

## WC-13 Not a holy war 20/3

**EVEN BY** the bizarre standards of Akali politics, the latest episode in the tussle between the Akal Takht jathedar Giani Puran Singh, who has now been ousted, and Bibi Jagir Kaur, president of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), is quite unique and not very flattering for either of them. Although Bibi Kaur seems to have won the first round by having the jathedar removed by the SGPC executive, the validity of her action may be questioned. Considering that Giani Puran Singh had excommunicated Bibi Kaur from the Sikh panth some time ago, her present status remains unclear. Indeed, Giani Puran Singh had asked Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal to appoint an acting president of the SGPC since, according to the jathedar, Bibi Kaur could no longer function in that capacity until her apology to the Akal Takht had been accepted and she had been readmitted to the panth.

If Mr Badal failed to respond in this matter, and instead hoped for divine intervention to solve the problem, it is presumably because Bibi Kaur is believed to be his supporter, as, indeed, is Giani Puran Singh. In the event, however, not only did the meeting of the SGPC executive take place before a replacement for her had been found, she also took the opportunity to remove Giani Puran Singh from his position and appoint Giani Joginder Singh Vedanti in his place. However, there may be some doubts about the legality of her action since the supporters of both Gurcharan Singh Tohra and Simranjit Singh Mann had left the meeting before the decisions were taken. Irrespective of the legal aspect of these moves and counter-moves, however, the very fact of the kind of peremptory action which both Giani Puran Singh and Bibi Kaur have been taking reflects poorly on the way the Sikh religious-political establishment is functioning.

It is clear enough that the customary maladies of factional politics are now as prevalent in the "spiritual" field as in the mundane one. What is more, although the earlier Badal-Tohra divide has given place to a new dispensation where Mr Badal is supposed to be fully in control, the clash between the Akal Takht and the SGPC (of which the last may not have been heard) showed that nothing really has changed. The loss in the end will be measured in terms of the reputation of the two institutions.

**THE HINDUSTAN TIMES**

**30 MAR 2000**

# New jathedar revokes Jagir excommunication

UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

AMRITSAR, March 29. — The newly-appointed Akal Takht jathedar, Giani Joginder Singh Vidyanti, today rejected the three *hukamnamas* (edicts) issued by his dismissed predecessor Giani Puran Singh and "acquitted" all those excommunicated from the Sikh panth.

Besides SGPC chief Bibi Jagir Kaur, the directive acquits the jathedars of Keshgarh Sahib and Damdama, and the Akal Takht head granthi Giani Bhagwan Singh. It also readmitted SGPC executive members — Mr Satnam Singh, Mr Raghujit Singh, Mr V Singh Gora and Mr Pritam Singh Bhatia — and member Mr Jaswinder Singh into the Sikh fold.

The jathedar read out the directive from the Takht balcony after a meeting of the Panj Pyaras — the Akal Takht jathedar, the head granthi and two granthis of the Harmandir Sahib, and the Akal Takht granthi — at the akal takht office inside the Golden Temple complex. Holding the three *hukamnamas* violative of the Takht's high traditions, the directive accused Giani Puran Singh of having acted in a manner "unbecoming of an Akal Takht jathedar". He allowed his "own selfish motives to override Panthic principles," it said.

**SNS adds:** The Akali Dal president, Mr Parkash Singh Badal, today ruled out the immediate change in the SGPC leadership. "There is no ques-



The new Jathedar, Giani Joginder Singh Vidyanti (centre) comes out of Akal Takht after participating in religious ceremonies at the Golden Temple on Wednesday. — AP/PTI

tion of replacing Ms Jagir Kaur," he told reporters here.

Mr Badal termed the crisis as unfortunate and said the Akali Dal was trying its best to settle it amicably. Three ministers — Mr Rattan Singh, Mr F S Brahmpura and Mr Tota Singh — had been despatched to Amritsar to talk to both the

sides. The situation would return to normal in a few days, Mr Badal said.

However, he hedged queries about Mr Kaur's defiance in not fulfilling the directive of the Akali Dal political affairs committee which had asked her to submit before the Takht.

Mr Badal also obliquely justi-

fied yesterday's events saying that only the SGPC chief could appoint the acting president and only the SGPC executive had the right to appoint the Akal Takht Jathedar.

Meanwhile, in a function marked by thin attendance and shorn off traditional festivities, Giani Joginder Singh Vidyanti was installed as the new Jathedar of Akal Takht.

Important organisations like the Sant Samaj, comprising religious preachers and heads of such outfits, stayed away from the function.

Ms Kaur and some excommunicated high priests like Prof. Manjit Singh and Giani Kewal Singh, though present in Amritsar, chose not to attend, so that the installation did not become controversial.

The Golden Temple head granthi honoured the new Jathedar with a *siropa* (robe).

Tomorrow's SGPC general house meeting to pass the annual budget is expected to be a stormy one.

About 45 members enjoy the confidence of Mr GS Tohra and radical leader, Mr Simranjit Singh Mann. Their three representatives had boycotted yesterday's executive meeting called by Ms Kaur, saying that an excommunicated Sikh couldn't hold such a meeting.

In the Punjab Assembly, some Congress and CPI members demanded a debate on the developments in the House. Opposition members walked out after the demand was turned down.

# Jagir bows to 'godfather'

FROM GAJINDER SINGH

Amritsar, Nov. 30: Bibi Jagir Kaur was today replaced as Shiro-mani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) chief.

Jagdev Singh Talwandi, a former Akali Dal chief, was unanimously elected the new president. He was backed by the G.S. Tohra faction.

Kaur was the first woman president of the key religious body of the Sikhs in its 75-year history. The decision to replace her comes soon after the CBI charged her with the murder of daughter Harpreet.

The meeting of the 190-member SGPC general body was chaired by Kaur. Chief minister Parkash Singh Badal, who is also the Shiro-mani Akali Dal chief, nominated Talwandi. This was supported by members of Tohra's rival Akali Dal faction, making the election unanimous.

Welcoming Talwandi, a subdued Kaur said she would continue working for the Sikh community. "I will abide by the decision made by my godfather Badal and leave my political career in his

hands," she added.

Talwandi said he respected Badal's decision to suggest his name for SGPC chief. "It is a great responsibility and I would like to take everyone along with me and guide the Panth properly," he added.

Prem Singh Chandumajra, a leader of the Tohra faction, alleged that the chief minister "should have removed Kaur from the post when the CBI charged her with being involved in the murder of her daughter. Talwandi has to undo the harm done to Sikh institutions by Badal."

Political observers said Talwandi's election could mean trouble for Badal. "Talwandi is a very shrewd leader. His next move would be to garner as much support to enable him to replace Badal as party chief," a source said.

Kaur was elected in March last year following a split in the Akali Dal that also saw the easing out of another Dal veteran Tohra, who held the post of SGPC chief for a record 26 years. During her 19-month tenure, Kaur remained steeped in controversies.



Jagir Kaur

THE TELEGRAPH

1 DEC 2000

SATURDAY, DECEMBER 2, 2000

9-81 Puran Singh  
**AN INEVITABLE CHANGE** 10-12/2/12

THE REPLACEMENT OF criminally implicated Bibi Jagir Kaur as the chief of the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabhandak Committee would have served the Sikh *maryada* better had it come the day the CBI named her the key accused in the case of suspected murder of her daughter, Harpreet, some six months ago. If she herself had little compunction about continuing in office despite her tainted image, the Chief Minister and Shiromani Akali Dal supremo, Mr. Parkash Singh Badal, took no initiative to secure her resignation and, worse, came up with all kinds of specious arguments in her 'defence'. In fact, if only Mr. Badal could have got his predilections to prevail over the perceived mood of many of his own colleagues in the higher echelons of the Akali Dal and also had his way with the members of the SGPC general house owing allegiance to him, Bibi Jagir Kaur would perhaps have been nominated for another term. On the face of it, the fact that the SAD's Political Affairs Committee and SGPC members (who constitute a majority in the general house) authorised Mr. Badal to make the nomination does suggest his getting an absolutely free hand in making the choice. Behind the mandate was however the unstated, yet clearly perceivable, understanding that Bibi Jagir Kaur, who had become a big liability to the party, would not be renominated. Given the strong anti-Kaur sentiments within the SAD leadership and the declared intention of the rival Gurcharan Singh Tohra camp to put up its own candidate in the event of her being renominated, there is no way Mr. Badal could have persisted with the morally unacceptable and politically inexpedient course of backing her for another term. On a different level, with the elections to the SGPC general house just a year away, the negative implications of mindlessly propping her up should have also weighed with him in deciding against her renomination.

With the inglorious exit of Bibi Jagir Kaur,

the second of the two instruments Mr. Badal employed nearly two years ago, and with success, to marginalise his *bete noire*, Mr. Tohra, and emerge as an unchallenged Akali leader, both in the political and the religious domains, has proved a liability; earlier Giani Puran Singh, whom he got anointed as the Jathedar of the Akal Takht, met with the ignominy of being dismissed by the SGPC executive. In fact, the unseemly and ego-centred wrangles the two proteges of Mr. Badal had indulged in marked a new low in the murky Akali politics, with the Chief Minister choosing to throw his weight behind the SGPC chief and ensure that she completed her tenure. It is interesting, even if somewhat intriguing, that he has now opted for a veteran Akali leader like Mr. Jagdev Singh Talwandi, one who was very much in contention on earlier occasions too when Bibi Jagir Kaur was handpicked by Mr. Badal for the position. There is however no question of doubting Mr. Talwandi's credentials; his experience and stature in the party surely place him far above the other aspirants to the high office. By all accounts, he was found acceptable to all Akali factions, including that of Mr. Tohra, and as such it is possible that Mr. Badal wanted to play it safe and avoid any confrontation.

If the record of Akali politics is anything to go by, it may not be long before the factional squabbles started coming into full play again. As Mr. Talwandi sets about undoing the perceived damage Bibi Jagir Kaur had inflicted on the institutional linkages and well established religious practices by her arbitrary and questionable actions, he is more than likely to run into trouble, with the clear prospect of his rubbing one faction or the other on the wrong side. In the immediate context, much will depend on what exactly were the calculations of Mr. Badal in putting Mr. Talwandi at the helm of the SGPC and whether he is willing to go along with his initiatives fully and without any reservation.

THE HINDU

- 2 DEC 2000

## Maharashtra rules out Enron review

MUMBAI, Dec. 1. — The Maharashtra government today declared that it will not review the controversial deal with US energy major Enron, despite severe opposition from the ruling Democratic Front constituents.

"We will have to pay a price to review the deal", Dr Padamsinh Patil told the Legislative Council in Nagpur.

Earlier, Peasants' and Workers Party, JD-S, Bharatiya Bahujan Mahasangh and other constituents of the DF asked the Congress-NCP led government to scrap the agreement for the second phase of Enron's power project.

The DF allies had launched a attack against the government for purchasing Enron's power at a higher rate from its Dabhol plant in coastal Konkan.

THE STATESMAN

- 2 DEC 2000

# CBI may arrest Jagir

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 4. — The CBI may arrest the SGPC chief, Bibi Jagir Kaur, in connection with the mysterious death of her daughter, Harpreet Kaur.

A CBI official said: "It all depends on the outcome of the interrogation of Nishan Singh, an assistant sub-inspector of Punjab Police and an accused in the case, who was arrested by the agency today."

Nishan Singh is the sixth of seven (including Bibi Jagir Kaur) named as accused in the FIR filed by the CBI after complying with Punjab and Haryana High Court's directive to investigate the case as Punjab Police had failed to do so.

"Though it is too early to make any comment, the involvement of Harpreet's mother in the case can't be ruled out," CBI officials said, citing circumstantial evidence collected by the agency.

Immediately after his surrender, Singh was

arrested by the special investigating unit of the agency and produced before a special CBI judge at Patiala House Courts, who remanded him in police custody till 13 November.

Mr Justice VM Jain of Punjab and Haryana High Court directed the CBI yesterday not to arrest Nishan Singh before 10 this morning, the time by when he had to surrender before the investigation officer at the CBI headquarters.

While disposing of his (Singh's) petition seeking protection of his "rights" in case he surrendered, Mr Justice Jain has also said: "If he did not surrender by the time fixed before the court the order would cease to exist."

CBI officials said Mr Justice Jain has also directed the agency to comply with the guidelines laid down by the Supreme Court on custodial interrogation. They are producing the accused before a magistrate every 48 hours, regular medical examinations are conducted and lawyer of the accused could be present during the interrogation.

THE STATESMAN

5 NOV 2000

# Hostage states again in apex court firing-line

FROM OUR LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Oct. 31: The Supreme Court today reserved judgment in the legal tussle over whether Veerappan's associates should be released from jail and voiced anguish over the manner in which Tamil Nadu and Karnataka have handled the issue.

The court, closing its month-long hearing, castigated the governments of the two states for failing to bring the bandit to justice and expressed concern over his association with secessionist forces.

"...for the last 10 years, Veerappan remained out of the reach of law," said Justice S.P. Bharucha.

"Both states admit their failure to nab him. They say his gang has been reduced to only four to five men. But now instead of a small gang, he has established links with secessionists...We express our anguish over such a development."

The bench of Justice Bharucha, Justice D.P. Mohapa-

tra and Justice Y.P. Sabharwal did not set a date for the verdict in the case. It stayed the release of Kamada star Raj Kumar, who now faces a fourth month in the clutches of Veerappan.

The bench heard arguments on a batch of three petitions challenging a Karnataka court's ruling in favour of the release of 160 detainees charged under Tada and the National Security Act.

"Prima facie we feel that the order of the designated court in Mysore allowing dropping of charges against Veerappan and his 160 associates is not sustainable under law," the bench said.

The court said it felt the two governments acted in "panic" and the public prosecutor made the application before the designated court without satisfying himself about the need for dropping the charges against the accused.

"The application was not made properly," Justice Bharucha said even as solicitor-general Harish Salve clarified that the Karnataka government had dropped Tada charges against those who were

in judicial custody and also against those who were absconding, including Veerappan.

The judges made it clear that it was not questioning the constitutional validity of holding negotiations with a bandit, but said it was only bothered about the legality and validity of the prosecutor moving an application before the designated court to secure the release of Tada and NSA detainees and withdrawal of all cases against them.

"Our prima facie view that the state governments acted in panic without thinking about the repercussions stands reinforced," the bench added. The judges frowned on the Centre's argument that it could not intervene in efforts to apprehend Veerappan because law and order is a state subject.

"It is very law abiding to say that law and order is a state subject and the Centre cannot interfere in it. However, in the present case, we have a small part of the two states being used by a brigand which the governments have failed to penetrate."

'MYSORE COURT ORDER BAD IN LAW'

# S.C. sets aside order on release of 51 Veerappan associates

By T. Padmanabha Rao

NEW DELHI, NOV. 7. The Supreme Court today in the 'Rajkumar abduction-Veerappan associates accused case' set aside the August 19 order passed by the designated court, Mysore granting 'consent' to the special public prosecutor's application to withdraw 'TADA' charges against 51 Veerappan associates, as the court's order "does not meet the requirements of Section 321 of the Code of Criminal Procedure (CrPC) and is bad in law".

The court also set aside the Mysore Principal Sessions judge's August 28 order granting bail to the Veerappan associates accused (respondents).

Delivering the main judgment of the Bench, Mr. Justice S. P. Bharucha, speaking for himself and Mr. Justice D. P. Mohapatra, also set aside the August 16 order passed by a Chennai designated court giving consent to the special PP to withdraw TADA charges against Venkatesan alias Radio Venkatesan.

The court also set aside the orders of the Government of Tamil Nadu passed on August 14 under the National Security Act (NSA) in respect of Sathyamoorthy and three others revoking the orders of the detention under the National Security Act.

Mr. Justice Y. K. Sabharwal pronounced a separate but concurring judgment.

"What causes us the gravest disquiet is that when, not so very long back, as the record shows, his (Veerappan's) gang had been considerably reduced, Veerappan was not pursued and apprehended and now, as the statements in the affidavit filed on behalf of Tamil Nadu show, Veerappan is operating in the forest that has been

his hideout for 10 years or more along with secessionist Tamil elements," the judgment observed adding "it seems certain to us (the Bench) that Veerappan will continue with his life of crime and very likely that those crimes will have anti-national objectives".

"The decision of Karnataka, therefore, was that, in view of its apprehension of the unrest that would follow if any harm were to come to Rajkumar, it was better to yield to Veerappan's demand and to withdraw the TADA charges against Veerappan and his associates, including the accused respondents," Mr. Justice Bharucha said and added that "in this context, the Special PP should have considered and answered the (8) relevant questions (specified by the Court) for himself before he decided to exercise his discretion in favour of such withdrawal from prosecution of the TADA charges".

The court "did not find on the record, including that placed before us (court) in sealed covers, material that could give rise to a reasonable apprehension of such

civil disturbances as justifies the decision to drop TADA charges against Veerappan and his associates, including the accused respondents, and to release the latter on bail."

"There is nothing on the record which suggests that the possibility of reprisals against the witnesses who have already deposed against the accused respondents or the effect on the morale of the law enforcement agencies were considered before it was decided to release the accused respondents," the Bench said.

"The Government of Karnataka would appear to be unaware that once the accused-respondents were discharged from TADA charges, the deal was done; and that when they were released on bail they could not be detained further, whether or not Rajkumar was released in exchange," the main judgment said.

"While we cannot assert that conceding to Veerappan's demands was a ploy of the Government of the State of Karnataka to keep him out of the clutches of the law, we do find that it acted in

panic and haste and without thinking things through in doing so," Mr. Justice Bharucha observed.

