

# Serious challenge for Akali Dal

By Sarabjit Pandher

**CHANDIGARH, MARCH 31.** Recent developments in Punjab's religio-political circles, especially the Sikh community, have once again exposed the fast eroding authority of the Chief Minister, Mr. Parkash Singh Badal. The leadership of the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal also faces a serious challenge not only from the consolidation of the right-wing political radicals but also by drifting away from its agenda of communal amity and Punjabi unity thereby losing public support.

After over two months of feuding, the Shiromani Gurdwara Prabandhak Committee president, Bibi Jagir Kaur, on March 28, dislodged the Akal Takht Jathedar, Giani Puran Singh, who had earlier ex-communicated her through a controversial "Hukumnama" (religious edict), issued from Madhya Pradesh. The new Jathedar's appointment means history has taken a complete circle, but the problem remains.

The development showed that Bibi Jagir Kaur, had the capacity to take strong decisions even from a weak position. But whether such moves would make her strong is to be seen because Giani Puran Singh and his predecessor, Bhai Ranjit Singh, as well as the former SGPC chief, Mr. G. S. Tohra, also took some strong decisions only to be marginalised. This can be explained by the fact that the accepted parameters regulating the relationship between the Akal Takht, the SGPC and the Akali Dal are not clear. Over the years sparks flew as

cover a covert signal of approval.

The present crisis was sparked by the decision to implement the controversial Nanakshahi almanac by Bibi Jagir Kaur and opposed by Giani Puran Singh, who favoured the Bikrami calendar to determine the ritualistic practices of religion. In this context, Mr. Badal became ineffective because it was beyond him to resolve the issue of the supremacy of the Akal Takht and the scope of the SGPC writ.

However, the question doing rounds these days is, "were the differences between the two main actors in the controversy so irreconcilable that it led to the present situation?" Analysts feel it is imperative for the Sikh community to sort out certain contradictions regarding the SGPC and the Akal Takht Jathedar. They point out that while the Akal Takht may be the supreme temporal and spiritual seat, its Jathedar is considered a mere employee of the SGPC and is expected to implement the latter's decisions. This contradiction was exploited by Bibi Jagir Kaur to resist attempts to persuade her into accepting the authority of Giani Puran Singh.

By siding with Bibi Jagir Kaur, Mr. Badal may feel relieved but a situation has been created where the ruling SAD must clarify its stand on the commitment to preserving Punjabi identity. On religious issues, Mr. Badal must address the political questions especially when the urban Hindus were seen drifting away from the traditionally accepted moderate Akali leadership, as in last year's Lok Sabha polls.

individuals at the top exercised more autonomy within their respective set-up.

Last year, Mr. Badal had been warned that by entering the religious sphere on the eve of the 300th anniversary celebrations of the Khalsa, in pursuit of his goal in the politics of succession, he could make initial political gains. However, it would be the far right ideology of asserting the need for a separate Sikh identity that would gain currency. The development is a major setback to the moderate politics in the State as the radicals would now have more space and issues to influence the people with.

Mr. Badal is now in a spot with his authority eroding fast, as evident from the open defiance shown by both his proteges, Bibi Jagir Kaur, and Giani Puran Singh, whose weak positions was considered their merit to replace heavyweights — Mr. Tohra and Bhai Ranjit Singh. As a keen watcher of Punjab affairs said, "by shuffling individuals it is not possible to change the logic that governs the logic of religious institutions."

Though Mr. Badal initially tried to resolve the stand-off between the SGPC chief and the Jathedar, through direct interventions and by using emissaries, ultimately he was left with no choice but to wait and throw his lot with the winner. When the Jathedar was seemingly dominant, the political affairs committee of the SAD directed Bibi Jagir Kaur to accept his authority. Later, when Bibi Jagir Kaur decided to do away Giani Puran Singh, the State Government immediately withdrew the security

# Angry allies want NDA meet to clear PM's Ayodhya stand

Deepak Razdan  
New Delhi, December 8

47-1 9/12

**T**HE TRINAMOOL Congress and the Telugu Desam Party were restless today because Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's remarks on the Ayodhya temple had "somehow conveyed a wrong message" to the people. They wanted him to "clarify" his stand quickly to maintain communal harmony.

The two important allies of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government stressed today they were part of the ruling alliance only on the basis of the common minimum agenda and any deviation from it would be unacceptable. The Trinamool has written to NDA convenor George Fernandes for an early NDA meeting to end the "confusion".

TDP leader and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu was in touch with his party MPs and a meeting of the Parliamentary Party would discuss

## Fellow-namazis heckle Shahnawaz



AT A mosque a stone's throw away from Parliament House, a barrage of barbed questions overwhelmed Mr Shahnawaz Hussain, the NDA's lone Muslim Minister at whose Ifar Party PM Vajpayee had made his controversial remarks, reports HTC.

As Mr Hussain went around greeting fellow nazamis after the Friday prayers, the crowd insisted on knowing whether he had ever visited the disputed site. "Why are you letting down your own people to curry favours with the BJP?" they remonstrated. Mr Hussain fumbled and beat a hasty retreat. Slogans denouncing the Minister's stand on the Temple issue rent the air as he hurriedly broke free of the melee to head for his car.

the issue in Hyderabad tomorrow.

The two parties maintained that the Prime Minister was the "champion of the cause of national integration" and he should therefore clarify the NDA stand on the Ayodhya controversy, irrespective of how his statements raised doubts in sections of the people. A mosque had been demolished in Rae Bareilly and there was tension in Meerut also, they said.

The Trinamool and TDP leaders

expressed similar sentiments on the issue. They said in case the Congress demand for discussion under Rule 184 was accepted in the Lok Sabha, they would state their views on Babri mosque demolition but toppling of the Government was certainly not on their agenda.

The two NDA allies with strong roots in Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal were emphatic that they could assert their secularism as

vocally as the Congress or the Samajwadi Party. Upset over Vajpayee's remarks, the two parties spoke at Speaker G M C Balayogi's meeting in the same language, together with another ally, the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD). Ms Banerjee met Vajpayee to support the TDP's demands relating to the Andhra paddy farmers' plight.

She said there was no scope for "delay" and a correct message must go to the people from the Prime Minister. "This is a sensitive issue. Communal tension is rising," she said. She said the Government and the Opposition could decide on how to discuss the issue in the House, but the PM's "clarification" could not be delayed.

"I don't know what happened by evening," she said, referring to the Prime Minister's second observation on the issue. "Our intention is not to topple the Government. Our intention is to raise peoples' issues," she said.

