

Soren to meet Laloo Prasad Yadav today

JMM-S quits NDA

over CM's post

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

PATNA, Oct. 31. — The JMM (Soren) today decided to walk away from the NDA after the BJP made it clear that it will not spare the Jharkhand chief minister's post to Mr Shibu Soren.

"The JMM-S has decided to sit in the Opposition. There is no question of going back now", the party general secretary, Mr Prashant Kumar, told The Statesman here today.

Mr Kumar and the JMM-S Legislature Party leader, Mr Stephen Marandi, said the party, which has 12 MLAs, would hold its legislature party meeting here tomorrow to decide the "future course of action."

They said Mr Soren would reach here tomorrow to attend the meeting. "Guruji (Mr Soren) will also meet Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav tomorrow to explore the possibility of forming a secular government in Jharkhand", Mr Kumar said.

The JMM-S decision to walk away from the NDA is all set to give an interesting turn to the power struggle in the run-up to government formation in Jharkhand. The NDA will have

Jogi sworn in

RAIPUR, Oct. 31. — Chhattisgarh became the 26th state of the Indian Union soon after midnight tonight with the swearing in of its Governor Mr Dinesh Nandan Sahay and Chief Minister Mr Ajit Jogi. There was tight security here in view of a bandh call by the Naxalites. Union ministers Mr LK Advani, Mr George Fernandes, Mr Arun Jaitley, Mrs Sumitra Mahajan and Mr Ramesh Bais were present at the function. — PTI

■ Shukla supporters beat up Digvijay, page 6

only 40 MLAs (32 BJP, 5 Samata Party, 3 JD-U) in the 81-member Jharkhand House in the absence of the JMM-S (12 MLAs).

Political observers are not sure whether Mr Soren has completely severed ties with the BJP or his decision to walk away from the NDA is a mere pressure tactic to "bargain for some important positions."

The BJP has begun moves to woo JMM-S MLAs who assembled here today before their legislature party meeting tomorrow. Sources in the BJP said "a section of party leaders is in constant touch with JMM-S MLAs".

Mr Marandi and Mr Kumar claimed that the BJP's moves to "purchase the MLAs and split the JMM-S will fall on its face."

Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav — a past master in the art of political manoeuvring — is waiting in the wings for Mr Soren and his JMM-S to finally break away from the NDA and join hands with him, Congress and Left parties to form a "secular" government in Jharkhand.

Mr Laloo Yadav's close lieutenant, Mr Shivanand Tiwary, welcomed the developments in the JMM-S. He said: "It's high time for Mr Soren to sever ties with communal forces and join efforts to form a non-BJP government in Jharkhand."

The RJD has said it will have no objection accepting Mr Soren as the chief minister.

Mrs Jehan Nara, widow of Jaipal Singh, founder of the Jharkhand movement, has also joined the fray for the chief minister's post.

THE STATESMAN

1 NOV 2000

Shekhar, VP back third front plan

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

51-3 511
CALCUTTA, Nov. 4. — Mr Chandra Sekhar today said he was willing to support the anti-BJP and anti-Congress third front mooted by Mr Jyoti Basu.

"I'm neither the initiator nor an active participant of the third front. But I am willing to contribute to it if I am asked to do so. Nobody has asked me yet," said the former Prime Minister and Samajwadi Janata Party (Rashtriya) chief at a press conference here.

He added that it would be ideal if Mr Basu chose to lead the front.

The third front will be a true

alternative as there is very little difference between the BJP and the Congress.

Another former Prime Minister, Mr VP Singh has also expressed a desire to take a positive role in the formation of a third front.

Mr Jyoti Basu will discuss the future direction of national politics and the shape of the proposed third front with him

A date for a meeting will be fixed after Mr Basu demits office on Monday. Mr Singh called him today to wish him well in retirement.

Mr Chandra Sekhar, however, skirted a comment on the chief minister's view that forming the third front would

not be an easy task.

Earlier in the day, Mr Chandra Sekhar attended a convention here with Mr Saifuddin Chowdhury, whose membership was recently dropped by the CPI-M.