"That is so is clear from the fact that the demands were conceded overnight and also from the fact that the State of Karnataka did not ascertain the legal position that it was not for it but for the court to decide upon the release of persons facing criminal prosecutions," the main judgment observed.

"The Government of Tamil Nadu had been apprised that Mr. Rajkumar faced the risk of being kidnapped by Veerappan when he visited his farmhouse at Gajanur and it knew that Mr. Rajkumar was unlikely to give advance intimation of his visits: he had visited Gajanur for the house-warming ceremony of his new farmhouse in June without prior notice," the Bench noted.

Dealing with Section 321 of the Cr.P.C and relevant case law, Mr. Justice Bharucha said "the law, therefore, is that though the Government may have ordered, directed or asked a PP to withdraw from a prosecution, it is for the PP to apply his mind to all the relevant material and, in good faith, to be satisfied thereon that the public interest will be served by his withdrawal from the prosecution."

"In turn, the court has to be satisfied, after considering all that material, that the PP has applied his mind independently thereto, that the PP acting in good faith, is of the opinion that his withdrawal from the prosecution is in the public interest, and that such withdrawal will not stifle or thwart the process of law or cause manifest injustice".

Panic reaction: Page 13

## Nedumaran pulls out

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, NOV. 7. The Tamil Nationalist Movement leader and key negotiator in the kidnap crisis, Mr. P. Nedumaran, today suddenly refused to undertake any further mission to the forest to negotiate with the bandit Veerappan release of the Kannada actor, Mr. Rajkumar, and another person.

While the emissary team was scheduled to leave for the forest this evening, Mr. Nedumaran, in an angry response to the Opposition parties' bitter objections voiced in the State Assembly to his joining the rescue team, announced his decision to pull out of the mission.

The journalist-emissary, Mr. R. R. Gopal, too has decided to put off his next trip till Mr. Nedumaran reconsidered, sources said.

THE HINDU

8 NOV 2000



## STICKING TO THE RULE OF LAW

THE MUCH-AWAITED judgment of the Supreme Court in the case relating to the release of the associates of forest brigand Veerappan has, evidently, upset the applecart of the Governments of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu who are seen to be bending over backwards to concede even patently unreasonable and potentially disruptive demands while 'negotiating' the release of the Kannada film icon, Mr. Rajkumar, from captivity. But the verdict itself, quashing the orders of the relevant courts in the two States assenting to the prosecution's plea for the dropping of charges under TADA/NSA against the detenus and granting of bail to them, should come as no surprise even to the Governments themselves. For, the thinking of the three-judge Bench on the legal points at issue, as also the way the two Governments have been handling the hostage imbroglio, had come out sharply at various stages of hearing, as when it commented caustically on their abject failure to bring the brigand to justice all these years and blamed them for pressing the panic button and meekly submitting to his dictates in the post-Rajkumar abduction phase. And the most telling — even if somewhat uncharitable — of such observations, *obiter dicta*, was that a Government which cannot maintain law and order had no business to stay on and that it should quit, making way for a more efficient one; the reference was to the Karnataka Government which had raised the spectre of a linguistic unrest should any harm be caused to Mr. Rajkumar.

While not denying the political executive its right to negotiate the release of a hostage, or for that matter the propriety of its seeking the withdrawal of prosecution proceedings against certain person(s) in 'public interest', the Supreme Court has apparently found nothing to show that the two Governments had applied their minds adequately on the wider implications of dropping the TADA/NDA charges against Veerappan's associates or that the public prosecutors or the judges concerned have done so, a vital re-

quirement under Section 321 Cr.P.C., before acting upon the executive's initiative. In fact, the Bench has, apart from speaking of the (Karnataka) Government's "package deal" and "complicity" with the detenus, posed the rather significant question whether the whole thing was "a ploy adopted by them (the two Governments) to keep Veerappan out of the clutches of the law", given that they had not apprehended him for 10 long years. Consider the facts: not long ago Veerappan's gang got severely depleted, yet he was not pursued vigorously, and he has since teamed up with Tamil secessionist elements (a cause for "gravest disquiet"). On his taking Mr. Rajkumar captive, the Governments are only too ready to set free and drop grave criminal charges against as many as 51 of his associates. To crown it all, they capitulate to the brigand by deputing, as demanded, Mr. P. Nedumaran and two others known for their espousal of the Tamil nationalist cause to negotiate. It is the totality of these factors that had obviously weighed with the apex court in passing the sort of indictments it has done against the two Governments.

Now that the two Governments have been stopped by the highest judiciary in their tracks by ruling against the release of Veerappan's associates, it is for them to come up with other ways of securing Mr. Rajkumar's release from captivity. With the hostage crisis having extended over 100 days and given the kind of ordeal and trauma it should have meant for the Kannada filmstar, there can be no question that all the endeavour should be directed towards realising that objective without any further loss of time. However, the bottomline that needs to be recognised is that whatever strategy is adopted by the two Governments cannot, and should not, be such as to subvert the rule of law or give in to crass blackmail. This indeed is the real message of the Supreme Court's verdict and its relevance goes well beyond the immediate context of the Veerappan-engineered hostage crisis.

THE HINDU

• 9 NOV 2000

# Bail denied, Jagir Kaur goes into hiding

NEW DELHI, NOV. 13. The Central Bureau of Investigation today said it would soon question the Shriomani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC) chief, Bibi Jagir Kaur, an accused in the mysterious death of her daughter Harpreet Kaur, and then take a decision on arresting her.

Soon after the special court in Patiala rejected Bibi Kaur's bail application paving way for her arrest by CBI, Bibi Kaur went into hiding. CBI sources said, "We are considering the matter (about her arrest). We will question her and then see whether the arrest is required."

The SGPC chief, who had made her first public appearance in a religious procession at Amritsar last week after remaining incommunicado for over two months, was inaccessible in the city, at her native village Begowal in Kapur-



thala district and the SGPC office at Amritsar today, SGPC and police sources said.

"What is more important is the filing of the chargesheet. We are concentrating on this aspect at present," the CBI sources said.

*J. Kaur - Punjab*  
The CBI in its FIR named seven persons, including Bibi Kaur, who has been charged under Section 302 of the IPC. All the other six accused are in custody.

## Charged under Sec. 302

In Patiala, CBI counsel informed the Patiala District and Sessions Judge, Mr. S.N. Aggarwal, that the agency has changed the charge against Bibi Kaur from 304 IPC (culpable homicide not amounting to murder) to 302 IPC (murder) investigations.

The judge rejected the bail plea today saying if the accused was not arrested it would "hamper investigations (into the case) beyond repair".

Stating that the offence against Bibi Kaur under section 302 IPC (murder) and section 313 IPC (causing miscarriage without women's consent) was *prima facie* made out, he said in his 10-

page order said "I am of the firm opinion that a custodial interrogation is certainly required."

CBI counsel said Bibi Kaur was charged with murder following interrogation of about 20 people including six of the seven arrested accused named in the FIR filed by the agency in connection with the death of Harpreet.

Bibi Kaur's counsel said the change was "biased" as it was made by the CBI on November 9, a day after the bail plea of the SGPC chief was moved.

The judge said that after considering the "rival contentions he had reached the conclusion of involvement of Bibi Jagir Kaur in all the incidents starting from forcibly taking Harpreet Kaur to Phagwara and lifting of the last remains to remove all possible doubts regarding her involvement".

THE HINDU

14 NOV 2000

11-10 15/11 ✓

## Bibi and Sahibs

Man invented religion as a means of elevating himself; religion was beyond all boundaries, between humans, between nations. Yet, in practice we have seen religion combine with crime and statecraft to make a heady cocktail. The case of Bibi Jagir Kaur, charged with murdering her daughter, underscores this. Clearly, the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee chief enjoyed enormous powers. Consider the circumstances. She is the prime suspect in a murder — the murder is premeditated and is of her own daughter. The young girl is despatched in a most horrific manner. She is forcibly separated from her husband, made to undergo an abortion and poisoned to death. Bibi doesn't face the accusations upfront, she goes into hiding. More extraordinary is the behaviour of the body she heads. The SGPC allowed itself to be embroiled in this case when it could have rid itself of the leadership of Bibi without falling back on legal technicalities. Only now, when Bibi's term is coming to an end, the various factions have started to debate the issue of her ouster. Bibi is unlikely to have carried on thus far without the support and confidence of Punjab Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, who is also president of the Shiromani Akali Dal. Mr Badal took the position that since she was only an accused — and not guilty — she could continue as SGPC president. This no doubt emboldened Bibi to evade arrest and mobilise her supporters. Now that the CBI has charged Bibi with murder and her bail plea has been rejected, it is the responsibility of Mr Badal as well as the SGPC to let her face the consequences of the murder charge.

The point here is not that religious offices are misused. It is that this is bound to happen when political patronage enters the spiritual domain. If Bibi Jagir Kaur stayed on in office despite the worst suspicions about her conduct, she must have been confident of being able to brazen it out. We have enough examples from politics to demonstrate this. Barely a week ago, we had a senior cabinet minister defending two ministers charged with the murder of an Ahmedabad constable. The minister argued that the two men were innocent. Of course, for the sake of the law, they must be presumed to be innocent till proven guilty. But to pronounce them innocent? Isn't that the job of the judiciary? More to the point, wouldn't that amount to a lack of confidence in the judiciary? The irony lies precisely here. Our elected representatives are the first to enumerate the virtues of higher institutions like the judiciary. And the last, when it comes to actually putting their faith in these institutions. Thus Kalyan Singh proudly defies the judiciary, even as J Jayalalitha and Laloo Yadav insist that the only court they are accountable to is the people's court. Maybe the remedy lies in a solution given, in fact, by the judiciary. In a recent verdict, the Delhi high court directed the Election Commission to publicise all facts pertaining to candidates in assembly and parliamentary elections, including such details as the number of pending cases and convictions. If Janata is Janardhan — the public is the final arbiter, as politicians tirelessly tell us — then surely they have a right to better know the men and women they are trying?

THE TIMES OF INDIA

15 NOV 2000

## Bibi's dirty deeds

The "system" has finally struck. By clearing the decks for arresting the powerful Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee chief Bibi Jagir Kaur in connection with the killing of her own daughter, the establishment has finally made up for several months of procrastination and worse. During this while, the powerful suspect tried every trick in the book to evade the proverbial long arm of the law. She was also "helped" by the fact that Punjab chief minister Parkash Singh Badal was caught in an unenviable political zone which his detractors like Mr G.S. Tohra did their utmost to exploit. Mr Tohra played the psychological game to the hilt; far from reconciled to the Bibi's ascension to the SGPC throne from the very beginning, Mr Tohra knew that Mr Badal will find the situation tough either way. If Mr Badal had shown any urgency to expedite the case, Mr Tohra would have taken advantage of even that. Mr Badal played the waiting game, lending himself open to the charge of helping the SGPC boss in her attempt to evade the law. In the end, however, Mr Badal's patience seems to have won, and since it is the Central Bureau of Investigation which has sought her prosecution, the chief minister can say that the law has taken its own course, thereby providing proof, if such was ever needed, of his masterly political skills. As for Bibi Jagir Kaur, there is unlikely to be much public sympathy. Having decided against giving her consent to her adult daughter getting married into the family of a marginal farmer, the Bibi then proceeded to position herself in an adversarial role. So much so that the young woman was found mysteriously dead; murdered in a manner most foul, in fact. In this case, the fact that Bibi Jagir Kaur was heading the SGPC which gave her tremendous clout may have delayed the process of her role being properly investigated. Now, that the bottleneck, and it was a formidable one indeed, seems to have been finally cleared. It is not easy to visualise what immediate impact will the development have on Sikh politics, especially since there has seldom been any demarcation there between *piri* and *miri* — between religion and politics. More often than not, the attempt to make the two work in tandem has ended in disaster — the course of events that led to Operation Bluestar and Mrs Indira Gandhi's assassination were the two broadest manifestations of the malaise. There is, however no reason why the SGPC or its leading lights, howsoever powerfully placed that they are, should not be subject to the laws that operate for everybody. In that context, Ms Kaur's eventual fate will impact all future history in a fundamental manner, for on test will be the resolve of the system to legitimately confront those who seek to defy it in order to save themselves from paying the price for their actions. If the high and mighty get an opportunity to reflect on the consequences of some of their acts, it will do them no harm. In fact, such an opportunity for self-introspection, howsoever forced it may have been in Bibi Jagir Kaur's case, should actually be welcomed as an avenue for soul-searching.

THE ASIAN AGE

15 NOV 2000

# Rajkumar freed, to reach home today

By Our Special Correspondent

**BANGALORE, NOV. 15.** The Kannada actor, Mr. Rajkumar, and his relative, Mr. Nagesh, were released by the forest brigand Veerappan early this morning and would be brought to the State capital tomorrow, the Karnataka Chief Minister, Mr. S. M. Krishna, announced here.

News of the release sparked celebrations in the capital and elsewhere in the State. The actor's ecstatic fans burst crackers and distributed sweets. There were also reports of special poojas offered at temples.

The Chief Minister told reporters that Mr. Rajkumar was undergoing medical examination, but refused to say where the actor was camping. "He is free and fine now. The long agonising wait is over. We are relieved."

Earlier in the Assembly, Mr. Krishna expressed his gratitude to the people for showing patience and said the 108 days of agony had ended. "I am grateful to the people of Karnataka. I am grateful to the Opposition parties which stood solidly by the Government in all its efforts to rescue Mr. Rajkumar and I am grateful to the Tamil Nadu Government and the Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, for extending full cooperation," he told a jubilant House.

From the first day, the Tamil Nadu Government showed a keen interest and extended full support in resolving the crisis. It first established contact with the abductors and brought reassuring news about the actor's health when the Karnataka Government was clueless and groping in the dark, Mr. Krishna said.

Many persons had helped the Government in its efforts at resolving the crisis and some had worked behind the scenes. The negotiators came forward to help on humanitarian grounds. A number of them walked a long distance into thick jungles. All for the love and affection they had for



Fans celebrating the release of the actor, Mr. Rajkumar, in front of his house in Bangalore on Wednesday. — Photo: V. Sreenivasa Murthy

Mr. Rajkumar. Thanking several organisations, particularly the Karnataka Film Chamber of Commerce and the Dr. Rajkumar Abhimanyu Sangha, for their support, the Chief Minister said he had directed the police to keep a watch in localities where linguistic minorities lived and to see that no untoward incident occurred.

## Release wrapped in mystery

By Our Tamil Nadu Bureau

**CHENNAI, NOV. 15.** The long wait for the release of the Kannada actor, Mr. Rajkumar, ended today with the bandit Veerappan

by Veerappan and his gang from the actor's farmhouse at Doddagajanure on July 31.

Sources in Erode said Mr. Rajkumar was treated at a private clinic and that he spent some time in the house of Mr. Nedumaran's friend. After five failed missions, the official emissary, Mr. R. R. Gopal, did not undertake the final trip and the negotiations by the new team headed by Mr. Nedumaran with the brigand clinched the release.

Mr. Karunanidhi said the thespian spoke to him and thanked him for the rescue efforts. When Mr. Rajkumar mentioned his long stay in the jungles, the Chief Minister, in a lighter vein, told him that Lord Rama had spent 14 years in the forests. The actor sounded fatigued and would leave for Bangalore either tonight or tomorrow morning, Mr. Karunanidhi said.

If the rescue mission had been wrapped in secrecy for the past three months, so was the "release" today. While the news had been in the air since early morning, police officials here initially denied the reports. In fact, an official even said the negotiations had failed and that Mr. Nedumaran would return empty-handed.

Even after the Karnataka Law Minister announced the release in Bangalore around 11 a.m., police officials here kept mediapersons on tenterhooks, refusing to confirm the report till around 12.30 p.m. when the Chief Minister's secretary officially broke the news at the Apollo Hospital here where the Union Minister, Mr. Murrasoli Maran, is undergoing treatment.

The Union Rural Development Minister, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, expressing happiness over the release, said the Centre would consult the State on putting an end to the kidnap menace permanently.

See also Page 13

setting free his star-hostage and his relative, Mr. Nagesh, at Bannari in Tamil Nadu's Erode district around 3 a.m.

The Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, told reporters that the hostages had been set free "this morning" and that the Tamil Nationalist Movement leader, Mr. P. Nedumaran, telephonically conveyed the "good news".

However, even after the official announcement, the actor's "whereabouts" were under wraps and there was no official word on how the climax came about.

Mr. Rajkumar, his son-in-law, Mr. S. A. Govindaraj, Mr. Nagesh and the film assistant director, Mr. Nagappa, were abducted

**K S Dakshina Murthy**  
Bangalore, November 15

**T**HE SUDDEN release of Kannada superstar Rajkumar, though hugely relieving, is intriguing and potentially embarrassing for the two state governments of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu.

What is intriguing about the release is that Veerappan and his associates have not benefited at all from the kidnapping. None of his original 10 demands have been met, including the release of the TADA detainees. On the contrary, by kidnapping a high-profile person like Rajkumar, Veerappan may have earned the wrath of the two governments.

Since the beginning of the abduction drama the grapevine has it that there was an eleventh demand, that of a huge ransom running into several crores. The governments of both states had consistently denied any such demand. Even in the most private of conversations, officials in the know of negotiations have smirked when asked about the ransom demand.

Opposition politicians like former P G R Sindhia raised this issue at closed-door meetings with the government. In fact, Mr Sindhia, in one such meeting, alleged that certain minis-

## state governments, after the release, have now to answer the criticism of being a soft state, what with the kidnappers freeing Rajkumar and Nagesh without insisting on the release of the TADA detainees. The two governments had stated in the Supreme Court about possible dangers to Rajkumar's life if the details were not released.