See also Page 11

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 DEC 2000

# TDP warns Centre

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, DEC. 9. The Telugu Desam Party today warned the BJP-led Central Government that it would take a serious view of any deviations from the common minimum agenda and sought a clarification from the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, by Monday on his controversial statements on building the Ram temple at Ayodhya.

A meeting of the TD Parliamentary Party (TDPP) convened by the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and party supremo, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, sent out a strong message to the NDA Government that it would brook no shift from the national agenda of governance as that was the basis for its extending outside support to the Vajpayee Government. Contentious issues such as the common civil code, Article 370 and Ram Janmabhoomi had no place in it.

Briefing presspersons, Mr. Yerran Naidu said Mr. Vajpayee's observations were "uncalled for and unnecessary" at a time when the nation faced pressing problems such as payment of remunerative prices to farmers and floods in West Bengal.

The meeting was held against the backdrop of Mr. Vajpayee's statement and the TDP Government's strain in relations with the Centre over paddy procurement by the Food Corporation of India.

Though the TDP Government was partly mollified on Friday by the Centre's package to help paddy farmers, Mr. Vajpayee's 'clarification' that the temple could be built at the disputed site has raised the hackles of the TDP which feels that the Prime Minister

should speak only about the common agenda.

However, the TDP has resolved to steer clear of the motion under Rule 184 sought to be tabled by the Congress in Parliament on the resignation of the Union Ministers charge-sheeted in the Babri Masjid demolition case. It decided to take an appropriate decision if and when a similar notice was given on the Prime Minister's statement.

## Not to join Cabinet

The TDP today firmly scotched speculation about the possibility of its joining the NDA Government.

The conjecture was fuelled by reports in a daily that TDP MPs met in New Delhi on Friday on the eve of its Parliamentary Party meeting to discuss the pros and cons of joining the Vajpayee Ministry.

At today's meeting, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu, reportedly frowned upon the MPs' conclave and wondered how they could discuss such a possibility when the TDP was fighting the Centre on several issues.

The lack of consensus on this surfaced at a press conference today when the MPs were asked to comment on the media reports that they wanted Ministry berths. Mr. A. Raj Kumar, Rajya Sabha member, said this question must be posed to Mr. Chandrababu Naidu.

Mr. Yerran Naidu said the party had decided to extend outside support to the NDA Government based on its common minimum agenda. As this stand remain unchanged, there was no need to pose this question to the Chief Minister.

THE HINDU

10 DEC 2000

VAJPAYEE'S REMARKS ON AYODHYA IGNORED

# NDA swears by secular agenda

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, DEC. 10. The National Democratic Alliance meeting this evening adopted a unanimous resolution reiterating the secular agenda of the Government while ignoring the controversial remarks of the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, made earlier this week on the Ayodhya issue, in which he had stated that the "Ram temple can be built at the disputed site where a temple already exists, and the Masjid can come up at an alternate site."

A heated discussion is reported to have taken place at the two-hour meeting at Mr. Vajpayee's residence, with the allies and the BJP leaders wrangling on the

wording of the resolution that was finally adopted.

It was the Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, and the Indian National Lok Dal of Mr. O.P. Chautala, who successfully insisted that the resolution commit itself to the Government maintaining the "rule of law" and the "constitutional duty" to "accept and implement" any decision of the Supreme Court which is seized of the Ayodhya matter.

It was also the allies who insisted that the resolution reiterate the NDA Government's "unambiguous commitment" to protecting and promoting secularism, while pointing out that the NDA had "consciously left out all issues of contentious nature" (read the

Ayodhya dispute, uniform civil code and scrapping of Article 370 in relation to Kashmir).

## Mamata's insistence

Apparently, Ms. Banerjee reminded the Prime Minister that she had asked for the meeting to discuss his controversial statements that had sent a "wrong message", although later at a briefing the NDA convener, Mr. George Fernandes, refused to admit this. He insisted that he had called the meeting to discuss the parliamentary impasse over the Congress' insistence on a discussion on the resignations of three Cabinet Ministers chargesheeted in the Babri demolition case.

Asked repeatedly whether the

leaders of the allies had demanded an explanation from the Prime Minister, who presided over the meeting, for his remarks which some allies described as "communal," Mr. Fernandes' response, amid loud protest from the media, was that those were the creation of the media.

## For status quo

The one-page resolution affirmed commitment to the NDA agenda, and also asserted that "the status quo must be maintained (at Ayodhya) until the Supreme Court delivers its verdict" and this "must be accepted" by "all parties to the dispute" and "every political party" which has committed itself to upholding the Constitution. Totally silent on the Prime Minister's remarks made on December 7 and 8, the resolution instead preferred to quote his remarks made immediately after the demolition of the Babri Masjid on December 6, 1992, describing the event as "unfortunate".

Others present at the meeting were Mr. T.R. Baalu (DMK), Dr. Farooq Abdullah (National Conference), Mr. Nitish Kumar (Samata Party) Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan (Janshakti), Mr. Vaiko (MDMK), Mr. Sharad Yadav (JD-U), Mr. Parkash Singh Badal (Akali Dal), and Mr. Sanjay Nirupam (Shiv Sena). From the BJP, the heavyweights, excepting Mr. Advani and Mr. Joshi, were present — Mr. Vajpayee, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, Mr. Jaswant Singh, Mr. Yashwant Sinha and Mr. Pramod Mahajan.

Speaker's meet crucial: Page 13  
Text of resolution: Page 15



The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, with the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Union Ministers, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, Mr. T.R. Baalu and the MDMK leader, Mr. Vaiko, at the NDA meeting at the Prime Minister's Office in New Delhi on Sunday.— Photo V. Sudershan

THE HINDU

11 DEC 2000

# NDA partners give BJP the jitters on Opposition motion

## Want Hindutva flavour kept out of debate • Legal eagles Arun Jaitley, Somnath Chatterjee in war of words

**HT Correspondent**  
New Delhi, December 13

**T**HE NDA allies kept the BJP on tenterhooks today over their stand on the Opposition motion in the Lok Sabha that calls upon the Prime Minister to drop three ministers charged with the Babri Masjid demolition case.

Although, they said that they would not let the government lose the vote, the fact that they met separately to discuss their strategy gave the BJP anxious moments.

With the Opposition focusing their criticism on Prime Minister A. B. Vajpayee himself, the allies said they wanted to ensure that the BJP members did not go beyond the agreed brief and did not try to bring a Hindutva flavour to the debate.