Asked whether the Samajwadi Janata Party would work with Mr Choudhury in forming a front against the CPI-M for the state Assembly elections next year, the former Prime Minister said, Mr Choudhury shared his views and his objective was to bring together all leaders with similar views.

Whoever is ready to join me may do so, he asserted.

THE STATESMAN

5 NOV 2000

Soren's nightmare

The week long discussions between Jharkhand Mukti Morcha chief Shibu Soren and the rest of the National Democratic Alliance are finally over. Mr Soren has been shown the door by the Bharatiya Janata Party, which was clear right from the very beginning, that it was going to install its own chief minister. Mr Soren was probably the only hopeful in the picture, in that he really believed that the BJP would rest its claim on Jharkhand and allow him to take over the new state. Of course to be just to Mr Soren, he was led to believe this by the Samata Party and its leaders Mr George Fernandes and Mr Nitish Kumar. Both had reportedly assured him that the chief ministership of the new state would be his, provided he continued to support their politics in Bihar. So when finally Jharkhand came into existence, Mr Soren rushed to Delhi to remind the Samata leaders of their promise. But Mr Fernandes did not deliver, he could not deliver as the BJP refused to give up its claim on the state. Cajoling, threats, nothing worked and Mr Soren has been left high and dry to look for other partners. He is now left with the option of aligning with the Rashtriya Janata Dal and the Congress Party, as there is no other way that he can even think of regaining his claim on the state. The BJP's decision comes as part of the obvious re-thinking that is going on in the party giving credence to the hardliners' reluctance to strike new alliances in the states. The party which has not made the expected inroads into the states through its regional partners, is coming around to the view that it should strike out on its own whenever and wherever possible. It has reduced the Samata Party to the status of a junior partner in Bihar, and by keeping Mr Soren out in Jharkhand, has ensured that there is no tie-up between the Samata and the JMM in the new state. The BJP, knows as well as others, that this alliance could create trouble for it in the foreseeable future and it is better to lose the JMM than to give up the leadership of the state. In the process Mr Soren will hold the Samata Party responsible for the failure of the negotiations, more so as it were the Samata leaders who had helped him dream of chief ministership. Talks between the JMM and the RJD can now be expected to begin with the Congress reportedly having given the green signal to Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav to install Mr Soren in the top post, if circumstances so permit. But then relations between the two leaders who might now be forced to sit across the negotiating table have not been very good, and it is definitely too early to say if these talks will yield the expected results. In the final analysis, Mr Soren might just decide to part ways with the NDA and sit in the Opposition without striking any new alliances. This seems likely at the moment, given his overwhelming desire to be Jharkhand's first chief minister and it is almost certain that he will explore all possibilities and avenues to realise his ambitions. Politics often steers a strange course, and in this case as well Mr Soren is not likely to sit back and let others rule over him and his party without at least the semblance of a fight. The end results are anybody's guess.

THE ASIAN AGE

7 NOV 2002

Soren eyes tribal support

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Nov. 6: With JMM chief Shibu Soren deciding to pull out of the NDA, the race for the numbers game has hotted up in Ranchi. Soren said he is leaving for Patna tonight for talks with Laloo Prasad Yadav, as well as with the Congress and the Left parties, to form a non-NDA government in Jharkhand.

"I will meet Laloo Prasad Yadav after the JMM executive body finalises its decision (of whether to stake claim or sit in the Opposition)," Soren told our Patna correspondent on phone.

"The NDA leaders underestimated my strength. It is unfortunate," he added.

Samata Party sources said Soren had spoken to NDA convenor George Fernandes over phone today.