S M Krishna referred to the tussle as a psychological warfare in which Veerappan had relented after the SC refused to allow the TADA releases. The only way in which the two governments can now erase the "soft" tag and neutralise the adverse comments of the SC is to go all out and capture Veerappan.

But, in the past, the special task forces of the two states have rarely combined in action. Friction and one-upmanship between them have been the order of the day. The eagerness to claim credit and lack of proper coordination ensured that Veerappan got away on several occasions with murder, literally.

Probably, Veerappan may now be banking on the same ego tussles between the two states to remain unchecked in the jungles. The two state governments, rather than obliging Veerappan, will have to play ball and nab the bandit and his friends if only to erase the image of being soft

spoke of Cauvery, statue for a Tamil poet and Tamil's role in schools. Unlike the past, he proved to be a hard nut to crack till the end. While the shadowy figures of Veerappan's new friends, the Tamil extremists, lurked in the background, they left no one in doubt about their influence as Veerappan added the release of their extremist friends to his wish-list and picked out Tamil nationalist leader Nedumaran to negotiate.

A late entrant, the fragile and gaunt Nedumaran turned out to be the unlikely gallant knight as he stole the thunder from the well-tested Nakeeran Gopai.

The comedy track was monopolised by the two CMs, Karunanidhi and Krishna. They remained clueless till the end and kept pointing fingers at each other.

Karunanidhi had the best laugh lines, as he did not know if

### Celebration time

**T**HIS MORNING, as the news of Rajkumar's release filtered into Bangalore, people reacted cautiously, unable to believe that it had really happened. After similar news in the past when they turned out to be rumours, even officials refused to confirm the release. When realisation dawned around 11.30 am that the news was indeed true, there was spontaneous bursting of crackers by Rajkumar's fans.

In central Bangalore where the Kannada film chamber offices are situated, the happiness of the fans was expressed by stray stone-throwing. Besides this, no untoward incidents were reported. A van belonging to a local television channel too was damaged in the stone-throwing.

**HTC, Bangalore**  
eters were going around collecting money from key industrialists, the government denied it.

A couple of days ago, former PM H D Deve Gowda demanded that the state government publicly reveal the entire tape in which the 10 demands were made.

In addition to the alleged ransom demand,

## Happy ending to a real life thriller

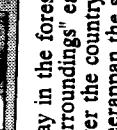
**G C Shekhar**  
Chennai, November 15

**A** VERTICABLE potpourri of a thriller came to an end with the release of Kannada matinee idol Rajkumar on Wednesday.

Even the veteran Kannada actor-director could not have visualised a script full of such twists and turns, the plot going haywire thanks to some minor actors not sticking to their roles.

No doubt, Rajkumar remained hero till the end, a picture of confidence and equanimity, unruffled by his altered status of a demi-god turned into a hapless captive. His dialogues, sent through audio and video tapes, went straight to the heart of the Kannada fan -- urging him to keep his cool even while asking his sons not to mourn or shave off their beards.

The words "I am enjoying my



### WHO SAID WHAT

I am very glad you have come back. I really admire your courage for spending more than 100 days in the forests!.

**M. KARUNANIDHI**

What's 100 days? Lord Rama spent 14 years in the forests!.

**RAJKUMAR**

We have learnt some hard lessons from the incident and it should not be allowed to recur.

**S. M. KRISHNA**

stay in the forests, these peaceful surroundings" earned him fans all over the country. Ever the villain, Veerappan the smuggler this time donned new colours, with an

'extremist' tinge clinging. His dialogues were improvised to suit the new role. Along with the demand for the release of his fellowmen in a Mysore jail, he also



Rajkumar

## TWISTS AND TURNS IN THE DRAMA

**July 30:** Rajkumar kidnapped from his ancestral house at Gajanur on the Tamil Nadu side of the border with Karnataka.

**July 31-Aug. 15:** Violence brings life in Karnataka to a standstill. Government functioning paralysed. Schools and colleges remain closed. "Nakkeeran" Gopal appointed official emissary to negotiate with Veerappan.

**Aug. 4:** Veerappan sends first list of 10 demands including that for the release of 51 TADA prisoners from Mysore Jail and five Tamil extremists from Tamil Nadu.

**Aug. 7:** Karnataka moves to drop charges against the TADA prisoners.

**Aug. 16:** Gopal begins second round of negotiations.

**Aug. 27:** Gopal leaves for the forests for the third time.

**Aug. 28:** Karnataka drops charges against 51 TADA detainees. Mysore court frees them on conditional bail.

**Aug. 29:** Retired police officer Abdul Kareem moves the Supreme Court against the TADA releases. Stay is granted.

**Sept. 3:** SC castigates Karnataka for giving in to Veerappan on release of TADA detainees.

**Sept. 4-27:** No movement in efforts to get Rajkumar released.

**Sept. 28:** One of the hostages (Nagappa) escapes from Veerappan's hideout.

**Sept. 29:** Gopal's fourth mission a failure. He blames Nagappa's escape for it.

**Oct. 8:** Tamil leader P. Nedumaran, human rights activists Prof. Kalyani and G. Sukumaran join Gopal for his fifth visit. Hopes run high.

**Oct. 16:** Veerappan releases Rajkumar's son-in-law, ostensibly on "health" grounds.

**Oct. 31:** SC reserves verdict.

**Nov. 7:** SC disallows release of TADA detainees and extremists in TN jail. Both governments clueless on next step. Nedumaran pulls out of negotiating team.

**Nov. 10:** Nedumaran re-joins negotiating team on request of Rajkumar's family.

**Nov. 11:** Nedumaran leaves for the forest accompanied by Sukumaran and Kalyani. Gopal doesn't join team.

**Nov. 15:** Rajkumar released.

## Krishna Government

### caught unawares

**K S Dakshina Murthy**  
Bangalore, November 15

**T**HE KARNATAKA government appears to have really washed its hands of the Veerappan kidnap case, going by its reactions when news of Rajkumar's release started to come in early this morning.

By around 11 am, when it became fairly clear that Rajkumar had indeed been released after the Tamil Nadu home ministry confirmed it, senior officials in Karnataka were still in the dark. "Our intelligence units have not confirmed it," they said.

Even senior ministers were not willing to bet on his release. One of them said Chief Minister S M Krishna would talk to his counter-

part M. Karunanidhi in Chennai. evening was still in the dark.

Probably the government had been embarrassed in a few earlier instances when news of star's release turned out to be rumours. But, whatever happened to the coordination between the two states and the reason for Karnataka being in the dark.

Maybe the government played it safe as the session was on but then the release had been announced by Karunanidhi himself.

The news became official only when the CM made the announcement in the House at around 1.30 pm, three hours after it was confirmed in Chennai. As far as the details were concerned, the government even by this evening was still in the dark.

# SGPC chief Jagir Kaur is granted anticipatory bail

The Times of India News Service

CHANDIGARH: Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee (SGPC) president Bibi Jagir Kaur was on Wednesday granted anticipatory bail by the Punjab and Haryana high court here which has directed her to appear before the investigating officer, CBI headquarters in New Delhi on November 17 by 11 a.m., failing which the investigating agency was free to move the court for cancellation of the bail.



Jagir Kaur

Justice S.S. Nijjar passed this order after nearly two hours of arguments by Bibi Jagir Kaur's counsel and that of CBI counsels Rajan Gupta and R.M. Tewari, the latter having come specially for the hearing from New Delhi.

The order has not attached any conditions to it except the one relating to her appearance before the investigating officer of the CBI at New Delhi.

While rejecting the CBI plea for not granting bail to the SGPC chief since the investigation into the death of her daughter Harpreet Kaur in April this year was at a crucial stage where her custodial interrogation was paramount, Justice Nijjar observed that no material had been produced before the court to justify custodial interrogation.

Prima facie, the judge further observed, he was of the view that whatever was required to be done by the investigating agency could well be ensured by asking the petitioner to join the investigating as and when required and that it should be ensured that investigation was not hampered or interfered with by her in view of the allegation against her that she had been pressurising witnesses. In this connection Justice Nijjar referred to the pressure put on Dr Tarsem Singh, Dr Jaswant Singh and staff nurse Dalbir Kaur. At the same time, the allegation of political vendetta levelled by the petitioner could not be brushed aside, he added.

The counsel for Bibi Jagir Kaur opposing the de-

mand for custodial interrogation pointed out that nothing is needed to be recovered from her as per the FIR and no case under sections 302 or 344 was made out and the only thing which emerged could at best be what is sought to be termed as the illegal confinement of Harpreet Kaur at Phagwara or Begowal.

CBI counsels Rajan Gupta and R.M. Tewari while arguing for rejection of the bail so that she could be taken into custody for interrogation since she was the prime accused in the present case and because custodial interrogation was qualitatively different and important, stressed that already arrested accused had revealed during the course of questioning that a conspiracy had been hatched by Bibi Jagir Kaur. In this context, the CBI counsel referred to revelation by one of the 20 witnesses examined so far by the agency that clearly indicated that it was Bibi Jagir Kaur who had given direction to "finish" Harpreet Kaur. In the light of this, it was only obvious to further go into the lead provided by the witness, the CBI counsels submitted but did not name the witness because of obvious apprehensions.

For the first time, it was disclosed by CBI counsel R.M. Tewari during the course of arguments that on April 20, 2000 Harpreet Kaur had repeatedly been kicked in the belly after heavily sedating her in order to achieve the objective of abortion and whereafter Harpreet bled profusely and died between 2 and 2-30 a.m. on the intervening night of April 20 and 21. This, the counsel said, had come out during examination of the witnesses and it was in this background the CBI wanted Bibi Jagir Kaur to be taken into custody. It was further disclosed that but for the custodial interrogation of accused already arrested, the CBI would not have been able to reach the present crucial stage of investigation undertaken on the directions of the high court.

Justice Amarbir Singh Gill had on June 9, 2000 entrusted the investigation into the death of Harpreet Kaur on a petition filed by Kamaljit Singh, who claimed to have married her, as also by the Lawyers Initiative for Human Rights among others.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

16 NOV 2000

## CLOUD OF SUSPICION

BIBI JAGIR KAUR, the first woman president of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabhandhak Committee (SGPC), may have earned a reprieve by securing bail in the case relating to the mysterious death of her daughter. But the attitude of the SGPC chief, ever since allegations were levelled that she was responsible for young Harpreet Kaur's untimely death, leaves much to be desired. The cloud of suspicion which hangs over Bibi Jagir Kaur has only thickened by her decision to go into hiding and remain incommunicado for the past few months. Her attempt to evade being questioned by the CBI, which has registered an FIR against her and others in the case, hardly reflects well on someone who holds such a venerable office. The SGPC after all is the apex body for the management of gurudwaras and related affairs of the Sikh faith. It runs educational institutions and hospitals but one of its charters is to spread the teachings of the ten Sikh Gurus throughout the land. It is imperative that the head of such a body remains above suspicion and Bibi Jagir Kaur has hardly helped matters by dismissing the case as politically motivated and going underground.

The 'Harpreet murder case' would never have reached this stage if it was not for the intervention of the Punjab and Haryana High Court, which ordered a CBI probe into her death. The inquiry conducted by the Punjab police into the murky incident had lacked credibility — attended, as it was, by apprehensions that the Prakash Singh Badal Government was effecting a cover-up on behalf of the embattled SGPC chief. The CBI's case against Bibi Jagir Kaur is that she forced Harpreet to abort her (love) child against her daughter's will and kept her in illegal detention, resulting in her death. The absence of a post-mortem examination and

the unseemly haste with which Harpreet's funeral was organised only served to heighten the suspicion about what caused her death. The CBI has already taken six of the seven accused in the case into custody. It is likely that Bibi Jagir Kaur, who was portrayed as a key figure in the criminal conspiracy case registered by the CBI, would have met a similar fate had she failed to get bail.

Perhaps predictably, Harpreet's mysterious death has become caught up in Punjab's overheated religio-politics. It is shocking that as many 100 members of the SGPC, all of them owing allegiance to the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD), stood by Bibi Jagir Kaur and ridiculed the so-called "mudslinging" over what they described as her daughter's "natural death". The Chief Minister, Mr. Prakash Singh Badal, who pulled Bibi Jagir Kaur out of relative obscurity by handpicking her for the SGPC job, has ruled out her replacement. The support she has received from within the SGPC and from the SAD reinforces the fact that this former maths school teacher — a political non-entity a few years ago — has created a power centre of her own within the Badal camp. Her brief tenure as SGPC chief, which has been marked by a combative style, has not been free of its share of controversies. It was only earlier this year that she locked horns with the Jathedar of the Akal Takht, Giani Puran Singh, and managed, through a mixture of adroitness and aggression, to survive the battle. Such attributes however are unlikely to help her escape the long arm of the law and Bibi Jagir Kaur may find that mustering political support is no help in evading prosecution. The truth about the tragic and puzzling death of Harpreet Kaur must be unravelled. By failing to cooperate with the CBI, Bibi Jagir Kaur discredits her high office.

THE HINDU

17 NOV 2000



# How Rajkumar acted his way out

HT Correspondent  
Bangalore, November 16

KANNADA FILM icon Rajkumar was saved by the one thing he knows best: Acting. In the forests, he acted as if he had heart trouble and a worried Veerappan let him go at once. Tamil leader P. Nedumaran was the brain behind this master plan.

Rajkumar made this startling revelation at his press conference on his return to Bangalore on Thursday.

A four-member team from Bangalore, including woman doctor Bhanu, gained access to him thanks to Nedumaran. Dr Bhanu, in the presence of the captors, whispered to Rajkumar to act as if he had a problem with his heart. Rajkumar did so and the kidnappers fell for it lock, stock and barrel. They asked Dr Bhanu to check his pulse and she gravely declared that his heart was failing.

Soon after, Nedumaran arrived for negotiations and Veerappan asked him to take the high-profile hostage with him to freedom.

The four-member team comprising Dr Bhanu, Ramkumar, Mani and Raghavendra, was apparently sent in consultation with the state government and Nedumaran. Rajkumar was all praise for the Tamil leader.

"When I saw him for the first time, I was irresistibly impressed by him. He had the aura of a yogi," he said.

Interestingly, Rajkumar described bandit Veerappan as a person with a "humanitarian" bent of mind. "If not, you would not have seen me alive today," he said.

"Initially, we felt that the release would

happen in 10-15 days. Nakkeeran Gopal (the official emissary) kept coming and going but there was no sign of a release. We were getting impatient," he said.

"Probably the court order rejecting the release of the TADA detainees proved to be an obstacle to our freedom," he said. It was at this point that Veerappan suggested Nedumaran's name and sent word to him through an audio cassette, he said. Soon after, Nedumaran arrived in the forest with his team and he did the job.

After the court's verdict, "just when I thought there was no way out, one afternoon as I was sleeping, I was told a group had come to meet me. I thought some Tamilians had come visiting. Imagine my surprise when I found the group members talking Kannada. My day was made and I was thrilled," he said.

"I could not believe my ears when I heard a woman's voice. A woman's voice in a jungle where no man has the guts to set foot. It was really brave of her. When I met the group members, I found that she was a doctor. She had got a lot of medicines for me. I told the group the Nedumaran was making attempts to get us released and I asked Dr. Bhanu and the other to go back to Bangalore and that I would follow hopefully.

"But, after a few days the group members again came to meet me and I was surprised. They told me that they were staying in the vicinity and that they were negotiating with Veerappan with the help of Nedumaran. At that point, the doctor told me to feign illness, which I did. And, when Nedumaran arrived, the trick worked and Veerappan released me," the superstar recounted.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 NOV 2000

# Rajkumar does a flip-flop

HT Correspondents  
Bangalore/Chennai, November 17

**I**N THE first flush of freedom, Kannada cinema superstar Rajkumar yesterday shared with the media something that was apparently meant to be kept under wraps.

In a statement signed by Rajkumar and released to the media by P. Nedumaran in Chennai today, he denied that he pretended to be seriously ill to persuade Veerappan to let him go.

In Bangalore yesterday, the superstar had told over 100 journalists that he had, in captivity, feigned a heart condition at the behest of Dr Bhanu (of the Nedumaran-led team). That had Veerappan sufficiently worried to give him back his freedom, he said.

Rajkumar's flip-flop today read: "When Dr (Mrs) Bhanu came to treat me for chest pain, she asked me how I was keeping my condition to myself when I was in such bad health. I replied that I had to pretend to be doing well in the present situation. I emphatically deny the distorted version of this being spread by a section of the media. I have never even thought of earning my freedom by such deceit."

Many journalists who covered his media conference in Bangalore could not have missed cer-



## LOOK WHO IS TALKING

I emphatically deny the distorted version being spread by a section of the media. I never even thought of faking ill health to earn my freedom by such deceit.

**Rajkumar**



The dignity and decency with which we treated Rajkumar and others as hostages can be contrasted with the brutal way those nabbed by the STF and Karnataka police.

**Veerappan**



Till those responsible for killing 70 people, sexually harassing 60 women and torturing and maiming 300 persons are brought to book, the two governments should not think about any operation against Veerappan.

**Nedumaran**

tain oddities yesterday. Today, the penny dropped:

- When Rajkumar identified Dr Bhanu as his principal godsend, his son Raghavendra quickly whispered something in his ear. And so did Dr Bhanu, who was sitting right behind him.

- Rajkumar's wife Parvathamma too appeared distinctly uncomfortable when he

named the team from Bangalore that brokered his freedom.