The allies decided among themselves that they should "watch" the tone and tenor of speeches of the

BJP before deciding to vote. Leaders of the parties included Trinamool Congress chief and Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee, Telugu Desam party's ministerial leader K. Yerranaidu, DMK leader and Environment Minister T. R. Baalu, Janata Dal (U) leader D. P. Yadav, Samata Party member Prabhunanth Singh and National Conference member Abdul Rashid.

Significantly, these leaders had expressed concern about the recent statements of the Prime Minister on Ayodhya and pressed the NDA to tone down the impact of his suggestions.

They said the BJP speakers should not say anything that went against or appeared to contradict the NDA agenda of governance. "The NDA partners will participate in the debate tomorrow after watching the course it takes," a senior leader of the allies said.

He said the allies had not taken

a decision yet on the issue of voting on the censure motion moved by the Opposition. They were likely to meet again tomorrow.

Another leader said that the allies wanted to hear the Prime Minister before making up their mind. "After his last remark, which snowballed into a controversy, we have to be cautious," he said.

At a meeting of the NDA Coordination Committee last Sunday, Ms Banerjee had opposed the NDA coming out in support of Union Ministers L. K. Advani, M. M. Joshi and Uma Bharti, saying their continuation in the government was a matter between them and the BJP.

Her objection was then overruled by NDA convenor George Fernandes, who had held that the alliance had come to their defence in the face of the Opposition onslaught because they were also NDA ministers. Interestingly, Ms Banerjee made only one interven-

**HT Correspondent**  
New Delhi, December 13

**A** HIGH point of the Lok Sabha debate today was the tussle over points of law between two legal luminaries—Law Minister Arun Jaitley and CPI(M) veteran Somnath Chatterjee.

Mr Jaitley went hammer and tongs at the Opposition to show on what unsound legal wicket they were on. "There is an element of Constitutional impropriety in the motion which seeks to introduce new jurisprudence where an accused is held guilty before being proved innocent."

On the demand for the three Ministers' resignation, he said "under Article 75, it is the prerogative of the Prime Minister to determine his Council of Ministers. There is an attempt to interfere with this prerogative." Moreover, even on grounds of sustainability under Rule 184, a motion seeking

**Shakespearean flourish**

"ET TU BRUTE", the legendary last words of Julius Caesar after Marcus Brutus had delivered his coup de grace, were recalled in the Lok Sabha today by Congress leader S. Jaipal Reddy to describe the sentiments of the liberal classes when they heard Mr Vajpayee describe last week the demolition of the Babri Masjid as an "expression of nationalist sentiment". "That was the unkindest cut of all", the member said with Shakespearean flourish to send home the message that the "moderate mask" of Mr Vajpayee had finally fallen off. He then drew from Dante to characterise Mr Vajpayee's long-held policy of regretting -- but not condemning-- the demolition. "The hottest places in hell are reserved for those who stay neutral in a moral crisis".

Mr Arun Jaitley, said those who recall Mr Reddy's role as the "most articulate opponent of the Emergency" must be remarking "Et tu Brute" today. Mr Reddy, had crossed over from the Janata Dal to the Congress before the 1999 elections.

**HTC, New Delhi**  
removal of an individual Minister was inadmissible because the Council of Ministers was collectively responsible to the House. Mr Jaitley pleaded with the Chair that a discussion on a Motion of this nature should not be made a precedent. "It's a text book illustration of law with vast parliamentary experience,

when Mr Jaipal Reddy started speaking on his motion. They left shortly before the debate opened even as Ms Uma Bharti sat through the discussion.

Mr Hiren Pathak, the man responsible for the political storm that gripped Parliament for more than a week, patiently heard the debate in which his name found mention. He was seen prodding other BJP MPs to protest against the charges leveled by Mr Reddy.

Was it a slip of tongue or is Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav really so obsessed with his friend-turned-foe Mayawati? Participating in the debate, the SP supremo remarked: "Behr Umrwati should resign."

The first to respond to the slip was

Ms Uma Bharti, who jocularly observed: "Inhe abhi bhi Mayawati ka khauf rehita hai."

But Mr Yadav's word of caution to the Trinamool Congress wasn't taken kindly by Ms Mamata Banerjee. When he warned that if the Trinamool continued to support the BJP, the Left would win the elections in West Bengal, an angry Ms Banerjee declared: "Moh (CPI-M) harega, harega, harega...."

Bihar CM Rabri Devi found mention for all the wrong reasons. Is this debate on Babri or Rabri? retorted an angry RJD member to Mr Arun Jaitley's reference to the Congress coalition with a tainted Bihar CM and her spouse.

Mr Chatterjee almost conversed his way through the web of logic that Mr Jaitley had woven. Recalling the Prime Minister's statements exonerating his ministerial colleagues of the CBI charges, the Marxist leader ventured to ask a pensive-looking Mr Vajpayee: "Instead of lecturing us, why doesn't your Law Minister advise you that you are yourself breaking the law of sub judice."

"You commented on the merit of the case before the courts. You exonerated the accused persons. Does this not amount to interference in the due process of law," Mr Chatterjee continued. Thereafter, he went on to observe that the Prime Minister's comments on the Ram temple amounted to "surrender under pressure from the Sangh Parivar". Mr Chatterjee wondered as to why Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee never came to the House and decided to respond to the Opposition's demand at a forum other than Parliament.

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**HTC, New Delhi**

# UP turf war casts shadow on Ayodhya debate

**Saroj Nagi**  
New Delhi, December 13

**T**HE BATTLE for UP turf intruded upon the Ayodhya debate today. Although the line-up for next year's Assembly polls remains hazy, the first signals of the scenario that could unfold came through today. The Samajwadi Party, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the BJP provided glimpses of undercurrents that could mark the UP elections, even as the Congress maintained silence.

SP leader Mulayam Singh Yadav may have refrained from attacking the BSP when he launched a tirade against the Congress and the BJP. But he claimed his party would form a government on its own when the elections take place.

Ms Mayawati, whose antipathy towards Mr Yadav is well-known, kept the SP in her line of fire and was harsh on the Congress for its role in the demolition of the Babri Masjid. She accused the Opposition parties of stoking the Ayodhya issue to entice the Muslim vote with an eye on the UP polls although they had foisted the BJP in government.

Though she criticised the BJP too for trying to use the issue to consolidate its Hindu vote, the bite was missing. Perhaps aware that the party may have to go in for a coalition in the next Assembly in view of its dipping popularity, the BJP benches maintained a stoic silence even when Ms Mayawati repeatedly referred to the Babri Masjid.