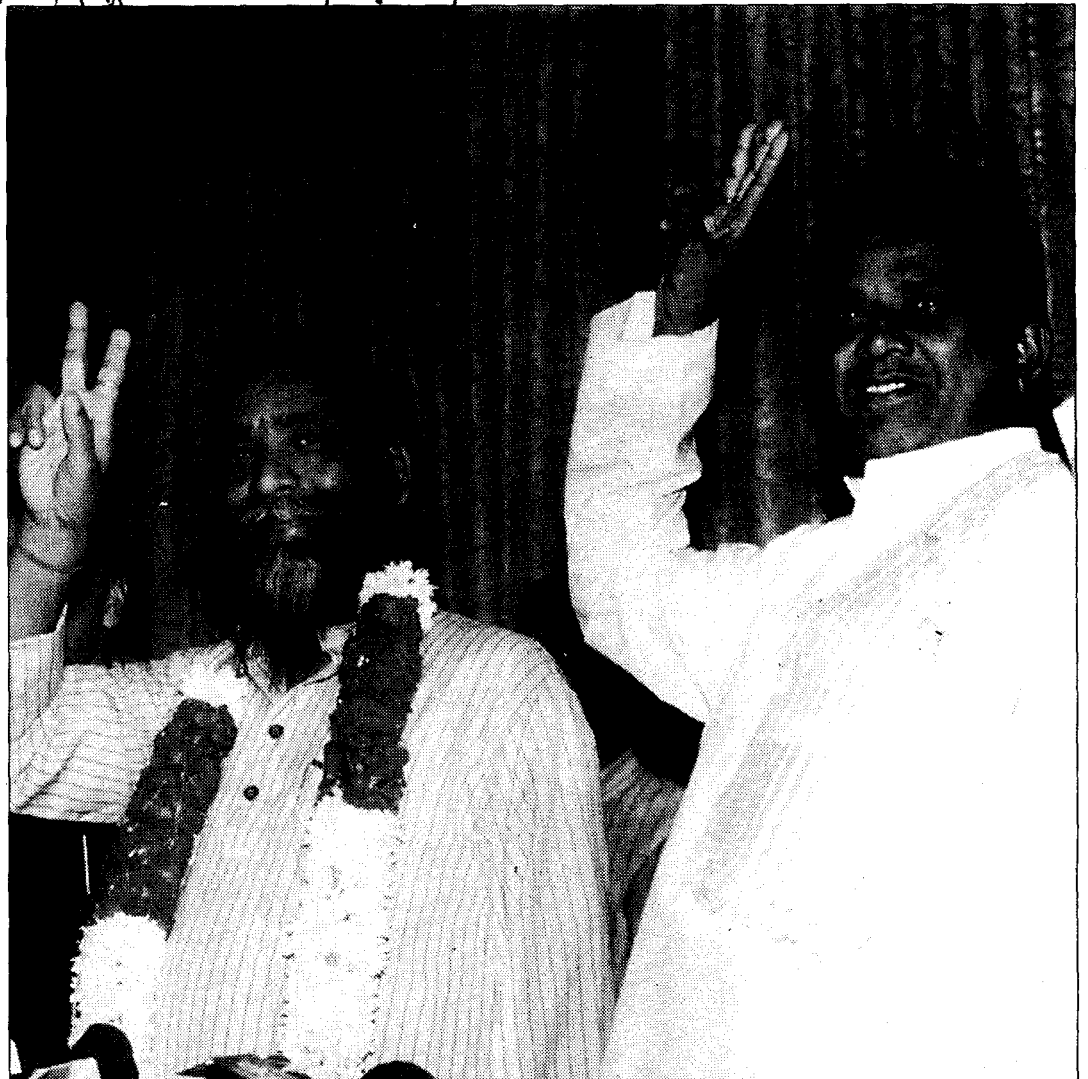
The JMM chief said he was ready to accept any formula but would not compromise on the chief minister's post. He regretted that Fernandes had come under BJP pressure and backtracked from his assurance to back the JMM's claim for chief-ministership.

The BJP hardened its stand following Soren's decision to quit the NDA. Senior BJP leader J.P. Mathur said the JMM claim has no basis as it does not have the numbers. "We would rather sit in the Opposition than surrender our claim for chief ministership," he said.

However, the Samata was conciliatory and said the JMM should reconsider its decision to quit the NDA. Party spokesperson Shambu Srivastav said his party is "unhappy that JMM has decided to sever ties with the NDA. Fernandes and the Samata leadership tried their best to retain them in the NDA."