- An expansive Rajkumar was cut short by Chief Minister S.M. Krishna, who told presspersons: "We only wanted to present Rajkumar to you. He will not answer any questions."

- The relief on the faces of Rajkumar's children and wife at the somewhat abrupt end to the media conference was palpable.

It now transpires that by praising Dr Bhanu for coming up with the ruse to pretend to be ill, Rajkumar may have:

- 'Offended' the forest brigand, who was shown up as gullible.

- 'Embarrassed' Dr Bhanu, who overnight has become a celebrity for the print and electronic media.

- 'Diluted' Nedumaran's role in securing his freedom; the principal negotiator could also 'suffer' a loss of face vis-à-vis Veerappan.

A section close to the rescue team is now spreading the word that

Rajkumar was indeed very ill. And that Dr Bhanu had, contrary to what Rajkumar had told the media yesterday, advised him not to pretend he was okay.

Rajkumar's personal physician, Dr Ramana Rao, today set at rest all speculation about his health and certified him to be in fine fettle.

Positive thinking, yoga kept Rajkumar fit: Page 11

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 NOV 2000

9.11.10  
Kannan

## Jungle Tales 11-10 20/11

Far from ending the long-drawn drama, actor Rajkumar's release has opened a whole new can of worms, which is to the discredit of almost all those involved except, ironically, the forest brigand Veerappan. The post-release scenario seems to be fraught with dangerous plots, devious sub-plots, deals and machinations implicating not just a Union minister, two state governments and politicians, but also public activists and human rights campaigners. Rajkumar is admittedly a good and successful actor but he is not very convincing when he protests that he was misquoted about feigning illness, that on the contrary he was ill but pretended to good health. However, had this been the only glitch in the script, suspicions might not have been raised about the other players involved. Unfortunately, Rajkumar's volte face, the changed story about who really carried out the rescue act, the sudden disappearance of the mysterious Dr Bhanu and her partner in the granite export business, all add up to suggest that the denouement could well have been scripted by Veerappan. This is reinforced by Tamil Nationalist Movement leader P Nedumaran holding a press conference to defend Veerappan and demand that the Special Task Force desist from any action against the bandit king. Mr Nedumaran has argued that in order to preserve the "peaceful atmosphere" now prevailing, the hunt for Veerappan should be called off. He has also revealed that Defence Minister George Fernandes had asked him to continue negotiations. More disquieting is the allegation that Rajkumar's release was secured by the Tamil Nadu and Karnataka governments agreeing to pay a total compensation of Rs 10 crore to the victims of STF excesses in both states.

These columns had observed that Rajkumar had been released "without any overt submission to Veerappan's explicit demands". From Mr Nedumaran's statement, it appears that there were covert transactions. If these amount to a deal being struck with the bandit, the question is whether this violates the Supreme Court's orders. From what has now emerged, it is difficult to believe that none of Veerappan's conditions were met. Mr Nedumaran's demand — that Veerappan be allowed to go scot-free while the officials responsible for operations against him be investigated for their alleged 'atrocities' against innocent people — underscores the specious political respectability the outlaw acquired after the kidnapping. That Mr Fernandes endorsed "negotiations" suggests that there were many wheels within wheels. Veerappan has been projected by some as a champion of those wrongly detained by the government. However, in its November 7 verdict, the Supreme Court conceded that the TADA accused might have grounds to challenge their prosecution and seek bail. This separated the issue of Veerappan's depredations from the situation of the detenus, which is a legitimate human rights concern. That this dubious nexus should once again be revived, Veerappan glorified for his humaneness, and state agencies pursuing him dubbed as the 'greater criminals' are disturbing developments. Public interest demands that this murky affair be cleared up without delay; the Centre may well have to step in to set matters right.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

20 NOV 2000

# Karnataka seeks NSG help to nab Veerappan

By Our Special Correspondent

**BANGALORE, NOV. 23.** The Karnataka Chief Minister, Mr. S. M. Krishna, today said the State would request the Centre to deploy NSG commandos to help the Special Task Force capture the brigand Veerappan.

Mr. Krishna told mediapersons here that he had written to the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, to direct the concerned authorities to ensure that the commandos were fully prepared to join the STF operations. He would leave for New Delhi on Sunday to discuss the issue with Mr. Vajpayee and the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, and impress upon them the need for Central assistance. The State Chief Secretary, Mr. B. K. Bhattacharya, the Home Secretary, Mr. M. B. Prakash, and the Director-General of Police, Mr. C. Dinakar, would leave for New Delhi tomorrow for discussions with Home Ministry officials.

After returning from Delhi, he would meet his Tamil Nadu counterpart, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, in Chennai, and call on the Union Industries Minister, Mr. Murasoli Maran, who is undergoing treatment in a private hospital there.

Recalling his agonising 108-day wait (for Mr. Rajkumar's release),

## Advani's promise to T.N.

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, NOV. 23.** The Centre would provide the Tamil Nadu Government all assistance, in terms of manpower and equipment, to nab the brigand Veerappan, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, assured a delegation from the State here today.

The team included the Chief Secretary, the Home Secretary and the Director-General of Police. The Union Environment Minister, Mr. T. R. Baalu, was also present.

The delegation, sent by the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, explained to Mr. Advani the steps taken to track down Veerappan and the assistance they needed from the Centre. The State Home Secretary and the DGP will discuss details on coordination with their Karnataka counterparts on Saturday, a State Government release said here. The delegation also met the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, and sought his Ministry's assistance in the bid to nab the brigand.

often going without sleep for days, he said perseverance had paid off. When the actor was finally released, he, the Home Minister, Mr. Mallikarjuna Kharge, and the Government were relieved. Now, he would like to take rest for at least three days in a secluded place and undergo a medical checkup, Mr. Krishna added.

It was not possible to pass on the responsibility of securing the hostages' release to Tamil Nadu, he said. "As the Chief Executive of Karnataka, I had to take steps for

the safe release of Mr. Rajkumar."

Asked if pressure would be brought on the brigand to surrender and face trial, Mr. Krishna said the thought did not occur to him. However, he would like to study the pattern that emerged when the dacoits of the Chambal Valley surrendered. He declined to discuss the composition of the team which succeeded in securing the hostages' release, but said the two Governments had been criticised regarding the LTTE connections some of the emissaries.

THE HINDU

24 NOV 2000

# SGPC president: Badal to announce candidate

By Our Staff Correspondent

CHANDIGARH, NOV. 29. The much-awaited meeting today of the Shiromani Gurdwara Parbandhak Committee (SGPC), owing allegiance to the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal in Punjab, proved to be an anticlimax. Similar to the outcome of the Dal's Political Affairs Committee (PAC) meeting last week, today's meeting also ended after authorising the Chief Minister and party president, Mr. Parkash Singh Badal, to name the candidate for tomorrow's annual election of the SGPC president.

Talking to presspersons after the meeting which he chaired in his capacity as the party chief, Mr. Badal said he would announce the name of the candidate for the coveted post of SGPC president just before the committee general house begins its deliberations. Responding to repeated queries, Mr. Badal said, "I would not even disclose whether its is going to be a man or a lady. At least not before tomorrow morning." However, he ruled out the possibility of a temporary arrangement of having an acting president.

The development is being viewed by political observers as an attempt by Mr. Badal to assert his leadership in the political as well as religious sphere of

the Sikh community. It is felt that Mr. Badal has once again trampled over the democratic traditions and practices only to project himself as the undisputed leader of Sikhs in particular and Punjabis in general.

Apart from a minor flutter caused by a walk-out by a member, Mr. Puran Singh Josh, the meeting, which lasted 28 minutes inside Bhai Gurdas Hall near the Golden Temple complex passed off peacefully.

As other members favoured authorising Mr. Badal to name the SGPC chief, Mr. Josh got up to make a point. He said he would support any person named by Mr. Badal, with the condition that the party chief does not allow Bibi Jagir Kaur to continue for another term. When he was shouted down, he walked out and threatened to raise at tomorrow's meeting the various contentious issues, including the mysterious disappearance of jewels from the treasure of the Golden Temple.

While most members jeered at Mr. Josh, the former Akali president, Mr. Jagdev Singh Talwandi, appealed to Mr. Badal to allow the member to voice his grievances. However, senior leaders, such as Capt. Kanwaljit Singh, Mr. Balwinder Singh Bhunder and Mr. Kirpal Singh Badungar, said that as per the tradition, the Dal president always nominates a candidate for the post of the SGPC president.

THE HINDU

29 NOV 2001

# Bibi named in FIR, goes underground

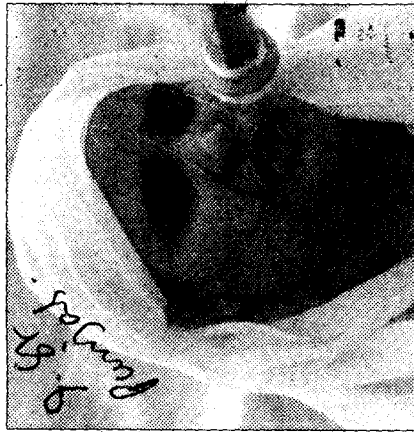
S P SINGH  
CHANDIGARH, OCT 7

**T**HE CBI has named SGPC chief Bibi Jagir Kaur as the first accused in the FIR filed in the case of her daughter Harpreet Kaur's death last April under mysterious circumstances. Her gunman and relative Nishan Singh is the second accused, it was learnt. Bibi is yet to be arrested and remained untraceable and her office failed to issue any statement on the issue.

Given the Bibi's position in Sikh polity, and with elections to the SGPC round the corner, political calculations in Punjab began working overtime.

Top police and administration officials in the state and the capital here remained tightlipped about Bibi's whereabouts. Jaglandhar range DIG Suresh Arora, under whose charge Bibi's hometown Begowal falls, refused to comment when asked if adequate precautions had been taken regarding her security.

CBI Investigating Officer Harbhajan Ram told *The Indian Express* from Delhi that neither Jagir Kaur nor Nishan Singh



**Jagir Kaur: Running for cover**

was arrested today but didn't give any reason for not arresting them. They have been charged with culpable homicide (not amounting to murder), wrongful confinement and conspiracy.

Meanwhile, CBI special branch officers today interrogated the five accused, including Jagir Kaur's close aides Paramjit Singh Raipur and his sister-in-law Dalwinder Kaur, in Delhi today, sources said.

CBI sleuths also questioned Kamaljit, the Begowal youth who claims to have married Harpreet against Jagir Kaur's wishes and fathered her child. Kamaljit's sister Manjit Kaur and younger brother Simarjit Kaur also accompanied Kamaljit to Delhi where he was summoned by the CBI today.

Kamaljit's mother Balwinder Kaur told *The Indian Express* from Begowal that Kamaljit had called home from Delhi and expressed satisfaction at the way CBI sleuths were uncovering the case.

Seven more people, including a driver, an ASJ and a hawaladar, were questioned by CBI officials here in the UT Guest House between 10 am and 12:30 pm, sources said. All the police personnel questioned by CBI officials belonged to Bibi Jagir Kaur's security set-up.

Bibi heads the cash-rich dera of Baba Prem Singh Murari Wale at Begowal and her image of a deeply religious person has taken a severe beating with the Harpreet episode, a problem she has been grappling with since the April 20 death of her daughter.

Bibi Kaur's travails have landed Chief

## Cong secy seeks ouster

PUNJAB Congress Secretary Subhpal Singh Khaira, on Saturday appealed to the Shromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee to remove Bibi Jagir Kaur from the office of president of the premier Sikh institution to save it from disrepute.

He said since the Akal Takhti Jathedar Joginder Singh Vedarti has failed to perform his duty as custodian of the Sikh faith by his silence, the only hope rested with its members to save the 75-year-old institution of the Sikhs.

Minister Parkash Singh Badal in an unenviable position as she was hand-picked by him to head the three-quarters-of-a-century old SGPC, a position of prime importance and considerable influence in the Sikh community. Knives are already out for Jagir Kaur within Badal's own Akali Dal with SGPC executive member and Badal loyalist Balbir Singh Panmu demanding her resignation on moral grounds, saying her arrest was imminent.

# Rajan extradition request to be submitted soon

H BULA DEVI  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 9. — With the Maharashtra government and ministry of home affairs blaming each other for the inordinate delay in extraditing underworld don Chhota Rajan from Thailand, the ministry of external affairs and Mumbai police are understood to have begun efforts to directly handle the extradition request with the Thai government.

While repeated references are being made to the absence of an extradition treaty between Thailand and India, an MEA official said, "in cooperation with and under the guidance of the MEA, the Mumbai government is preparing the extradition request". The latter is expected to be submitted in 10 days' time.

Dismissing allegations that the Centre was taking more time than necessary in sending the request, the officer said there was "no unreasonable delay". In fact, he said, the MEA had not earlier received any formal request to extradite Rajan.

On not having an extradition treaty with Thailand, he said there were ways for "arranging" a request for extradition of a criminal.

While efforts to have Rajan extradited continue, the Central and Maharashtra governments have got into a spat over the issue

of delayed action by Indian investigative agencies.

The home ministry, on its part, took the unusual step of issuing a formal press note on Saturday evening which not merely absolved the Centre from responsibility for the delay but accused the state government of not responding to CBI's request to submit the extradition papers.

Referring to media reports suggesting that the Centre had not been prompt in clearing the Maharashtra government's request to despatch a team of police officers to Bangkok to process the extradition, the note from North Block said, "this impression is incorrect" and gave a chronological order of the whole development.

As soon as information was received of the shoot-out in which Chhota Rajan was injured, the press note said, CBI sent a message on 18 September to Thai police informing them of the International Red Corner notice issued against the gangster in 1995. Thai police was requested to detain Chhota Rajan on the basis of the Red Corner notice and then inform them so that extradition papers could be sent.

On 29 September CBI wrote to the state government requesting it to send necessary extradition papers, the note said emphasising that extradition papers have not been received as yet from Maharashtra.

THE STATESMAN

10 OCT 2000

# Orissa to launch *pani* panchayats

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, Sept. 29. — Goaded by the World Bank and observing the success of states like Maharashtra and Andhra Pradesh, Orissa today decided to launch the "pani panchayat" scheme or water users associations in a big way.

The estimated water resources in the state is one of the highest in the country and yet the gap between potential creation and potential utilisation is as high as 40 percent.

In order to ensure better utilisation of water by involving farmers in distribution of water to agricultural fields as well as maintenance of the canal system, pani panchayats would be formed throughout the state. The first step is to hand over a part of the network of canal system for its operation and maintenance to the farmers through such panchayats which would be registered bodies.

Already 4 pilot projects funded by the World Bank have been implemented, namely Ghodahad project, Rushikulya distributary, Aunli and Derjang projects. Also 50 pani panchayats have been formed.

The government has identified another group of 29 irrigation projects covering an area of over 3 lakh hectares in its second phase. It is estimated that

688 pani panchayats will be formed to look after the irrigation systems of these 29 projects. The objective is to extend the programme to the entire state covering about 16 lakh hectares under various irrigation command areas in all of the 30 districts of the state, said officials.

Secretary of water resources department Mr Bijoy Patnaik said that it was becoming extremely difficult to operate and maintain the canal systems. The department has more than 58,000 employees and another 25,000 temporary workers. Salary bills consume over 53 percent of the non plan allocation and this is another reason why it is difficult to invest in operation and maintenance of canal systems, he observed.

Once farmers are involved through pani panchayats, the maintenance, distribution and even collection of revenue would be more effective and easier, he noted. These panchayats can facilitate changing of the crop pattern and can also encourage farmers to take up cash crops.

Inaugurating a function to launch the programme, Union water resources minister Mr Arjun Sethi said that the government has since long been encouraging farmers' participation in irrigation systems.



# Status report on Orissa drought

Bhubaneswar, September 21

**T**HIS YEAR, drought in 20 districts of Orissa has destroyed an estimated 11.74 lakh tonnes of paddy worth Rs 622.42 crore, Chief Minister Naveen Patnaik said on Thursday.

Paddy cultivated on 8.4 lakh hectares — mostly high and medium land — has been destroyed, he told reporters here after a two-day tour of the worst-hit Sundergarh, Jharsuguda and Nuapada districts.

The State Government is preparing a status report on the situation that would be presented to the Centre within a week, the Chief Minister said.

Patnaik put the projected loss at Rs 495.02 crore. In addition to this, loss of production in about one lakh hectares of land where no cultivation had taken place at all, would amount to 2.4 lakh tonnes valued at Rs 127.20 crore.

The loss would go up further if rainfall continued to be scanty during September, Patnaik said.

The worst-hit districts are Deogarh, Sambalpur, Nuapada, Sundergarh, Bolangir and Jharsuguda where rainfall has been less than normal by 40 per cent to 60 per cent, Patnaik said.

The Revenue Minister Biswabhusan Harichandan and Minister of State for Agriculture, Amar Prasad Satpathy, were also present at the press conference.

Patnaik said rainfall was near normal in June (250.9 mm), 259 mm rainfall was registered in July and 357.8 mm in August.

There has been 23 per cent deficit rainfall with 726.8 mm recorded till now, he said.

Jharsuguda was the worst hit with a deficiency of 62 per cent.

The quantum of rainfall during the crucial month of August, although seemingly only moderately deficient, had a highly uneven distribution with long dry spells in the first fortnight and heavy rainfall in the last three days of the month.

Harichandan said the Government was conscious of the intensity of the calamity.

He said he had discussed the matter with Union Agriculture Minister Nitish Kumar and Union Rural Development Minister Sunderlal Patwa.