**HTC, New Delhi**

# Jaipal Reddy at his wittiest best

**C**ONGRESS LEADER Jaipal Reddy's remarks were laced with witticism. He described Mr L.K. Advani as a man "with the ability to articulate medieval philosophy to a modern audience".

He also took a jibe at Dr M.M. Joshi and said: "He is a student who often confuses history with mythology, philosophy with astrology. But his choicest edarments were reserved for Ms Uma Bharti whom he described as a restless soul "forever transmigrating between ministry and ministry and the other way round."

Two of the main protagonists in the controversy, Mr L.K. Advani and Dr. M.M. Joshi, were conspicuous by their absence in the House

# NDA restive on Ayodhya again

■ Defeat of <sup>76-1</sup> censure motion not an endorsement of the <sup>127/12</sup> Ram temple, assert allies

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA  
NEW DELHI, DEC 16

**F**RESH tensions surfaced within the ruling NDA on the Ayodhya issue with key allies TDP and Trinamool Congress mounting an attack on BJP's alleged attempts to push the Mandir agenda, but party President Bangaru Laxman raised a new controversy saying courts cannot "ignore the reality" of a Ram temple in the disputed site.

A sulking Railway Minister and Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee spoke out at an 'Iftar' party in Calcutta saying she would not tolerate anyone trying to deviate from the NDA agenda.

"If anyone tries to deviate from the NDA agenda, we will be the last to tolerate it," she said adding her party favoured a status quo on

the masjid issue. She also disagreed with the Prime Minister's statement that temple construction was an expression of national sentiment.

K Yerran Naidu, leader of another major ally, TDP, which supports the Government from outside, sharply attacked the BJP president for his remarks in interviews to newspapers that the Lok Sabha rejection of the censure motion was an endorsement of the Ram temple movement and even if the Courts decided in favour of Masjid, the Ram temple there could not be disturbed.

He said the Telugu Desam Party would act as a "watch-dog" and would not "spare" the Government if it deviated from the secular agenda.

However, Laxman, the man at the centre of the controversy today

sought to play down his reported controversial remarks saying he was being "quoted out of context in the media".

Naidu said it was "highly improper" for Laxman to interpret the verdict on the censure motion which related to the demand for dismissal of the chargesheeted ministers as an endorsement of the temple agenda.

Both the leaders demanded that the Prime Minister's assurance in Parliament that Government would abide by the court verdict on the issue should be respected.

Naidu said Laxman should not have made such controversial remarks. He was supported by JD(U) MP Devendra Prasad Yadav who said Laxman should not have made such a statement.

But Laxman said today, "I to-

tally deny what has been quoted to me. I only said that ground reality is that there exists a temple today and Parliament also during its debate on this issue echoed the same thing and certainly the court would take cognisance of this ground reality."

Referring to the allies' anger over his statements, he said, "I will only request NDA partners not to get perturbed over what is being quoted out of context in a section of the press."

Laxman said Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has clearly stated that the party was committed to abide by the Court decision and "this should remove all doubts".

"This overrides all other comments and statements," he said adding that BJP's relations with allies were "good and there is no room for stress or strain".

INDIAN EXPRESS

17 DEC 2000

# Snubbed Soren dumps NDA

FROM TAPAS CHAKRABORTY

Patna, Oct. 31: Casting a cloud on the BJP-led coalition's coronation plans in Jharkhand, JMM leader Shibu Soren has decided to quit the alliance and explore the possibility of a deal with Laloo Prasad Yadav.

The decision of Soren, who has the support of 12 legislators, makes the race for Jharkhand a close call as the BJP camp's strength will be reduced to 40 — two short of the majority mark in the 82-member Assembly. The new state will come into being on November 15. If Soren strikes a deal with Laloo, the tally of the "secular front" will swell to 38, leaving the clincher with four Independents.

Soren decided to pull out of the National Democratic Alliance after talks with coalition convenor George Fernandes for the Jharkhand chief minister's post failed yesterday in Delhi.

The JMM chief will meet Laloo here tomorrow to "cobble together a majority to form an alternative government with the help of the Congress and Left secular parties".

Soren, who was recuperating from fever in Bokaro, sounded bitter. "We were cheated once again. Now we will either sit in the Opposition or form the government with the help of non-NDA leaders. If the second option does not come through, we will go for the first."

The JMM has called a legislative party meeting at the house of its leader in the Bihar Assembly, Stephen Marandi, here tomorrow to ratify Soren's decision. Once the party gives the go-ahead, Soren will meet Laloo.

A small JMM team is believed to have met Laloo today, who assured all help. Laloo is desperate for a "friendly" government in Jharkhand since most fodder scam cases will be shifted to Ranchi, the new state's capital, where the CBI plans to set up two special courts.

The spokesman of Laloo's party, Shivanand Tiwari, said: "The JMM is welcome to break free of the NDA and seek our help. Who can take care of the different groups in Jharkhand other than Soren, who fought for the problems of the region for so long?"

A JMM delegation, led by Soren's son Durga, failed to extract a pledge from Fernandes on the chief minister's post. Instead, Fernandes offered to make Durga deputy chief minister. L.K. Advani was also intransigent. He urged the JMM to stay on in the NDA but refused to concede the demand for the top post.

The BJP is citing this numerical superiority to claim the post but the Jharkhand party argues that numbers are not enough to form the government. "As an NDA partner, we easily stand a chance owing to our popularity and contribution to the movement for a separate state," Durga told leaders in Delhi.

■ Another report on Page 9

# How secular is NDA, ask minority heads

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 22. — The Archbishop of Delhi, Reverend Vincent M Concessao, and the Shahi Imam of the Jama Masjid, Maulana Syed Ahmed Bukhari, today questioned the Centre's secular credentials.

The Archbishop was delivering his Christmas message and the Shahi Imam, his address on the last Friday of Ramzan.

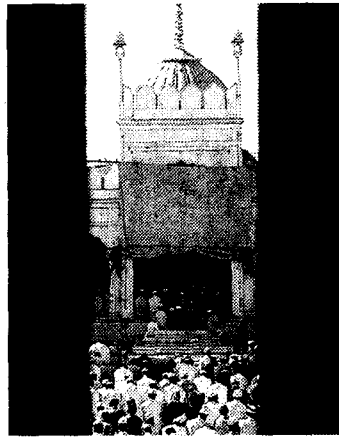
Rev Concessao said the BJP-led government could have "done much more to check violence against Christians". The government was not following the constitutional provisions on equality to all religions.