Satpathy informed that paddy was generally grown on 42 lakh hectares. But this year, it would be grown on 39 lakh hectares and the rest of the land would be used for the cultivation of more remunerative non-paddy crops.

The Chief Minister said the Government was maintaining a constant vigil over the emerg-

ing situation and the Cabinet committee that had been set up to look after post-supercyclone relief and rehabilitation had been renamed as Cabinet committee for calamities to focus on drought also.

Seven Cabinet ministers had been asked to monitor the situation in the seven worst-hit dis-

tricts.

The ministers and the districts they had been given charge of are Nalinikanta Mohanty (Jharsuguda), A U Singh Deo (Sundergarh), Surendranath Naik (Bolangir), K V Singh Deo (Deogarh), Bhagabat Behera (Nuapada), Bed Prakash Agrawal (Sambalpur) and Samir Dey (Bargarh).

Patnaik said he would lead a delegation to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee soon to brief him about the calamity and other problems of the State.

Naveen said the Government might waive the loans taken by farmers and agricultural workers in the affected districts after it received reports on crop cutting.

Steps were also being taken to combat a possible drinking-water scarcity in the drought-hit districts, he said.

"There have been no reports of migration of people from the affected areas," Patnaik said the Government had no immediate plans to open free kitchens in the drought-hit districts.

Congress, the Opposition party, has been clamouring for more funds allocation and opening of free kitchens. (PTI)

**Paddy cultivated on 8.4 lakh hectares, mostly high and medium land, has been destroyed, Patnaik said after visiting the worst-hit districts**

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 SEP 2000

# Orissa seeks re-merger with areas now in Bihar

■ Undoing history: Assembly adopts a resolution to reunite with former princely states of Sadheikala and Kharsuan

**PRESS TRUST OF INDIA**  
BHUBANESWAR, JULY 11

**T**HE Orissa Assembly has adopted an unanimous resolution reiterating the demand for the re-merger of the former princely states of Sadheikala and Kharsuan, now in Bihar, with the state.

The resolution, passed after a marathon seven-hour debate on the issue late on Monday night, urges the Centre to undo the "historic injustice" done to the people of Orissa by taking away the states of Sadheikala and Kharsuan from the State despite the historical, linguistic and cultural relation

of the two areas with the rest of Orissa.

Moved by Revenue Minister Biswabhusan Harichandan the resolution also urges the Centre for the re-unification of Sadheikala and Kharsuan with Orissa simultaneously with the creation of the new state of Vananchal or Jharkhand. Though all the members supported the resolution, the only discordant note was struck by JMM member George Tirkey who said that the State Government should first attach priority to the development of tribals living in the districts bordering other states.

Alleging that the tribals were neglected by the government, he

said he was opposed to the resolution. But he did not object when the resolution was put to vote.

Describing it as a sensitive issue, Harichandan said a fresh memorandum, which will be submitted to the Centre, is almost ready and is awaiting the Cabinet's clearance. "We want to involve everybody and, if needed, it would be placed and discussed at an all-party meeting before being presented to New Delhi," he said.

Clarifying the BJP stand on the issue, Harichandan, who is the leader of the BJP legislature party in the House, said that it was not true that some of his party leaders had other views on the subject.

A resolution on re-merger of Sadheikala and Kharsuan had been passed at the BJP legislature party meeting and some members even stated that for them the state came first and the party next. Harichandan said while adding that the party's state chief had been misquoted on the issue in the media earlier.

Referring to the Bihar, BJP leader Sushil Modi's statement that his party was opposed to the re-merger of these areas with Orissa, the Revenue Minister said that had Bihar demanded the merger of some areas of Orissa with that state "we would have also reacted in the same way".

Replying to criticism that the Government had not demanded merger of other outlying Orissa speaking areas, in three other states, Harichandan said that the Government did not do it as the four states would have jointly opposed such a move.

The Revenue Minister said that former chief minister Biju Patnaik had written to the Centre twice on September 4, 1992 and February 16, 1993 requesting for re-merger of Sadheikala and Kharsuan before the creation of a separate state in south Bihar.

He also thanked organisations like the Utkal Sammilani and Viswa Oriya Sammilani for spear-

heading the stir for the re-merger of these ex-princely states with Orissa. Several ministers including Surendranath Naik (Panchayati Raj), Nalinikanta Mohanty (Works and Housing), Ramkrushna Patnaik (Finance), Mangala Kishor (Welfare) and Amar Prasad Satpathy (Agriculture) participated in the debate supporting the re-merger.

The Congress leader of Opposition Ramakanta Mishra said that an united fight was needed to archive the objective adding MPs from Orissa should oppose the Vananchal Bill in Parliament if the Centre did not accede to Orissa's request.

INDIAN EXPRESS

12 JUL 2000

# Govt. sanctions prosecution of Thackeray, Azmi

□ No immediate plans to arrest Sena leader, says CM □ Commissioner's assurance calms Sainiks

**The Times of India News Service**  
**MUMBAI**—The Congress-led Democratic Front (DF) government has given the Mumbai police the 'go-ahead' to prosecute Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray and Samajwadi Party leader Abu Asim Azmi for "promoting communal enmity".

The announcement by deputy chief minister Chhagan Bhujbal, who holds the home portfolio, was made at a hurriedly convened press conference on Saturday and sent out waves of panic throughout Mumbai. Sena activists were seen on the streets ordering the closing down of shops, restaurants and commercial establishments. "It's a spontaneous reaction," said a key Sena leader.

Alarmed by reports of sporadic incidents of hooliganism, chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh on

Saturday night directed Mumbai police commissioner M.N. Singh to flash a message on Doordarshan informing citizens that there were no orders to arrest Mr Thackeray.

Speaking to this newspaper, Mr Deshmukh said there were no "immediate plans" to arrest Mr Thackeray.

"Granting permission to the city police to prosecute Mr Thackeray and Mr Azmi is a preliminary step. The police will now examine the legal implications of the case and seek opinions from their lawyers."

Cases of violence and stone-pelting were reported in Parel, Chembur, Mulund, Bandra and

Khar as news of Mr Thackeray's prosecution spread in the city. The Western railway network was brought to a halt by scores of Sena activists who sprawled across

the century-old tracks at Elphinstone Road station. On the Central Railway section, trains were stopped at Mulund.

Sena chief Bal Thackeray said he should be arrested, "entire Hindustan" would be "up in flames". Stating that Mr Bhujbal had "lit a fuse", Mr Thackeray expressed fears that the home department's decision would trigger communal disturbances in Mumbai. "In that case, the Democratic Front government will



**Bal Thackeray**



**Abu Asim Azmi**

be responsible for the consequences," he added.

"The state government suffers from a death-wish," said top Sena leader Uddhav Thackeray. "The DF government is digging its own grave," declared prominent party leader Raj Thackeray.

Senior Sena leaders had earlier met at leader of the opposition Narayan Rane's south Mumbai residence to deliberate on the political fall-out of the home department's move to prosecute their chief. "The state government's decision smacks of political vendetta," said Mr Rane, a former chief minister.

By late Saturday evening, however, the Sena leadership seemed to have had a change of heart, presumably after the police commissioner's televised appeal to citizens. Former minister Sudhir Joshi

issued an appeal to partymen to call off the impromptu agitation and to maintain calm.

A senior Sena leader said the party had no plans to issue a bandh call on Sunday to oppose the state government's move to try Mr Thackeray under section 153 (A) of the Indian Penal Code, a non-bailable offence.

Speaking to newsmen on Saturday afternoon, Mr Bhujbal had said that he had signed the papers submitted to the home ministry by the Mumbai police seeking the home department's permission to try Mr Thackeray under the relevant section of the IPC.

Mr Bhujbal said that should the Mumbai police find it necessary to arrest Mr Thackeray, the Maharashtra government was "competent" to meet any situation arising out of such a decision.

Santosh Bane

THE TIMES OF INDIA

## Enough ground to prosecute Thackeray, says CM

9/8/93  
Mumbai  
19-17

**MUMBAI, JULY 16.** The Maharashtra Chief Minister, Mr. Vilasrao Deshmukh, today asserted that his Government had enough justification to give a "go ahead" to the Mumbai police to prosecute the Shiv Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, and said the law would take its own course. Addressing a press conference on the eve of the three-week monsoon session beginning here tomorrow, Mr. Deshmukh said that police had sought permission to prosecute Mr. Thackeray in 1993 for his "inflammatory" editorials in his party mouthpiece *Saamna* during the Mumbai riots. "My Government has given permission for the same and would present its justification to the court in due course of time".

The situation in the State was "calm and quiet", the Chief Minister informed.

To a question regarding the claim of the Opposition that the Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Chhagan Bhujbal, who holds the Home portfolio, had not forwarded the file of the Mumbai Samajwadi party president, Mr. Abu Asim Azmi, to the Chief Minister, Mr. Deshmukh said, "Mr Thackeray's file concerned the general administration department, of which I am in charge while that of Mr. Azmi falls under the purview of the Home department".

Mr. Deshmukh refuted the charge of the Opposition that his Government had raked up a "non-issue" to divert the attention of the people from its "fail-

ures". "There is no question of diverting from the main issues", he said.

The Chief Minister confirmed that he had received a letter signed by the Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly, Mr. Narayan Rane, and his counterpart in the Legislative Council, Mr. Nitin Gadkari, conveying the Opposition decision to boycott the customary tea party.

"They could have come here and discussed the important issues concerning the people, which they had raised in the letter to me and similarly they can highlight them in the Legislature. By boycotting the tea meeting, they have not behaved as a responsible Opposition", he added. — UNI

THE HINDU

# Vilasrao reiterates resolve to prosecute Thackeray

*Sena-BJP to battle it out outside the Assembly* *BEST buses, traders bear the brunt of Sena protests*

By A Staff Reporter

By A Staff Reporter

MUMBAI: Chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh on Sunday reiterated the ruling Democratic Front (DF) government's resolve to prosecute Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray for allegedly promoting communal hatred, even as the opposition Shiv Sena-BJP combine bigwigs said they were prepared for a "confrontation" with the state government on the issue outside the precincts of the Maharashtra legislature. The Sena had closed shops and disrupted transport on Saturday night and repeated its action on Sunday morning. However, it withdrew its agitation in the afternoon.

Battle lines now seem to have been drawn between the ruling eight-party alliance and the Sena-BJP combine on the eve of the monsoon session of the state legislature which begins here on Monday.

Striking a note of propriety, the chief minister said "suitable action" would be taken against Mr Thackeray "at the right time". The law and order situation across the state was "peaceful," Mr Deshmukh said in reply to a question.

"The law will take its own course. I have done my duty (of issuing orders for Mr Thackeray's prosecution) with a clear conscience," deputy chief minister Chhagan Bhujbal said.

The DF duo was addressing a press conference at 'Sahyadri', the state government's Malabar Hill guest house, where the chief minister held the customary tea meeting on the eve of the monsoon session.

The opposition Sena-BJP combine, however, boycotted the tea meeting as a mark of protest against the home department's move to prosecute Mr Thackeray.

Asked if he felt deterred by the possibility of the BJP-led government at the Centre, of which the Sena is a major ally, invoking Article 356 to topple the eight-party alliance headed by him on the issue of Mr Thackeray's trial by Mumbai police, Mr Deshmukh shot back: "My government will not be shattered", adding, "We have taken the decision after careful thought. There is enough justification for Mr Thackeray's prosecution". However, neither Mr Deshmukh nor Mr Bhujbal were willing to set a deadline for the Sena chief's prosecution.

Elaborating on the administrative procedure for the trial, Mr Bhujbal, who holds the home portfolio, said the order for Mr Thackeray's prosecution, which he signed on Saturday, would be despatched by the home ministry to the city police commissioner's office which will work out the subsequent procedural framework in keeping with the provisions of the relevant section. "We will accept the court's verdict in the matter," Mr Bhujbal said.

MUMBAI: Shiv Sena activists took to the streets for the second day on Sunday and closed shops in several parts of the metropolis to protest against the Democratic Front (DF) government's decision to sanction the prosecution of party chief Bal Thackeray.

Cases were registered against Mr Thackeray seven years ago for writing allegedly inflammatory editorials in the Sena mouthpiece "Saamna".

Government sanction is necessary for prosecuting a person under section 153 (a) of the Indian Penal Code which deals with 'promoting enmity between different groups on grounds of religion, race, place of birth, residence etc and doing acts prejudicial to maintenance of harmony,' a non-bailable offence.

Soon after deputy chief minister Chhagan Bhujbal announced the sanction of prosecution on Saturday evening, hordes of Sena activists forced shopkeepers and hoteliers to down shutters and disrupted train services. The situation came under control only after police commissioner M.N. Singh appeared on television and assured that he had not received orders from the government to arrest Mr Thackeray.

Shiv Sainiks renewed their protests on Sunday morning by compelling traders to shut down their establishments. At Mulund and Vidyavihar stations on the main line of the central railway, Sainiks squatted on the tracks and stopped movement of trains.

According to the police, several incidents of stone-throwing were reported with BEST buses being the main target. Stone-throwing was reported from Kandivli, Vikhroli, Pantnagar, Kherwadi, Bhandup, Nehrunagar and other areas.

As many as 73 BEST buses were damaged and 18 drivers, one conductor and a passenger were injured, BEST sources said. Tyres of many buses were also deflated.

Central Railway (CR) suspended its mainline services for 30 minutes from 10.30 a.m. The services resumed after the protestors were removed from the tracks by the railway police. Sena activists also prevented taxi-drivers and autorickshaw owners in many parts of the city from plying. A commuter, on her way to Goregaon from Khar by taxi, said she encountered stone-throwing at Santa Cruz and Jogeshwari. A rasta-roko was also staged at Western Express highway in Jogeshwari in the morning.

Nehru Nagar police station registered a case against corporator Rajendra Lad and three others for damaging a saloon. According to the police, the corporator and others allegedly tried to force a saloon owner to close his shop and damaged it in the process.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

17 JUL 2000

# Show of loyalty: Sena ministers quit Vajpayee ministry

PM says no to resignations, will tackle Thackeray issue

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The stand-off between the Shiv Sena and the Congress-NCP coalition ministry in Maharashtra over the impending arrest and prosecution of Sena supremo Bal Thackeray had a dramatic spillover in the capital on Wednesday, with all three Sena ministers resigning from the Union council of ministers.

Expectedly, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee declined to accept the resignations of Suresh Prabhu, Manohar Joshi and Balasaheb Vikhe-Patil while empathising with the Sena ministers, who said that they would rather "go back home and work for the party than stay as ministers here when we can't avert Balasaheb's arrest".

After a delegation of Sena ministers and MPs called on him later in the afternoon, Mr Vajpayee asked law minister Ram Jethmalani to "study the demands" of the third largest partner of the ruling NDA, presumably in order to suggest 'legal' ways in which Mr Thackeray's arrest could be headed off.

The Sena ministers claimed that Mr Vajpayee had assured them that Mr Thackeray would not be arrested. A PMO official, however, denied that any such assurance had been given.

The Sena ministers have had over half a dozen meetings with Mr Vajpayee and home minister L.K. Advani in the past three days. They are believed to have demanded that the Centre tell the state ministry "clearly and unambiguously" that Mr Thackeray's arrest would have "serious consequences" and should therefore be averted.

The resignations—widely seen as an attempt to put pressure on Mr Vajpayee to prevail on the Maharashtra government to stall Mr Thackeray's arrest and prosecution for his inflammatory writings seven years ago—were "not a pressure tactic, but an expression of our sentiments", heavy industries minister Manohar Joshi told newsmen.

Curiously, the resignation initiative came from chemicals and fertilisers minister Suresh Prabhu, while on a visit to Mumbai. He sent in his papers through a special messenger after speaking to Mr Vajpayee, who is learnt to have dissuaded Mr Prabhu and to have assured him that he would do all he could to avert the crisis. In a competitive show of loyalty, Mr Joshi and minister of state for finance Balasaheb Vikhe Patil also put in their resignations later.

Asked what he and his fellow Sena ministers expected from the Centre, Mr Joshi said, "We expect the Centre to send a clear and unambiguous message to the Maharashtra government that arresting Balasaheb Thackeray will only create a serious law and order situation in the state. The law under which action against Balasaheb is sought to be taken is an old law. The Centre should tell Maharashtra that Mr Thackeray's arrest will lead to serious consequences."

Asked what those "serious consequences" could be and whether the Sena ministers had asked the PM to sack the state ministry under Article 356 of the constitution, Mr Joshi said, "We have not asked, but our party already has."

Day of strife: Shiv Sainiks go on the rampage in city

By Our Crime Reporter

MUMBAI: It was yet another day of chaos and confusion. Stones were pelted, BEST buses were damaged and shopkeepers downed shutters in different parts of the city on Wednesday as rumours about the "arrest" of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray fanned out in Mumbai.

Deputy chief minister Chhagan Bhujbal had sanctioned the prosecution of the Sena chief last Saturday under Section 153 (A) of the Indian Penal Code for the latter's 'inflammatory' editorials in the Sena mouthpiece, *Saamna*, in 1993.

According to the police, stone-pelting incidents were reported from the Mazgaon, Pydhonie and Kherwadi areas. Suspected Shiv Sainiks even threw lit match sticks inside BEST buses, the police said. Nobody was injured.

In Vakola, at about 5.45 p.m., an angry mob pulled out a BEST bus driver, poured kerosene on the bus seat and set it on fire. They also broke window panes and damaged the windscreen, fire brigade sources said. "It was a minor fire and was extinguished within ten minutes," a fire brigade official said. Nobody sustained injuries.

Shopkeepers in several areas like Masjid, Pydhonie, Bandra, Andheri, Kurla, Chembur, Ghatkopar as well as Mulund downed shutters, fearing a law and order problem. Newspaper offices were flooded with calls from anxious citizens all through the day about the possible arrest of Mr Thackeray. "We are closing our shops and going home. There is a lot of tension in our area and we do not want to take any chances," said a shopkeeper from Masjid.

Panic also gripped Nalasopara after rumours of Mr Thackeray's arrest and alleged reports of firing by Sainiks. In the melee that followed, two persons were injured in an autorickshaw accident.

Several schools and colleges, fearing violence, had sent their students home early on Wednesday.

Joint commissioner (law and order) Y.C. Pawar said the situation was under control and there was no reason for panic. He said the police was fully prepared. "We have deployed an adequate number of policemen and there has been no serious law and order problem so far," he said.

Deputy commissioner (zone VIII) S.V. Date said it was difficult to identify those involved in the Vakola incident as they had managed to escape from the scene of the offence. "They were neither carrying flags nor shouting slogans," he said.

Meanwhile, police commissioner M.N. Singh has appealed to city residents to refrain from rumour-mongering. "There is no reason for panic," he said on Wednesday evening. "I have ordered my policemen to deal firmly with miscreants. Anybody indulging in violence will not be spared. I have ordered my subordinates to take stringent action against such persons," he said.

It is learnt that the police is waiting for certain petitions against Mr Thackeray to come up before the supreme court on Friday before arresting him.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

# Paramilitary forces deployed in Mumbai

By Arunkumar Bhatt

**MUMBAI, JULY 19.** The Democratic Front Government in Maharashtra today stepped up pressure on the Shiv Sena, ignoring the latter's warning that the arrest of its president, Mr. Bal Thackeray, would open a Pandora's box. Several incidents of lawlessness and stoning were reported from different parts of the city as tension mounted following rumours that Mr. Thackeray had been arrested.

The Sena Ministers who resigned from the Union Cabinet earlier in the day are returning tonight for consultations with Mr. Thackeray.

The Government withdrew security cover to all Sena legislators and functionaries except the party chief and his son, Mr. Uddhav Thackeray. "We have done so because we want policemen to protect the people," the Deputy CM, Mr. Chhagan Bhujbal, who also holds the Home portfolio, told the Assembly.

He warned the Sena members that if the party cadre took the law into their hands, the Government and the police would have no option but to do their jobs. He advised the Leader of the Opposition, Mr. Narayan Rane, to



A policeman maintains vigil outside the residence of the Shiv Sena leader, Mr. Bal Thackeray, in Mumbai on Wednesday. — AP

put the case before the court and prove Mr. Thackeray's innocence.

Mr. Bhujbal was responding to an acrimonious debate on the law and order in the State initiated by Mr. Rane who warned that riots would erupt in case Mr. Thackeray was arrested. In his reply, Mr. Bhujbal said it was clear who would be behind the riots if they took place, adding, "We will not have to appoint another Srikrishna Commission".

The Deputy Chief Minister ig-

nored the threat of the BJP member, Mr. Gopinath Munde, of initiating contempt of court proceedings against him if Mr. Thackeray was arrested as the Mumbai High Court had rejected a public interest litigation seeking the Sena chief's arrest for inflammatory editorials in the party organ *Saamna*. Later, the Supreme Court upheld the HC order.

Mr. Munde pointed out that the then Sharad Pawar Government had told the court that the said

editorials were not objectionable in its view. That the Government meant business was made clear with the arrival of at least 15 companies of the Rapid Action Force and the State Reserve Police. Top police and Home Ministry officials held a meeting to review the situation and finalise an action plan for any eventuality.

Today, about 130 legislators of the Shiv Sena and the BJP called on the Chief Minister, Mr. Vilasrao Deshmukh, and submitted a memorandum, calling upon the Government against any hasty action. They pointed out that in the eight years after the publication of the impugned editorials, communal amity had not been disturbed.

## CM reviews situation

**MUMBAI, JULY 19.** The Maharashtra Chief Minister, Mr. Vilasrao Deshmukh, tonight presided over a high-level meeting here to take stock of the law and order situation in the State. The meeting was attended by the Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Chhagan Bhujbal, the Advocate-General, the Additional Chief Secretary (Home), the Director-General of Police and the Police Commissioner. — PTI

THE HINDU

20 JUL 2000

## MORE FORCES SOUGHT

# DF Govt. firm on prosecution

19/07/2000  
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HD-1

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI JULY 20.** The Democratic Front Maharashtra Government appears determined to go ahead with the proposed prosecution of the Shiv Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, as soon as adequate paramilitary forces are made available to it.

"We are waiting for the paramilitary forces, the next step will follow immediately after that," said the Maharashtra Minister of State for Home, Mr. Kripashankar, soon after meeting the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani.

Mr. Kripashankar and his ministerial colleague, Mr. Manikrao Thackeray, sought 27 companies of paramilitary forces to help the State deal with any eventuality on the law and order front.

Mr. Advani assured the Ministers that the Centre would fulfil its "constitutional responsibility in the correct manner". He told them that four companies of the Rapid Action Force had already been placed at the disposal of the State and more companies would be withdrawn from other States if required.

### Governor sends report

The Maharashtra Governor, Dr. P.C. Alexander, sent a "factual" report to the Home Ministry Wednesday. The North Block remained the hub of activity throughout the evening. After the two Maharashtra Ministers, the former State Chief Minister, Mr. Narayan Rane of the Shiv Sena, and the former Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Gopinath Munde of the BJP, who airdashed to the Capital tonight, also met Mr. Advani and apprised him of the developing situation in the State.

The State Government had written to the Centre on July 16 asking for 21 RAF companies but only four were sent. However, according to Mr. Kripashankar, the request for additional forces was made again on July 17 to "make it possible for the Government to take preventive steps".

According to the two Ministers, they apprised Mr. Advani on the "tension caused due to rumour-mongering" by the Shiv Sena.

### BJP, Sena to take to the streets

By Neena Vyas

**NEW DELHI, JULY 20.** The BJP and the Shiv Sena today jointly announced their decision to "take to the streets of Mumbai" their struggle against what they describe as "illegal" attempts by the

Maharashtra Government to foist a seven-year old case against the Shiv Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, for instigating communal hatred through his writings in the Sena's official mouthpiece, *Saamna*.

This afternoon, senior BJP leaders were still trying to somewhat distance the party from the happenings in Maharashtra — "It is a matter primarily between the Maharashtra Government and the Shiv Sena," the BJP vice-president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi, said. But an hour earlier, Mr. Ram Naik, Petroleum Minister and senior-most BJP MP from Maharashtra, addressed a joint press conference along with Mr. Anant Geete, Shiv Sena parliamentary party leader, to say the two parties would together "take to the streets of Mumbai" the fight against the "unjust attempts" of the Congress(I)-Nationalist Congress Party Government in Maharashtra to get Mr. Thackeray convicted in a criminal case.

The "decision" to have a joint campaign by the BJP-Sena in Maharashtra was apparently taken at a meeting here this morning of some 18 BJP and Shiv Sena MPs from Maharashtra. Mr. Naik disclosed that the NCP president, Mr. Sharad Pawar, had seen him today to discuss some State projects. But naturally the Maharashtra happenings were also discussed and Mr. Pawar is reported to have expressed the hope that the "crisis" would be resolved soon.

While Mr. Naik described the State Government's moves as "provocative," Mr. Geete virtually described Mr. Thackeray as the angel who had "saved Mumbai" in 1993 when he wrote "*Ab bas karo*" (stop it), and "the rioting stopped." He added that "Balasaheb (Thackeray) is a valiant soldier for Hindutva and the country." Both Mr. Naik and Mr. Geete confirmed that the "allies" will campaign together against any attempt to arrest the Sena chief.

Answering questions Mr. Geete and Mr. Naik claimed that police arresting other political leaders, such as Dr. Jagannath Mishra, more than seven years after he relinquished office as Bihar Chief Minister, was not bad in law as it was a corruption case. But a seven-year-old case being "dug up" against Mr. Thackeray smacked of "political vindictiveness."

Legal experts differ with Jethmalani: Page 13

THE HINDU

21 JUL 2000



# Plea for Central forces rejected

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, July 20

AS THE BJP rallied to Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray's support against prosecution by the Maharashtra Government, Home Minister L.K. Advani tonight turned down the State government's plea to immediately despatch 3,000 paramilitary troops to bolster the police there.

Mr Advani also announced that Governor P C Alexander had sent a report to the Centre on the situation in the State "on his own" but assured the State Government that the Centre would meet its "constitutional responsibilities."

The Centre's "inability" to send forces to Maharashtra was conveyed to two State Ministers who called on Mr Advani today.

Senior Union Ministers and BJP leaders, in a bid to keep Mr Thackeray in good humour follow-

ing the resignation drama by three Sena Ministers, came out strongly against his prosecution for inflammatory writings eight years ago, calling it "time-barred."

Petroleum Minister Ram Naik and Information and Broadcasting Minister Arun Jaitley joined Law Minister Ram Jethmalani in speaking against the move to pros-

## Crisis in Maharashtra

ecute Mr Thackeray.

Mr Jethmalani today said the Centre could even direct the Maharashtra Government not to arrest Mr Thackeray. Under Article 162 of the Constitution, the Centre could give executive orders to the State, which was binding.

Criticising the move against Mr Thackeray, BJP vice president K

Jana Krishnamurthy, however, ruled out imposition of Central rule in the event of Mr Thackeray's arrest. He said "we know from our experience in Bihar, it is not possible to win approval of the Rajya Sabha for invoking Article 356."

In Shimla, Mr Jaitley questioned the rationale behind the decision to prosecute Mr Thackeray. He said the move appeared to be guided by considerations "outside the mandate of law." Mr Jaitley said the decision should have been supported by solid reasons.

Meanwhile, pressure was said to be mounting on the Congress-NCP Ministry to pick up the gauntlet thrown by Mr Thackeray, who had challenged it to arrest him and face the "consequences."

NCP chief Sharad Pawar warned that the state government would sternly deal with those who'll "hold people to ransom in court matters."

Related reports on Page 10

# Thackeray drama could head for tame finish

*Government considers arresting Shiv Sena chief 'only on paper'*

By Ambarish Mishra  
The Times of India News Service

MUMBAI: The Mumbai police has put off the prosecution of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray under Section 153 (A) of the Indian Penal Code until the elections to the state legislative council are over.

The legal eagles of the Maharashtra government and key officials of the city police are said to be hammering out a formula for the Sena chief's arrest only on paper.

Nationalist Congress Party president Sharad Pawar, who was in Mumbai on Friday, is believed to have advised deputy chief minister and NCP leader Chhagan Bhujbal to hold his horses until Monday, the day of the elections to 11 seats of the upper house. Elated by Mr Thackeray's statement on Friday exhorting his faithfuls to maintain calm amidst speculation about his arrest, the ruling Democratic Front government hopes to end the week-long political drama on a sober note.

However, Mr Thackeray's statement may be a ploy to catch the home department unawares, say Sena observers.

Matoshri, Mr Thackeray's Bandra residence, became the beehive of hectic political activity on Saturday evening. Union minister for information technology Pramod Mahajan held consultations with Sena chief Bal Thackeray. Union ministers Manohar Joshi and Suresh Prabhu, Sena MP Adhik Shirodkar, leader of the opposition Narayan Rane and senior BJP leader Gopinath Munde were present during the talks, sources said.

Emerging from the meeting after over an hour, Mr Mahajan declined to answer questions from media-persons on Mr Thackeray's proposed prosecution. "I came to see Mr Thackeray as I had not met him for quite some time," he remarked.

Earlier in the day, Mr Thackeray held talks with Union law minister Ram Jethmalani on the legalities of the case which has turned out to be a cause celebre for a party that is sorely in need of a makeover.

"The city police may treat Mr Thackeray's arrest as a matter of procedure," a senior home department official said on Saturday. "The sober tone of Mr Thackeray's statement is an indication that the Sena leadership is not keen on bringing the city to a standstill in the event of Mr Thackeray's arrest. The state government too is in no mood to exacerbate the crisis," the official said, adding, "Mumbai's police commissioner will take the final decision on the procedure of arrest and the filing of a chargesheet in the court of the additional metropolitan magistrate."



Bal Thackeray

*Deshmukh puts the ball in police commissioner's court*

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: With hectic lobbying and deft behind-the-scenes moves by Union government leaders over the past two days, the political temperature in Maharashtra on the possible arrest and prosecution of Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray appeared to be falling on Saturday.

Maharashtra chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh, in the capital to attend a national population conference convened by Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, reiterated his government's determination to act against Mr Thackeray for his 'provocative' writings during the '93 Mumbai riots.

Talking to newsmen on the sidelines of the conference, Mr Deshmukh

flatly ruled out backing down. "The state government has done its job by giving the go-ahead," he said, and it was now for Mumbai's police commissioner to take action. Mr Deshmukh added, "The police commissioner will take a decision after considering the overall situation."

The "overall situation", political observers in the capital noted, does not suggest that Mr Thackeray is about to be arrested. Observers cite three reasons for this: the Centre's refusal to send more para-military forces to strengthen the state ministry's hand if Mr Thackeray's arrest should create a law-and-order breakdown; Mr Thackeray's own advice to his party cadres to remain calm; and the uncertainty over whether the court will condone the time-bar and uphold Mr Thackeray's arrest and prosecution.

► Lawyers debate if Thackeray can be held for statements, Page 9



Vilasrao Deshmukh

# City police to chargesheet Thackeray

*2A/7* **The Times of India News Service** *98/11/00*  
MUMBAI: The city police were on Sunday all set to chargesheet Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray as a presage to his prosecution under Section 153 (A) of the Indian Penal Code, even as key Sena and BJP leaders were engaged in informal talks with the state government in a bid to stall the Sena chief's arrest.

"We have received the home department's order and a chargesheet will be filed in court in a few days," police commissioner M.N. Singh told this newspaper on Sunday.

Mr Singh's office received the home department's much-delayed order on Friday, it was learnt. It was seven years back that the Mumbai police had sought the home department's permission to prosecute the Sena chief for two of his 1993 editorials in *Saamna*, the party mouthpiece, on the post-Babri riots in Mumbai.

Mr Singh said there was no time-frame set for the filing of the chargesheet. Asked pointedly if Mr Thackeray would be arrested, Mr Singh declined to offer comment. On the other hand, Union ministers Pramod Mahajan, Manohar Joshi, leader of the opposition Narayan Rane and senior BJP leader Gopinath Munde were speaking informally to the Maharashtra government in a bid to pre-empt the Sena chief's arrest.

While Mr Mahajan was believed to have recently held telephonic talks with chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh in this connection, Mr Munde met both Mr Deshmukh and deputy chief minister Chhagan

*11*  
Bhujbal over the weekend in an attempt to resolve the stalemate over Mr Thackeray's arrest. While Mr Joshi and Mr Rane were in close contact with several DF ministers, talks were also underway between the state government and the Centre, it was learnt.

The Sena-BJP's initiative is chiefly aimed at working out a via media so that the Sena chief's arrest becomes a technical formality and does not kickstart fresh trouble in the state. "Mr Munde is hopeful of a positive response," the sources told this newspaper on Sunday evening. Mr Munde was believed to have spoken to Mr Bhujbal again on Sunday night.

However, the BJP leader, who held the crucial home portfolio in the erstwhile Sena-BJP government, was not available for details on his talks with Mr Bhujbal.

The Sena-BJP leadership was believed to have suggested to the state government that the city police should merely file a chargesheet in the court of the additional metropolitan magistrate against Mr Thackeray and leave the rest to the court's discretion. "Under the law, arrest is not a condition precedent to any case," said legal eagle and Sena MP Adhik Shirodkar, adding, "Arrest becomes necessary only in case of interrogation. But the police need not interrogate the Sena chief as the two editorials in question are eloquent enough".

A slew of face-saving measures were under active consideration. Sources said a legal provision would be found out whereby Mr Thackeray will be arrested only "on paper" and subsequently released on bail.



**Bal Thackeray**

THE TIMES OF INDIA

24 JUL 2000

# Centre despatches additional forces to Maharashtra

New Delhi, July 24

THE CENTRE today despatched 300 additional para-military force personnel to Maharashtra in the wake of the State Government's demand for more forces to tackle any law and order problem in the event of the arrest of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray.

"We have despatched three companies of Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) to Maharashtra. The Centre is keeping a close watch on the situation in the State," a senior Home Ministry official said.

He said "a decision to send more such forces to the State will be taken in a day or two".

The official said that four companies of Rapid Action Force (RAF) have already been placed at the

disposal of the State authorities.

The Maharashtra Government had requested the Centre to send 27 additional companies of para-military forces (about 3,000 personnel) to the State after it had ordered prosecution of Mr Thackeray in connection with 1993 Mumbai riots.

Meanwhile, in Mumbai, a senior police official today said that the process of preparing the chargesheet against the Shiv Sena supremo for his alleged inflammatory writings during the 1992-93 Mumbai riots was expected to take another two or three days.

Dismissing speculation about Mr Thackeray's immediate arrest, the official said police were going through the Maharashtra Government's sanction for prosecution of Mr Thackeray and con-

sidering various legal aspects.

The process was expected to last two-three days, the official who did not want to be identified said.

Meanwhile, Dr Nitin Mandke, who performed a bypass surgery on the Sena chief two years ago, said Mr Thackeray was "fit and fine" despite a hectic week.