"Are they following the secular Constitution?," he asked. The NDA has failed to protect the interests of minorities. "There's a fundamental distortion in the perspective of forces behind attacks on Christians as they look at them only in political terms." There have been 100 attacks on Christians till 15 November this year.

There's a constitutional provision for every citizen to profess and propagate his/her religion without fear, he said. He regretted that "some organisations were distributing anti-Christian literature...with the aim of spreading disinformation".

The Shahi Imam said: "If the demolition of a Masjid is the exposure of national sentiment we consider such sentiment a national curse".

Addressing Muslims at the Jama Masjid, the Maulana said: "If so called secular parties want to strengthen secularism, it's the time for their test". The government should allow an independent probe by international organisations into the



Muslims pray in Bhopal on the last Friday of the month of Ramzan.

— AP/PTI

alleged human rights violation in Kashmir, if it really wants to resolve the Kashmir issue.

He suggested the government release the jailed Kashmiri youths and begin unconditional negotiations with all parties, including Pakistan. "It's now the government's responsibility to act practically and accept short comings on its part in dealing with Kashmir".

**Babari trio :** A group of prominent Muslim leaders today demanded the ouster of the three ministers chargesheeted in the Ayodhya case reports UNI.

**Mann:** The Akali-Dal (Mann) chief, Mr Simranjit Singh Mann, today said the RSS's Hindutva ideology enjoyed the "blessings of the Prime Minister and his the government".

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee openly pleaded for the Sangh parivar when he asserted in Parliament that the demolition of the Babari Masjid was an expression of national sentiments. "It amounted to communalising the Indian society and polity."

THE STATESMAN

23 DEC 2000



# NDA rejects Soren demand

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 5. The leader of the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, Mr. Shibu Soren, has been firmly told that he should drop his demand for the chief ministership of Jharkhand and decide to back a National Democratic Alliance government in the State to be led by the Bharatiya Janata Party which will have 32 MLAs in an Assembly of 80.

A round of informal meetings were held today to unravel the tangle — Mr. Soren met Mr. George Fernandes, Convenor of the NDA, at the latter's residence and later met the Samata Party leader, Mr. Digvijay Singh. Mr. Soren met Mr. Fernandes a second time late tonight while earlier Mr. Fernandes was reported to have met the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee.

The Samata Party has now virtually admitted that it "may have" promised to back the JMM for the chief ministership of Jharkhand at the time when Mr. Nitish Kumar claimed the chief ministership of Bihar immediately after the Assembly elections.

In short, what has been conveyed to Mr. Soren is that he should reconcile to the fact that the JMM does not have the strength to claim the chief ministership.

Mr. Srivastava also said that even if the Samata Party wanted to give the chief ministership to Mr. Soren, it is unable to do so.

At the end of the day today the position was that the Samata Party and the Janata Dal both backed the JMM demand for a meeting of all the NDA partners in Bihar, which could happen next week.

The Samata Party leaders also seem to have conveyed to the JMM that if it drops its demand for chief ministership and decides to stay to share power in Jharkhand, the Samata would use its good offices with the BJP to try and get the JMM the deputy chief

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ministership. The BJP has been insisting from day one that the chief minister of Jharkhand will be from its party. Together with the Samata, the JD and a few independents it is in a position to form a government even without the JMM. But party leaders admit that they would like to take the JMM along keeping in mind the JMM's long struggle for a separate Jharkhand State.

The BJP's problem also is that without the JMM the new government may get a majority, but it will depend for survival on a few independents. Such a government will necessarily be shaky.

## JMM opts out of NDA

NEW DELHI, NOV. 5. The Jharkhand Mukti Morcha tonight decided to sever ties with the National Democratic Alliance at the State level after the latter rejected its demand for installing the JMM leader, Mr. Shibu Soren, as the first Chief Minister of Jharkhand. The JMM said it would explore all possibilities of installing a non-NDA Government. — UNI

The BJP has almost zeroed in on Mr. Babulal Marandi as its choice for chief ministership, though Mr. Karia Munda is also in the race. A final decision is expected to be taken a day or two before the birth of the State on November 15.

### 'BJP will form govt.'

PTI reports from Patna:

The BJP today made it clear that the party would not compromise with JMM-S as far as the post of chief minister was concerned and form the government in Jharkhand

THE HINDU

6 NOV 2000

# NDA cannot ignore Sena protest

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 25. Although the ruling coalition at the Centre has tried to make light of the Shiv Sena's outcry against the ceasefire initiative in Kashmir, the National Democratic Alliance is in fact more than a little perturbed at the vehemence of the protest.

Not only did the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, rush Mr. Arun Shourie, Minister for Disinvestment, to Mumbai to make peace with the Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, the NDA convener, Mr. George Fernandes, said the alliance partners should refrain from airing their differences in public although individual MPs, naturally, had the right to express their views in Parliament.

Mr. Fernandes was referring to the sharply different views on the Kashmir initiative aired by the Sena in Parliament. He said the burning of the Prime Minister's effigy by Shiv Sainiks yesterday was "most deplorable."

The Sena protest is hurting the BJP even more because it is in tune with the views of a large section of the party's own cadre

which sees the unilateral ceasefire offer as a sop to militants and a negation of the declared pro-active policy of the Home Ministry on Kashmir.

## 'Sabotage of peace process'

The BJP president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, today tried to explain yesterday's Doda killings as a planned action of sabotage of the peace process initiated by the Vajpayee Government. He said categorically that there was no question of the BJP going back on the offer despite these killings and the massacre of truckers in Jammu a day earlier.

Talking to a select group of journalists, Mr. Laxman said that as the people of the State were fed up with the daily violence inflicted upon them by the militants, they responded positively to the peace initiative; many countries welcomed the move.

However, he clarified, what the Government had already done earlier — that the ceasefire did not mean that the security forces would not act if they were attacked. They would retaliate, and retaliate strongly, he said.

THE HINDU

26 NOV 2000

# RSS supremo blasts NDA economic model

IT won't fill our stomach: Sudarshan

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 15 OCTOBER

**T**HE NATION'S socio-economic interests would be best served by a rural-centric Gandhian model of development, RSS chief K. S. Sudarshan said on Sunday, as he flayed the "Western" model of economic development espoused by the government.

Delivering the concluding address at the three-day RSS national security camp in Agra, Mr Sudarshan came down heavily on the "hype" generated in the country on the utility and efficiency of information technology, for which the ruling BJP at the Centre has set up a separate ministry. The RSS planned to present its own concept of a "more suitable" model of economic development, he said.

The RSS chief's endorsement of the Gandhian model of development is in sharp contrast to the economic liberalisation policies adopted by the ruling NDA.

Attacking the development model pursued by the Centre, Mr Sudarshan maintained that it was "ruining the country", failing to show satisfactory results on rural development and employment generation fronts.

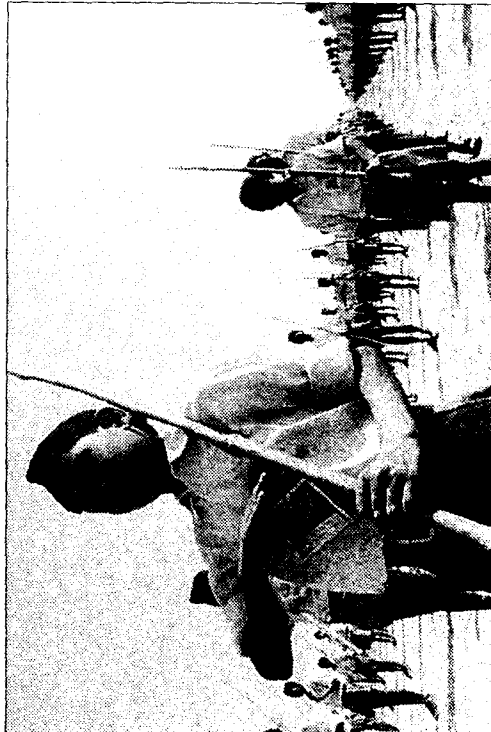
The adoption of a Gandhian economic model would lead to both higher rural growth and create more employment, he said at the meet which was attended by home minister L. K. Advani.

Further, the RSS chief also criticised what he held was



**OATH OF ALLEGIANCE: Home minister L.K. Advani and Uttar Pradesh chief minister Ram Prakash Gupta at the RSS Mahasivir near Agra on Sunday. — PTI**

largely hype on the achievements in the field of information technology. While acknowledging that the development of the field had witnessed some tangible results, Mr Sudarshan warned that focusing solely on IT would not resolve the basic problems of hunger, unemployment and poverty.



**CATCH THEM YOUNG: A RSS member at the Mahasivir. — Reuters**

address to the nation on the completion of one year in office, pointed to the lowered poverty line as a key proof of commensurate results.

Contending that the "path of economic reforms was straight and narrow" but one that would deliver in time through positive socio-economic indices, the PM had urged citizens to bear up to some of the "hard decisions" that had to be taken up along the way.

These, he had maintained, would affect the "haves" more than the "have-nots" but in the long run, would contribute to the overall development of the nation in the new century. To boot, Mr Vajpayee had chosen to specifically single out IT as one of the fields where the nation had grown and had been acknowledged as a global leader.

The RSS' decision to strike a pointedly jarring note on economic liberalisation is viewed by and large as a strategic attempt within the saffron family towards maintaining a political balance. Coming as it does at a time when the Opposition including the Congress and the Left parties are gearing up to extract the utmost political mileage from the government's recent decision to hike the price of petroleum products, it is perceived as significant.

Interestingly, the BJP's declaration on the economic front at its Chennai meet was perceived as having settled all differences within the party between the Swadeshi viewpoint on development and the one supportive of economic liberalisation.

However, there were voices within the party, such as those of petroleum minister Ram Naik, which favoured a cautious approach on liberalisation.

## PM HINTS AT HIKE IN PRICES OF PETRO PRODUCTS

# NDA meet to discuss West Bengal situation

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 21. The Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, called on the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, today and held talks for 45 minutes. It is said that he briefed the President on his 15-day visit to the United States.

The West Bengal issue and the recent exchange of letters between the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, and the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, did not figure in the meeting.

A meeting of the Union Cabinet is expected to take place on Saturday morning, and one issue likely to come up is the runaway increase in the prices of imported crude. A meeting of the ruling National Democratic Front (NDA) leaders is scheduled at the Prime Minister's residence later in the evening.

Besides a possible increase in the prices of petroleum products, the political drama being enacted in West Bengal is expected to dominate the NDA meeting. The Trinamool Congress is desperately looking for Central intervention in the State well before the Assembly polls, due in March next.

The Prime Minister is expected to share with his colleagues his impressions of the visit to the U.S. during the meetings.

At a meeting here this evening, Mr. Vajpayee threw gentle hints that the Government might be

forced to increase the prices of petroleum products. Addressing several hundred workers from the BJP's Delhi unit, he referred to the increase in the global prices of crude and the ongoing protests in Europe by transporters. He also said there was no pressure on India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty. The BJP continued to make the violence in

West Bengal an issue. On Wednesday evening, Mr. Vajpayee discussed with Mr. Advani the recent exchange of letters between the latter and Mr. Basu and the possible strategy to be adopted by the Centre.

Although the BJP has ruled out the use of Article 356 to impose President's rule, there is talk of the possibility of the Centre

amending the statute to allow it to intervene effectively, even if in a limited manner, by giving Central police forces the charge of law and order in a few districts.

But even BJP leaders are doubtful about this course of action as many NDA partners are known to be averse to the Centre interfering in law and order, a State subject.

Mamata on strategy: Page 13

## Advani hits out at Basu

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, SEPT. 21. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, gave a hard-hitting response to the West Bengal, Mr. Jyoti Basu's letter saying he did not expect a State Government to justify violence by marxist cadres under the plea that it was retaliatory.

Mr. Advani said he had discussed Mr. Basu's letter with the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, last night and sent it to the Home Secretary for processing.

The Home Minister said Mr. Basu had not denied the basic facts on the prevalence of political violence in the State nor contradicted the Centre's advisory about attacks by marxist cadres against political adversaries. "Violence is violence. Whether it is retaliatory or not, I would not know as there are different versions, including the one of the

West Bengal Government. But it is the duty of the State Government to see that violence comes to an end," Mr. Advani said.

Speaking to reporters after reviewing a passing out parade at the National Industrial Security Academy here today, Mr. Advani said Mr. Basu was right in saying he did not have to satisfy him (the Home Minister) about the law and order situation. But he had to satisfy the people of West Bengal and reassure them that democracy was safe in the State. Mr. Advani said he was disturbed over Mr. Basu's "intemperate language" against his Cabinet colleague, Ms. Mamata Banerjee. The attack on her was a clear manifestation of the Left Front's panic.

'No move on Telengana'

Mr. Advani surprised the accompanying ministerial col-

leagues from Andhra Pradesh as well as the local BJP leaders, who had adopted a party resolution supporting separate Statehood for Telengana, by announcing suo motu that "so far, the Centre has not been thinking about creating a separate State of Telengana".