A Sena spokesperson also denied reports of Shiv Sainiks going underground to evade the anticipated mass scale arrests of party workers to be effected by the police as part of its "precautionary measure".

And as the city remained on tenterhooks over the issue, gun-toting security personnel along with para-military forces continued to take positions at several sensitive areas in the metropolis.

(PTI)

CASE THROWN OUT; DF GOVT. TO APPEAL TO HC

# Thackeray arrested by police, freed by court

By Mahesh Vijapurkar

MUMBAI, JULY 25. The Mumbai police arrested the Shiv Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, after he dramatically put himself in the hands of the law today "to end the tension of uncertainty". He told police he would meet them in court even before the chargesheet was readied. Police then asked him to come to the Mayor's official bungalow to avoid the throng of the Sena cadre and formally arrested him.

But when Mr. Thackeray was produced before the court of the Additional Chief Metropolitan Magistrate, Mr. B.P. Kamble, at Boiwada, north-central Mumbai, the case under Section 153(a) of the Indian Penal Code for inflammatory writings in 1993 was dismissed because of a six-year delay in pursuing the case after the FIR.

Along with Mr. Thackeray, the publisher of *Saamna*, Mr. Subhash Desai, and its executive editor, Mr. Sanjay Raut, were arrested and taken to the court in unmarked cars with a large police escort.

They too were discharged. Since the case itself was thrown out, the question of bail did not arise and they were all freed, much to the delight of the party workers.

Following the court decision, a happy Mr. Thackeray drove back to the Mayor's residence, and spoke on the telephone to the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, and the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani. "My party's three Ministers would return to duty in New Delhi," he told them and asked the Prime Minister, in a lighter vein, not to dock their pay and allowances for a few days' absence.

(A UNI report from New Delhi quoted the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, as saying that the three Sena Ministers — Mr. Suresh Prabhu, Mr. Manohar Joshi

and Mr. Balasahib Vikhe-Patil — would resume duty tomorrow.)

## Govt.'s brave face

The State Government tried to put a brave face saying it would go in appeal to the High Court "because we have enough to substantiate our case that Mr. Thackeray has to be tried for inflammatory writings".

An appeal is the logical option before the Government which, sources said, would have to tread very carefully in dealing with the Srikishna Commission cases that would surface now after the recent opinion of the Supreme Court. The Chief Minister, Mr. Vilasrao Desh-

Caged only for a while: Page 13  
Echo in stock exchange: Page 18

mukh, and the Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. Chhagan Bhujbal, made it clear the High Court would be moved to "present our case. We have enough proof to proceed against Mr. Thackeray." Mr. Bhujbal added, "We showed that none was above the law. We wanted the law to decide things."

## A tense day

It was a tense morning. It was ensured that trains ran and buses plied and Mr. Thackeray reiterated that he did not want any trouble. However, people remained indoors fearing trouble. So heavy was the telephonic traffic on the episode that regular MTNL and cellular phone calls could not be made, leading to fears that police had switched off the systems to prevent rumours for three hours.

Following Mr. Thackeray's discharge, the tension that hung over the city and the State since Mr. Bhujbal first signed the papers authorising the prosecution of the Sena chief for his inflammatory writings in *Saamna* evapo-

rated. As soon as word spread that Mr. Thackeray was in the court, shops downed shutters and schools were closed amid the tightest-ever security blanket thrown over Mumbai, especially in Sena strongholds. Once the case was dismissed, people began to breathe easy.

The pace of events quickened after senior Sena leader, Mr. Manohar Joshi, telephoned the city police chief and said Mr. Thackeray would go to the Magistrate's court and the "police could do their work there". Police insisted that he would have to be arrested and instead of doing this amid the crowd of Sainiks outside his residence, he was asked to be brought to the residence of the Mayor, Mr. Harehwar Patil. The Sena chief was formally arrested and driven down to the Boiwada court. In an hour, he was a free man.

In the morning, Mr. Thackeray appeared irked by reports that the Centre had sent paramilitary forces to Mumbai on the Government's request. In New Delhi, Shiv Sena sources said they had to convince him that if the forces were not sent and trouble broke out, the Inter-Services Intelligence of Pakistan could become active. This "clarification" seemed to calm the Sena boss and prompted him to tell the media that he was ready to be arrested.

## Uproar in Assembly

PTI reports:

The State Legislative Assembly today witnessed uproarious scenes when Opposition members, mainly from the Shiv Sena and the BJP, damaged the Speaker's table, broke chairs, destroyed the public address system and threw papers in protest against the arrest of the Sena chief. Six Shiv Sena MLAs were suspended for a year and an equal number for six months. Before the commencement of the day's proceedings, the Opposition members began shouting anti-Government slogans and hurled abuses at Mr. Bhujbal.

The BJP's Mr. Raj Purohit picked up the silver mace from the Speaker's table while Sena members — Mr. Sanjay Band, Mr. Gulabrao Patil and Mr. Bala Nandgaonkar — broke a few chairs and threw some papers in the air. They uprooted the Speaker's table and removed the cushion from his chair. Some members broke the chairs on the podium. However, the Speaker went ahead with the business of the House announcing question hour. Realising that the situation was getting out of control, he adjourned the House for half-an-hour.

## 'A vindictive act'

Later, addressing a huge crowd of Shiv Sainiks outside his 'Matoshree' residence, Mr. Thackeray described his prosecution as "a vindictive act of one person (Mr. Bhujbal)", and vowed to "remove the DF Government from power". Clad in a saffron *lungi*, he told his supporters, "I have never said I do not believe in the law. But I am one who will never tolerate injustice."

Explaining the developments of the day, Mr. Thackeray said he had personally telephoned the Police Commissioner in the morning and told him that the fear psychosis in the metropolis should end. "I told the Commissioner that I was ready to come to the Shiv Sena Bhavan in central Mumbai on my own. I was told that it would be convenient for technical arrest if I came to the Mayor's bungalow on way to the court." He added that his statement a few days ago that Mumbai would burn if he was arrested was only a "warning".

The court verdict "is a victory for my followers", he said and appealed to them to maintain peace.

THE HINDU

# Bal Thackeray case: state govt. to move High Court next week

The Times of India News Service

MUMBAI: The ruling Democratic Front combine is eager to project a picture of unity in the face of the ruling by additional chief metropolitan magistrate B.P. Kamble on Tuesday dismissing the case against Shiv



V. Deshmukh

Sena chief Bal Thackeray.

Maharashtra chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh on Wednesday said the DF allies were "a hundred per cent" united on the issue of prosecuting the Sena chief notwithstanding the court ruling. An appeal in the Bombay high court would be filed next week "by Monday or Tuesday", declared Mr

Deshmukh. Inquiries revealed that the home department was prepared to move the high court this week. "It could even be on Friday," a key official of the home department told this newspaper on Wednesday.

"The court ruling is in no way a setback for the DF government. That the state government was actually seen by the people as upholding and enforcing the rule of law is the DF combine's most sterling gain," the chief minister said. He was speaking informally to newsmen at Vidhan Bhavan.

Asked if the adverse court ruling was the result of poor homework done by the Mumbai police and the home department, the chief minister replied in the negative. "Our aim was limited. We were prepared only for bail (for Mr Thackeray)," he explained, adding, "There are appellate

courts to decide the matter afresh."

The state government had not anticipated the ruling handed down by the additional chief metropolitan magistrate, Mr Deshmukh said in reply to a question.

A meeting of legislators belonging to the eight-party DF combine has been convened on Thursday to endorse the state government's decision to file an appeal in the Mumbai high court. MLAs belonging to the Sharad Pawar-led Nationalist Congress Party are also likely to meet on Thursday to take stock of the political situation.

A meeting of the extended working committee of the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee (MPCC) has been summoned to discuss the political situation, among other issues.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

27 JUL 2000

# Quit NDA to press for Seraikela merger, <sup>Orissa</sup> Opp. tells Naveen Govt

Bhubaneswar, July 26 <sup>18-7</sup>

THE OPPOSITION on Wednesday asked Orissa Union Ministers to resign and urged the Biju Janata Dal to withdraw support to the National Democratic Alliance Government at the Centre to press for the merger of Seraikela and Kharsuan with the State.

The issue cropped up in the State Assembly during Zero Hour when the Opposition members protested against the introduction of the Jharkhand Bill in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

They criticised the Centre for ignoring the unanimous resolution of the Orissa Assembly to merge Seraikela and Kharsuan with the State.

The two areas are presently parts of Bihar, but would become parts of the proposed Jharkhand State once the Bill is passed by Parliament.

Opposition MLAs called upon the ruling BJD-BJP combine to hit the streets to protest against the rejection of the unanimous resolution of the House.

House business was stalled for more than an hour as the ruling BJP-BJD and the Opposition had an altercation over the introduction of the Jharkhand Bill in Parliament.

Speaker Sharat Kumar Kar tried to pacify the agitated Opposition, but the members insisted that the Chief Minister clarify the Government's position on the Bill.

They alleged that the Government had kept the House in darkness about its stand on the proposed Bill.

Leader of Opposition Ramakanta Mishra (Congress) said since the Centre had ignored the unanimous resolution of the House regarding merger, the BJP-BJD combine should ask their Union Ministers to resign to put pressure on the Government.

Raghunath Mahanty (BJD)

attacked the Congress saying that the party neither responded to the Orissa Assembly resolution nor did it support the cause of the people of Orissa. He was supported by party colleague Nagendra Pran, who alleged that the Congress did not protest in Parliament because it was a national party.

Congress members Santosh Singh Saluja, Umesh Chandra Swain, Habibulla Khan and Jayanarayan Mahanty, however, demanded that the BJD ministers in the Union Government should resign to force the Centre to concede to their demands.

Khan suggested that all the MLAs should go to Delhi to meet the Prime Minister and the Home Minister and tell them about the unanimous opinion of the State Assembly.

BJD members, however, countered the Opposition allegations saying that their MPs had walked out of the House as a mark of protest while the BJP members argued that their MPs have taken up the matter with Union Home Minister L K Advani.

JMM member George Tirkey chided both the ruling parties and said he had deviated from his party's stand on the merger and supported the resolution passed in the House on July 10.

"But I find that all parties are busy fighting each other. My sacrifice unparallel. If the BJD-BJP combine have the guts, let them pull out of the NDA", he challenged.

As the allegations and counter-allegations continued, the Speaker intervened in the debate and said all members.

The ruckus later subsided after the Speaker announced that he would discuss the issue with the leaders of all political parties in his chamber on Thursday. (Agencies)

# Azmi presented before court

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MUMBAI, July 27. — The president of the Mumbai unit of the Samajwadi Party, Mr Abu Asim Azmi, was today presented before the court on the heels of the arrest of Mr Bal Thackeray on Tuesday.

The Opposition parties had been demanding his arrest since Mr Azmi had been clubbed with Mr Thackeray for prosecution by the deputy chief minister, Mr Chhagan Bhujbal.

The metropolitan magistrate of the sixth court at Mazgaon, Mr AM Garde, adjourned the matter for taking cognisance to 10 August stating: "I do not wish to hurriedly pass an order before going through the papers of investigation."

The police have amended the actionable clause in the charge-sheet from Article 153 (B) under which Mr Azmi is out on bail to Article 153 (A) which is non-bailable.

Mr Azmi was arrested on 19 March under Section 153 (B) for making an inflammatory speech at Mastan Talao on 24

February, wherein he is believed to have said that no insult to Islam would be tolerated even if the country is balkanised. He was released on bail after submitting a cash bond of Rs 950.

Today, Mr Azmi got a call from the DCP, zone I, Mr Sanjay Barve, asking him to be present at the court at 11.30 a.m. The case was over in about 15 minutes.

Mr Karde said that since the accused was out on bail, there was no need to bring him to the court.

However, as in the case of Mr Thackeray, the police were clearly unprepared here. Mr Azmi had about half an hour's wait at the court before the police and prosecutor could get their act together.

Following an uproar, the government sent the cassette recording of his speech to the CBI for verifying its authenticity. The report was received on 18 May, confirming Mr Azmi's voice. The issue was debated heatedly in the Upper House today with the

entire Opposition demanding that Section 124 (A), charging sedition, be made applicable to Mr Azmi and that the CBI report be tabled in the House.

When the minister of state for home, Mr Kripashankar Singh, made a statement on Mr Azmi's rumoured arrest after an adjournment, the Sena-BJP members were up on their feet demanding why he was not charged under the provision for anti-national statements.

The deputy chairman, Mr Vasant Davkhare, said it was up to the police and not the government to decide on which Section was applicable in which case. This was not acceptable to the Opposition members who shouted slogans against Mr Azmi and the government.

On 15 July, Mr Bhujbal had called the media to disclose that he would prosecute Mr Thackeray and Mr Azmi under Section 153 (A) for inciting ill-feeling between two communities. Mr Thackeray's case was dismissed on Tuesday when it came up for hearing on his bail plea.

THE STATESMAN

28 JUL 2000



# Drought fund figures were fudged: CM

HT Correspondent  
Jaipur, May 9

**R**AJASTHAN CHIEF Minister Ashok Gehlot today criticised former Delhi Chief Minister Sahib Singh Verma and Union Minister of State for Small Scale Industries Vasundhara Raje for misguiding the Centre and people by giving wrong and baseless figures about the money given by the Government of India to the Rajasthan Government to start relief programmes in drought-affected districts.

Talking to newsmen, Mr Gehlot said he was astonished to know that Mr Verma and Ms Vasundhara Raje had given contradictory figures about the Central assistance released to the Rajasthan Government so far. He made it clear that these two Ministers had tried to misguide the people to belittle the State Government, which was most unfortunate.

Quoting from statements of Mr Verma and Ms Vasundhara, the Chief Minister said the former had given the figure of Rs 1,660 crore released by the Centre whereas Ms

Vasundhara came down to Rs 800 crore, which created complete confusion among the people in Rajasthan. He said if Central Ministers wanted to mislead people, then it would be better for them to give atleast uniform figures. He, however, appreciated the sympathetic attitude of Defence Minister George Fernandes and Food and Supplies Minister Shanta Kumar who seemed to be "genuine" to understand the severity of the famine in Rajasthan.

Mr Gehlot said there was a third Central Minister of the BJP - Mr Sunder Lal Patwa - who said that the Centre had given an assistance of Rs 400 crore which contradicts the figures given by the two Central Ministers. Similarly, Mr Gulab Chand Kataria, State BJP president said that the Centre had



Gehlot: Game of numbers

released an assistance amount of Rs 713.88 crore which was ridiculous, added Mr Gehlot

The Chief Minister said BJP leaders were trying to play politics with the human tragedy, otherwise they ought to have given exact figures of Central assistance to the Press. He failed to understand the motives of these BJP leaders who were trying to blame the State Government for keeping the Central assistance "unspent, which was baseless and ill-founded." He said State BJP leaders had mis-guided their high command, hence such a mess had been created at the level of the Central Government.

Mr Gehlot said the Centre had provided an assistance of Rs 102.93 crore from the National Calamity Relief Fund (NCRF)

which excludes the additional assistance of Rs 133 crore. He said the Centre had released in advance the CRF installment of Rs 56 crore for July, 2000.

He expressed gratitude to the Centre for providing trains to transport drinking water and fodder. He said the State will have to pay Rs 402 crore as wages to people who would be engaged in the relief works which was a high amount as compared to the assistance of Rs 179 crore being given by Centre.

Mr Gehlot informed that Nabard had agreed to give the loan of Rs 144 crore to the State which would be utilised for metaling of roads (Rs 75 crore), supply of water (Rs 44 crore), constructions of school buildings (Rs 44 crore), etc. He said the State Government would employ 9.79 lakh people during the month of June, 2000.

Regarding the visit of Congress president Sonia Gandhi to Rajasthan, Mr Gehlot said she had cancelled her tour due to illness and now it might take place on May 13. This was yet to be confirmed, he added.

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

10 MAY 2000

25TH STATEHOOD DAY FUNCTION

# Ex-CMs absent at Sikkim meet

FROM KESHAV PRADHAN

**Siliguri, May 16:** Sikkim chief minister Pawan Kumar Chamling today marked the 25th year of his state's merger with India by praising Delhi for its generosity towards the Sikkimese.

However, all his four predecessors who became chief ministers after the erstwhile Himalayan kingdom became a part of the Indian Union failed to turn up at the government-sponsored function held at the Community Hall in Gangtok to celebrate the occasion.

Kazi Lhendup Dorjee, leader of the agitation for the merger and first chief minister of the state, and B.B. Gurung, who became the third chief minister for a fortnight in 1984 after he overthrew Nar Bahadur Bhandari, were among the 22 special invitees to be honoured by the government for their contributions to the merger.

Officials attached to the chief minister's office said Dorjee, who is in his nineties and lives in Kalimpong, could not attend the programme because he "is suffering from pneumonia".

As long as he was in active politics, Dorjee was branded *desh bechua* (seller of one's country) by Bhandari, who replaced him as chief minister in 1979, and other opponents of the merger.

Gurung, who is now political adviser to the chief minister, failed to reach the Sikkimese capital in time because his flight from Delhi could not land at Bagdogra yesterday because of technical problems.

The officials claimed that they had invited Bhandari to the function which was attended, among

others, by Governor Chaudhury Randhir Singh. "Bhandari seldom attends government programmes these days", they added. Bhandari is now the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly.

Sanchaman Limboo, Chamling's immediate predecessor who is now in the Congress, is ill and out of station for treatment.

The officials said no member from Ersthile Chogyal's family was invited.

Aware that a section of the Sikkimese had earlier opposed the merger, Chamling, who had supported Sikkim's union with India, told the gathering that "History will judge who is right and who is wrong. It is not correct to say that Sikkim has been sold off."

Lauding Delhi for what he described as a "generous help" to the state, Chamling suggested that the Sikkimese make full use of the resources they had got for development after the merger.

He expressed dissatisfaction at the fall of work culture in the state. "We must learn from countries like Japan how hard work can do wonders for mankind," he said. He also stressed the need for measures to protect the interests of the Sikkimese in employment and business.

"Sikkim has become somewhat like a warehouse where resources come and go. Nobody thinks of reinvesting his profits here," he added.

Chamling said special reports had been prepared for resource management.

The pro-merger leaders present at the function were given citations, shawls and a cash award of Rs 15,000.

THE TELEGRAPH

17 MAY 2000

# Navin takes charge of Orissa

## STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, March 5. — A 25-member BJD-BJP coalition ministry, headed by Mr Navin Patnaik, was sworn in today at a simple ceremony at Raj Bhavan.

The outgoing chief minister Mr Hemananda Biswal, former chief minister Mr Giridhar Gamang, BJP state unit president Mr Manmohan Samal were among those present at the ceremony. Several BJD legislators were, however, conspicuous by their absence.

The swearing in was held today to coincide with Biju Patnaik's birthday. Shortly after the swearing in, the ministers marched to a newly-built hotel, owned by the Union minister Mr Dilip Ray, to unveil a statue of Biju Patnaik.

They later went to Puri for a darshan of Lord Jagannath and also to the burning ghat where Biju Patnaik was cremated.

Mr Patnaik has, however, not yet made up his mind on the allocation of portfolios. Lobbying for the same still continues.

The three-tier council of ministers comprise 14 Cabinet ministers, six ministers of state with independent charges and 4 ministers of state.

The coalition partners are sharing the ministerial berths on the basis of 16:9 ratio. Of the 14 Cabinet ministers, nine



Mr Navin Patnaik takes oath as the new chief minister of Orissa at Raj Bhavan in Bhubaneswar on Sunday. — PTI

belonged to the BJD and five to the BJP. Each of the allies has three ministers of state with independent charges, while the BJD has three ministers of state and the BJP only one.

The Cabinet ministers are: Mr Nalinikant Mohanty, Mr Ramkrushna Patnaik, Mr AU Singhdeo, Mr Surendra Nath Nayak, Mr Mangala Kisan, Mr Bhagabat Behera, Mr AP Singh, Dr Kamala Das and Mr Anand Acharya (all BJD), and Mr Biswabhusan Harichandan, Mr Bedprakash Agrawal,

Mr Samir Dey, Mr Arabinda Dhali and Mr KV Singhdeo (all BJP).

Of the 14 Cabinet ministers, 10 had held ministerial charges in the Biju Patnaik ministry during 1990-95. The new faces are Mr Anand Acharya, Mr Sanjur Dey, Mr Arabinda Dhali and Mr KV Singhdeo.

The six ministers of state holding independent charges are Mr Bimbadhar Kuanr, Mr Duryodhan Majhi, Mrs Draupadi Murmu, Mr Bijoyshree Routray, Mr Prasant Nanda and Mr

Ranendra Pratap Swain.

Mr Bijoyshree Routray, Mr Duryodhan Majhi and Mr Ranendra Pratap Swain (all BJD) have been elected to the Assembly thrice in a row and Mr Bimbadhar Kuanr (BJP) is a second-time winner. The film star-turned-politician, Mr Prasant Nanda, and Mrs Draupadi Murmu of the BJP are first timers.

Three BJD MLAs — Mr Debi Mishra, Mr Amar Prasad Satpathy and Mr Rabi Narayan Nanda — and BJP MLA, Mr Golak Naik, have been appointed as ministers of state without independent charge. Of them, Mr Ravi Narayan Nanda and Mr Golak Naik are debutants.

Of the total 25 ministers, 15 have no previous ministerial experience, while five including the chief minister, Mr Navin Patnaik, are new to the Assembly.

Four ministers belong to ST and two to SC communities. One leader each from the SC and ST communities have become Cabinet ministers, while two ST and one SC legislators have been appointed ministers of state with independent charge.

One ST MLA has been made minister of state.

Although there are 10 women MLAs from the BJD and the BJP in the 12th Assembly, only two (one from each parties) have been given ministerial berths.

## *Muthiah gets 25-month RI for amassing illegal wealth*

The Times of India News Service

**CHENNAI:** Former Union surface transport minister Sedapatti R. Muthiah was convicted for amassing disproportionate wealth to the tune of Rs 45,74,937, along with his two sons, by Special Court 1, here. They have been sentenced to 25 months rigorous imprisonment (RI) and a fine of Rs 5,000 each.

However, Mr Muthiah's wife M. Shakuntala was acquitted by special judge Justice S. Sambandam. The judge also suspended the sentence against the other three till April 10, on execution of surety bonds of Rs 10,000 each, so that they could appeal to the high court.

"This means that he (Muthiah) would be debarred from contesting in the elections. Unless, there is a verdict on an appeal,"

said public prosecutor G. Krishnamurthy after the verdict.

This is significant, as Tamil Nadu will witness an assembly election next year. Mr Muthiah was assembly speaker during Jayalalitha's government, and had been MLA between 1977 and 1996. He would have been an important contestant.

The court proceedings were conducted under tight security, so much so that former state minister Ponnusamy, also an accused in the wealth cases, found it difficult to enter the court.

Mr Muthiah and his two sons R.M. Arivazhagan and R.M. Manimaran were charged for offences under section 13(2) read with 13(1)(e) of the Prevention of Corruption Act. The sons were also charged under section 109 of the IPC.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 9 MAR 2000

# Patnaik-Biswal discord puts Cong ranks in disarray

HT Correspondent  
Bhubaneswar, March 11

HTX  
THE ELECTION of Mr Ramakant Mishra as the Congress Legislature Party leader has plunged the party into a crisis with former Chief Minister Hemanand Biswal questioning Mr Mishra's election.

Following the election of the CLP leader, Mr Biswal launched a campaign against the "autocratic and undemocratic" style of functioning of Orissa PCC chief J B Patnaik.

Mr Biswal, who was hopeful of being elected as the CLP leader after his spectacular victory from Laikra, has joined hands with other hopefuls to eject Mr Patnaik from the PCC chief's seat.

Mr Biswal reportedly suspects the hand of Mr Patnaik in the election of Mr Mishra as the CLP leader.

Mr Biswal and his supporters, among them 11 MLAs, have dashed off protest letters to the party president, claiming that the election of the CLP leader was stagemanaged. Senior party leader Habibullah Khan has also thrown his weight behind Mr Biswal.

The party was heading towards a

split, they said, adding that Mr Patnaik, who had lost in the last polls by over 40,000 votes, was in no way qualified to retain his post.

"I have given my reaction to Mr Patnaik's behaviour in the Press. We are openly saying that the State unit is being ruined. The election was a farce. We are meeting this evening again to decide further course of action," Mr Biswal said.

However, AICC general secretary in charge of Orissa Ghulam Nabi Azad saw no impropriety in the conduct of the election. "We have spoken to the MLAs individually. We have a surprise candidate for the CLP leader's post.

Meanwhile, Mr Patnaik said there was no question of a split in the party.

"All these people will be disciplined. They are questioning the authority of the high command. There was no secret ballot for the election of the CLP leader.

"A meeting of the CLP was convened. One member proposed his name, another seconded it and Mr Mishra was declared elected. How can I stage manage these things. Mr Azad was representing the party high command, he took note of everything," Mr Patnaik said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 MAR 2000

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## BISWAL PIQUE

173

Undemocratic assumptions laid bare

**N**OTHING fails like failure. The Congress is discovering this in Orissa. The electoral disaster was not exactly a bolt from sunny skies. A disciplined and organised political party would have taken one defeat in its stride. Indeed, it would be expected of an organisation that has more than a hundred years behind it that it, would learn from strategic errors of both distant and recent past and build for the future. But the Orissa Congress has demonstrated that this is beyond them. Hemananda Biswal was a compromise candidate for the chief minister's job when Giridhar Gamang had to go. Gamang's lack of political savvy in the run-up to the assembly elections was embarrassingly obvious. But Biswal's elevation to the sizzling seat was not so much an acknowledgement of his administrative or political skills as an act of desperation on the part of the Congress central leadership. It was an attempt to justify Sonia Gandhi's wholly incompetent intervention and to keep JB Patnaik out. Thus, Biswal's fit of pique at not being elected leader of the legislature party can only be read as an act of extreme political immaturity, not to speak of the blatant contempt for democratic procedures.

The arguments that Biswal used to justify his pique, reveals some of the more jejune assumptions that underlie Indian politics. First, he said that the failure to elect him was some sort of an attack on Dalits and tribals, as a tribal, he has done very little to empower either of the social groups he claims to represent. The assumption that only a tribal can represent a tribal, a woman represent a woman and so forth has been a bane of the political system. This assumption is precisely what has allowed sectional leaders to exploit their constituents to make a niche within the political elite, without, needless to say, doing anything to serve their interests. The slogan "social justice" has, thus, been emptied of content. Biswal's second point was that the failure to elect him was a conspiracy to challenge Sonia Gandhi's leadership. The assumption in this case is that someone, either a regional kingmaker or a central plenipotentiary must settle such issues. This is the lasting and corroding contribution of Indira Gandhi to politics. One which has subsequently been internalised by all other parties. Biswal now has some support in the legislature party, but if that is not enough he will have to lump the election since he does not like it.

**THE STATESMAN**

12 MAR 2000

JAGIR KAUR DEFIANT, CLASHES AT AKAL TAKHT

## Three Sikh Jathedars excommunicated

By Sarabjit Pandher

CHANDIGARH, MARCH 12. The Akal Takht Jathedar, Giani Puran Singh, today handed out yet another 'hukumnama', excommunicating three of the designated "Singh Sahibs" (apex clerics) — the Jathedar of Takht Keshgarh Sahib, Prof. Manjit Singh, the Jathedar of Takht Damdama Sahib, Giani Kewal Singh, and the Head Granthi of Akal Takht, Giani Bhagwan Singh. An SGPC member, Pritam Singh Bhatia, and an advocate, Jaswinder Singh, were also excommunicated. They were held guilty of aligning with the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee chief, Bibi Jagir Kaur.

Tension prevailed at the Golden Temple where the already 'excommunicated' SGPC chief was scheduled to appear before the top clergy and accept 'tankah' to facilitate her return to the main stream of the community.

The trouble began when the Sant Samaj volunteers, supporting Giani Puran Singh, dislodged the SGPC's task force to lay siege around the Akal Takht. They objected to Bibi Jagir Kaur's entry into the Akal Takht building, arguing that like the 10 members of the Executive Committee, who appeared on February 2, she must present herself at the ground floor in the courtyard facing the Akal Takht building. Bibi Jagir Kaur, who had apprehensions that Giani Puran Singh was not acting according to the mutually agreed formula, turned this down.

Supporters of rival factions clashed both outside and inside the Akal Takht building. There were heated arguments and exchange of blows. With a strong contingent of supporters, Bibi Jagir Kaur broke through the cordon laid around the Akal Takht by the Sant Samaj activists.

At one stage, when Bibi Jagir Kaur was offering prayers inside the building, rivals brandished firearms and advanced threateningly towards each other.

Later, emerging out of the building, Bibi Jagir Kaur told



Bibi Jagir Kaur (kneeling), excommunicated from the Sikh community by Giani Puran Singh, head priest of Akal Takht, prays at the Akal Takht, Amritsar on Sunday. — AP

presspersons that it was her precondition that she would only appear before the designated Singh Sahibs and before those who participated in the process of issuing the January 25 edict through which she was excommunicated. She justified her stance, by arguing that she would not accept what was against the religious traditions. She said that the meeting of the SGPC executive would be held as per schedule on March 16.

Prof. Manjit Singh rejected the edicts issued today as well as on January 25. He blamed Giani Puran Singh's stubborn stance for the present impasse. On his part, Giani Bhagwan Singh performed his evening duties as usual, paying no heed to the edict issued against him in the morning.

Following objections from some SGPC executive members to Bibi Jagir Kaur's continuing as the president of the body and the decision by the 'sacked' Jathedar, Bhai Ranjit Singh, to organise a 'Sarbat Khalsa' (congregation of the community), the Chief Minis-

ter, Mr. Prakash Singh Badal's camp proceeded to sort out the matter. Through special emissaries, the ruling camp succeeded in softening the stands of Giani Puran Singh and Bibi Jagir Kaur.

PTI reports:

Giani Puran Singh accused Bibi Jagir Kaur of challenging the Takht authority and said "this kind of arrogance is not to be seen in the Sikh history. She should not be allowed to sit or participate in any religious, social or political gathering." He also declared that Bibi Jagir Kaur and the others who have been ex-communicated should not be allowed to participate in any of the Sikh affairs and asked the Sikhs to boycott them. Justifying the issuance of the edict ex-communicating Kaur, he said any five baptised priests could issue the directive. "It is not necessary for all the jathedars of the takhts to be present for issuance of a directive," he said and cited examples when Hukamnama had not been passed from the Akal Takht.

# CPI returns to ministry, leaders fume at climbdown

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, March 14. — Following a request by Mr Jyoti Basu and a directive from the CPI national executive committee, the state unit of the party today decided to return to the Left Front ministry and asked its two ministers to rejoin work.

The decision is likely to cause widespread resentment among a large chunk of partymen, say insiders. A section of CPI leaders described the climbdown as a "loss of face" for the party.

On 7 March, the CPI decided to quit the ministry after the state CPI-M decided not to offer any Rajya Sabha seat to the former this time. The CPI-M has decided to renominate three of its candidates and one from the RSP instead of renominating Mr Gurudas Dasgupta, saying the CPI member would be given a chance to enter the Upper House from West Bengal in the next biennial elections of the Rajya Sabha, slated for 2002 AD.

Despite continuous pressure from the CPI since its withdrawal, the CPI-M refused to budge.

The brief Press conference where the CPI announced its decision today was addressed by Mr Manju Majumdar and Mr Himanshu Das,

secretary and assistant-secretary of the state unit respectively. Party heavyweight and Minister for Water Resource Development Mr Nandagopal Bhattacharya was conspicuous by his absence.

Mr Majumdar said the Chief Minister, in a letter to Mr Bhattacharya today, requested him to ensure that the two CPI ministers rejoin office in the interest of Left unity.

Releasing copies of Mr Basu's letter in Delhi today, CPI general secretary Mr AB Bardhan said Mr Bhattacharya was in the capital yesterday to attend the CPI national executive meeting. Mr Basu called up from Calcutta even as the meeting was on at the Ajoy Bhavan headquarters of the CPI to say that he wanted the two ministers to resume work in view of the present political situation of the country and in the interest of the Left Front in West Bengal, adds SNS Delhi.

Mr Basu also offered to talk to Mr Bhattacharya on his return to Calcutta. Mr Bhattacharya met Mr Basu soon after his return to Calcutta last evening, Mr Bardhan said. The two leaders talked for about an hour and decided the "rivals of the Left Front should not be allowed to take advantage of the situation," according to Mr Bardhan.

THE STATESMAN  
15 MAR 2000



## Pondicherry

### CM quits

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, March 18. — The DMK chief minister, Mr RV Janakiraman, today handed his resignation to the Lt-Governor on the advice of party chief Mr M Karunanidhi.

Lt-Governor Dr Rajni Rai, who had called a meeting of the Congress and its allies at Raj Niwas to discuss government formation, said she was waiting for them to announce the leader of the alliance so that she could initiate the next step.

The Congress has sought time till tomorrow to announce its leader in the House. Pradesh Congress Committee president Mr P Shanmugham, who is not an MLA, is likely to get the post.

The AIADMK has announced unconditional support for a Congress ministry.

**THE STATESMAN**

**19 MAR 2000**

# H-0-1 19/3 Congress(I) set to take over in Pondy

By Our Tamil Nadu Bureau

**CHENNAI, MARCH 18.** Decks have been cleared for the installation of a Congress(I)-led government in Pondicherry after the DMK Chief Minister, Mr. R.V. Janakiraman, tendered his resignation today.

Leaders of the opposition front, comprising the Congress(I), the TMC, the AIADMK and the CPI, met the Lt. Governor, Dr. Rajani Rai, this evening and sought and obtained time till tomorrow for electing the Chief Ministerial candidate.

Earlier, the DMK leadership asked Mr. Janakiraman to step down as the Government headed by him had lost majority support in the Assembly after the TMC withdrew support.

After a meeting with Mr. Janakiraman in Chennai, the Chief Minister and DMK president, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, told mediapersons, "With no majority strength in the Pondicherry Assembly, Mr. Jana-

kiraman has been directed by the party leadership not to remain in office even for a minute more. We believe in politics that is civilised and democratic."

Although the AICC(I) emissary, Mr. P.J. Kurien, denied any hitch in electing the Chief Ministerial candidate, there appears to be opposition to Mr. R. Rangaswamy, the nominee of the Congress (I) high command. The PCC(I) president, Mr. P. Shanmugham, is also in the race. The final decision of the high command was awaited, he said.

In another development, the Assembly Speaker, Mr. V.M.C. Sivakumar, resigned his post, saying he did not want to cause embarrassment to the new government. The DMK, which was hoping to win over some TMC MLAs, did not meet with the expected success as Mr. K.S. Alagiri, deputed by the TMC high command, ensured that there was no split in the ranks.

THE HINDU  
19 MAR 2000