Mr. Advani said the Centre had agreed to carve out Jharkhand, Uttaranchal and Chattisgarh because the State Assemblies concerned had adopted near unanimous resolutions in their favour. The A.P. Assembly had not adopted a resolution recommending to the Centre to accord separate Statehood. Secondly, in contrast to the grievances of the people of the newly-created States, Hyderabad was part of Telengana. Hence, there appeared to be no basis for the complaint about neglect of the region.

THE HINDU

22 SEP 2000

# National Conference split over continuing in NDA

Srinagar, July 10

**S**HARP DIFFERENCES surfaced today at the crucial National Conference Working Committee meeting here on whether to remain in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) following rejection of Jammu and Kashmir Assembly's autonomy resolution by the Union Cabinet.

Highly-placed NC sources told PTI tonight that several speakers favoured pulling out of the NDA as the rejection of resolution was linked to the party's political base in the state.

The speakers, according to the sources, contended that the Centre's response to the resolution and the attack by the BJP, the leading partner of the NDA, on NC have made it untenable for the

party to continue in the alliance.

However, some senior leaders of the party are understood to have voiced the need for continuing in NDA as they feel that the state government should work in tandem with the Centre to stamp out militancy from the state.

Sensing the mood in the meeting, Chief Minister and party chief Farooq Abdullah bought time by announcing extension of the Working Committee deliberations by a

day tomorrow to allow all its 31 members to air their views.

So far 10 members have spoken in the meeting.

Earlier, NC general secretary

Sheikh Nazir came out of the meeting and told reporters in reply to a question that his party would not go for confrontation with the Centre.



IN A BIND: Farooq

Nazir said it is not BJP which runs the Union Government but the NDA which is at the helm of affairs at the Centre.

Before the start of the meeting, Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah had told reporters that the Working Committee meeting would be over in an hour and mediapersons should be conveyed the decision by this evening itself.

"The working committee session will continue for longer time as only four of the 31 members spoke

so far," Nazir said.

To a question whether the NC has softened its stand, he said "We have a clear stand on autonomy. We have passed the resolution in the Assembly. We have promised people to restore autonomy and initiated the action by passing a resolution in the Assembly."

Yesterday Mr Farooq Abdullah had asserted that he has not at any point of time diluted the autonomy issue. During his various stints in office, no Constitution amendment order was extended, he said while participating on the concluding day of the two-day seminar on state and regional autonomy.

He said the accord between him and former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in 1986-87 to fight the elections was to bridge the gulf between people.

Related reports on Page 12

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 JUL 2000

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## Positive signal to NC

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JULY 11. The spontaneous decision of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, to attend the funeral of Begum Akbar Jehan Abdullah, mother of Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, was prompted by a desire to send a positive signal to the National Conference leaders and cadre, according to officials dealing with the affairs in the troubled State.

For one thing, it would be some time before the National Conference national executive

can resume its deliberations on the future of the party's ties with the ruling National Democratic Alliance. The intervening time, it is hoped, will help soothe the ruffled pride among the National Conference cadre over the outright rejection by the Vajpayee Government of the autonomy resolution.

The presence of the Prime Minister and two other senior Ministers — the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, and the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes — at the Begum's funeral should take out the note of personal animus that

seems to have crept into the ties between leaders of the NC and the NDA.

That the late Begum was the patron of the National Conference and that the Prime Minister came to pay his last respects to her should dent the sense of hostility among the NC cadre towards the Central Government.

It is hoped that it would be noted in Jammu and Kashmir that everybody from the President and the Vice-President to other political leaders has shared Dr. Abdullah's sense of loss.

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

17/7/03

# NC okays Vajpayee-Farooq meet

By Shujaat Bukhari

**SRINAGAR, JULY 15.** The working committee of the ruling National Conference (NC), which resumed its deliberations today, extended its approval to the meeting between the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, on the issue of autonomy. However, it maintained that no decision can be taken between the two without Dr. Abdullah reporting back to the working committee, highest decision taking body of the party. Also, a decision on "remaining in the NDA or not" had not been taken, though the issue was discussed.

Briefing mediapersons, the Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Piyaray Lal Handoo, said, "The meeting was inconclusive and discussions will continue... No decision has been taken."

"Dr. Abdullah will meet the Prime Minister and brief the working committee on his return." Mr. Handoo said no decision will be taken on any issue by Mr. Vajpayee and Dr. Abdullah. He said today's meeting continued the discussion on the auto-

my resolution passed by the Assembly, its rejection by the Union Cabinet, and the invitation by the Prime Minister to hold a dialogue.

He acknowledged that the context and mood of the July 10 meeting, which could not be resumed due to the death of Begum Sheikh Abdullah, and today's meeting were different. Further discussion will depend upon the nature and quality of the dialogue to be initiated in Delhi.

**J&K talks to take off without preconditions, Centre urged to protect Ladakh Buddhists: Page 11**

Reiterating that the NC will not soften its stand on autonomy in the light of the State Autonomy Committee (SAC) report, Mr. Handoo said, "We are committed to pursuing the resolution adopted by the House on June 26." He maintained that the NC was ready to discuss all issues, including the 1975 accord between Indira Gandhi and Sheikh Abdullah.

Flanked by the State Autonomy Committee chairman, Mr. Ghulam Mohiuddin Shah, and minis-

terial colleagues — Mr. A.R. Rather, Mr. Bodh Raj Bali and Mr. Harbans Singh — the Law Minister asserted that there was no question of going back on autonomy as it was the party's political Bible. The Union Minister of State for Commerce, Mr. Omar Abdullah, was also present at today's meeting.

When asked how the NC was affording to be part of an alliance headed by a party which accused their chief, Dr. Abdullah, of being anti-national, Mr. Handoo said: "This is what was exactly taken into consideration when we tried to arrive at a conclusion... We will certainly take a political decision after we know the outcome of the dialogue (at Delhi)," he said.

The implementation of the autonomy resolution by the State Government would be done at an appropriate time. The Union Cabinet's five reasons for rejecting the report were termed "not tenable".

The leaders were unanimous that the mood of the party rank and file was for realising autonomy.

# NC defers decision to part ways with NDA until meet

MUZAMIL JALEEL  
SRINAGAR, JULY 16

96-7  
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CALLING the recent offer of a dialogue by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee the realisation that the Union Cabinet's decision of rejecting the autonomy resolution was "wrong and unfair", the National Conference Friday deferred its decision on parting ways with National Democratic Alliance till after the forthcoming crucial meeting between Farooq Abdullah and the Prime Minister.

"The first meeting between our president (Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah) and Prime Minister will reveal the kind and quality of the dialogue. The outcome of this meeting will determine whether to remain in NDA or not," said State Law and Parliamentary Affairs Minister P L Handoo. "The working committee will meet again immediately after our president returns from Delhi. He will report about his deliberations with the Prime Minister and then a decision will be taken," he said.

Handoo admitted the context of today's meeting was slightly different from the previous session, in view of the Prime Minister's invitation. Giving a maximum time-frame of six months for the outcome of the dialogue, Handoo and another senior NC Minister Ghulam Mohideen Shah said the party was committed to pursue the resolution. In fact Shah, who headed the State Autonomy Committee after Karan Singh's resignation, went a step further by saying the report had become the political Bible of the party. "We will have to do it. We are bound by the resolution passed by the House," he said. Shah said they would not hesitate even to pull out of NDA "as and when needed". He said the party was ready to go through the period of struggle again.

When asked what the agenda of the dialogue between Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah and the Prime Minister would be, Handoo shouted back: "The basis of the dialogue will be our State Autonomy Report and not the length of my nose." He said: "Those who wish to talk to us

should keep in view the resolution passed by the House which calls for a positive and effective implementation" of the State Autonomy Report.

What prompted Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to call the Chief Minister for a dialogue after the summary rejection of the State Assembly resolution on autonomy? Handoo was categorical. "It is a realisation that they (Union Cabinet) were wrong and unfair in rejecting the resolution," he said. He blamed the "compulsions of coalition politics" to be the main reason for the outright rejection of their resolution. Is the National Conference ready to compromise on the quantum of autonomy sought in the State Autonomy Report in view of the recent reconciliatory approach taken by the Centre, senior NC Cabinet Minister and the architect of the State autonomy report Abdul Rahim Rather said: "There will be no compromise on principles."

Handoo joined his colleague and said the bottom line was autonomy and nothing else.

INDIAN EXPRESS

JULY 16 2000



# 29/7 Sena keeps off NDA meet

By Neena Vyas 10-1

**NEW DELHI, JULY 23.** The Shiv Sena stayed away from a meeting of leaders of the National Democratic Alliance held at the Prime Minister's residence today to discuss business before the monsoon session of Parliament opening tomorrow. However, Mr. George Fernandes, convener of the NDA, did not attach much importance to this, preferring to see it as simply a question of Sena leaders being unable to make it.

The session, which is starting in the backdrop of the resignation of three Sena Ministers from the Union Cabinet and the sacking of the Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, is expected to see the Opposition raising issues related to the attempts by the Maharashtra

Government to prosecute the Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, the mishandling by the Government of the autonomy demand by Jammu and Kashmir, and the attacks on minorities, especially Christian institutions, on which Mr. G.M. Banatwala (IUML) has given notice for an adjournment motion.

The Left parties will also demand a discussion on the Government's disinvestment plans which it is opposing. Protests against Government's efforts to introduce a Bill to replace TADA are also expected.

The ruling coalition and the Opposition are both preparing for the battle in Parliament, and while the Government hopes to initiate a debate on foreign affairs issues — the developments in Fiji

and Sierra Leone, and the outcome of the Prime Minister's visit to Italy and Portugal — the Opposition, it seems, would prefer to concentrate on matters domestic. The NDA meeting, Mr. Fernandes later said, neither discussed the Maharashtra crisis nor the sacking of Mr. Jethmalani.

There was hectic activity today — an all-party meeting called by the Speaker, the NDA meeting at the Prime Minister's residence, and a separate meeting of the Left parties — all in preparation for a session that promises to be action-packed. The BJP is expected to hold its Parliamentary Party meeting tomorrow morning while a Congress(I) Parliamentary Party meeting has been planned for the day after.

**Decision on State Bills: Page 13**

THE STATESMAN

24 JUL 2000

## NDA After Bihar

More than the BJP's lack of electoral success in Haryana, Orissa and Bihar, the National Democratic Alliance's clumsy and questionable bid to prop up a ministry which did not have a popular mandate is now recoiling on Vajpayee and Co. Running a hectic campaign against the "jungle raj" of Laloo Prasad Yadav did not win the NDA enough numbers to sustain a ministry led by the Samata Party's Nitish Kumar. For this fiasco, the NDA has only itself to blame. And yet predictably, the constituents are busy pointing accusatory fingers at each other. Addressing what he called a "mid-night, mid-air" press conference on his way home from Mauritius, Prime Minister Vajpayee said that the denouement in Patna "is not exactly a setback". However, on the ground, his allies seem to think otherwise. Even before the recriminations that followed the fall of Mr Nitish Kumar, the BJP's allies had started to differ on Governor Vinod Pande's "hasty" action. Mr Ramakrishna Hegde said the invitation was "ethically incorrect" and called it a political blunder. The JD(U), which was no doubt aggrieved by the choice of a Samata Party man for the chief ministership, also found fault with the decision. The DMK's M Karunanidhi, who has no stakes in Bihar, has also pitched in now to say that the governor had erred in taking a "hasty decision". In Parliament, the BJP's allies did not rise to the aid of the party when it was under fire from the Congress and other opposition groups on the Bihar governor's action.

Yet, if Mr Vajpayee says that what happened in Bihar is not exactly a setback, there must be reasons for such assertion. Does it mean that although the governor may be discredited, the BJP is itself unaffected because the fall guy, Nitish Kumar, did not belong to its ranks but to the Samata Party? Could it be that the BJP is actually happy that the Samata Party, lately a somewhat troublesome ally, had finally got its comeuppance? And that this was not such an undesirable outcome of a messy situation? If that is indeed the perception of a section of the BJP, then it must think again, at least because of the letter Samata Party's Jaya Jaitly has shot off to the BJP chief asking the NDA to set its house in order. Ms Jaitly has demanded a discussion on "developments that have arisen in the last six months". Obviously the Samata Party is now bent upon dredging up a host of issues which were on the backburner and not only what happened in Bihar. She is explicit that situations have arisen at the national level where the Samata Party has had to react in opposition to stands taken by BJP governments in states. This can presumably be only the controversy over government employees joining the RSS in Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh. The Samata Party appears to be building a larger platform to bring together the allies of the BJP and there appears to be no dearth of support. The latest to join the chorus is the TDP which has cautioned the BJP against succumbing to RSS pressure with a friend like the BJP, its allies in the NDA don't seem to be in need of external enemies.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

15 MAR 2000