JMM leaders said the party could return to the NDA fold if Soren was offered chief-ministership.

In the 82-member Assembly—the effective strength is 81 follow-



PILLAR TO CM POST: Shibu Soren (left) in New Delhi on Monday. Picture by Ramakant Kushwaha.

ing the death of a CPI legislator — the BJP, with its 32 seats, claims a wafer-thin majority with its allies, the Samata (5), the Dal (U) (3) and two Independents.

The non-NDA parties, including the JMM (12), Congress (11), RJD (9), CPI (2), CPI-ML (1), MCC (1) and UGDP (2), have 38 seats, three short of majority. If three Independents join Soren or if the non-NDA group splits the Samata, JD(U) or BJP, it will be able to cobble together the magic number of 41.

The JMM is banking on a rebellion among tribal members of the BJP combine over denial of the top post to the JMM which was in the forefront of the Jharkhand agitation.

Even Soren's critics within the party are unhappy with the issue. "The government is now being hijacked by those who have never participated in the movement for a separate state," said N.E. Horo, veteran JMM leader who does not agree on a number of issues with Soren.

JMM vice-president R.K. Anand claimed that about 10 BJP MLAs have promised to back Soren.

"Anything can happen," Soren said, indicating that the Samata and the Dal(U) could support him and there could be a split in the BJP as "it also has tribal members".

Dismissing as "100 per cent wrong" predictions that his party might suffer a split, he said this was a "canard" spread by vested interests.

THE TELEGRAPH

THE TELEGRAPH

7 NOV 2000

7 NOV 2000

Laloo assures Soren of 'secular' support

By K. Balchand

PATNA, NOV. 7. The JMM and the RJD today agreed to work in tandem to form a secular Government in the proposed Jharkhand State to the chagrin of the BJP.

Humiliated by the BJP, the JMM president, Mr. Shibu Soren, on his arrival here today went straight to the residence of the RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, to seek the latter's support to form a government under his (Mr. Soren's) leadership.

After an hour-long meeting, both of them declared their intention to put in their best effort to stop the NDA from forming a government and provide a secular alternative in the new State. Mr. Yadav assured Mr. Soren of procuring the support of other like-minded parties so as to enable him to bag the top job.

Mr. Yadav's obvious hint was in getting the approval of the Congress to his candidature and some of the Independents, besides that of the left parties. Mr. Yadav welcomed Mr. Soren's decision to part company with the BJP, in particular and stressed on his secular credentials and his following among the Adivasis while justifying his claims for chief ministership. After meeting Mr. Yadav, Mr. Soren discussed strategy with his party legislators, all of whom were present. Each was assigned the task of contacting legislators including those of the Samata Party and the JD(U).

Significantly it was decided to



The JMM(S) chief, Mr. Shibu Soren (centre), met the RJD leader, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, at his residence in Patna on Tuesday to discuss the strategy to form a government in Jharkhand. — Photo: Ranjeet Kumar

call all "supporters" to Ranchi, on November 14, well ahead of the swearing-in ceremony, for the people to see if Adivasi aspirations had actually been fulfilled by the BJP-led NDA Government at the Centre. The oath-taking ceremony is scheduled to be held at mid-night November 15.

Mr. Soren squarely accused the BJP of humiliating him and disregarding the emotions of the Adivasis and three crore people of the plateau region. "The people, the soil and the forests are all

screaming to see me as Chief Minister, and I alone shall be the Chief Minister," he declared.

Mr. Soren said he decided to pull out of the NDA after giving them all opportunities to abide by their promise. "We had no option but to part ways. We had been left with no other political course to follow in the region. It is a question of survival now."

Mr. Soren said there was no room for reconsidering his decision to snap ties with the NDA and denied that there were any

differences within the party, over the issue. He claimed total unity within the party. He was confident of securing the support of the Independents and that of the UGDP which has two members.

He claimed that he received a telephone call from Mr. Samresh Singhone, an Independent, assuring him support, while the leader of the UGDP was likely to arrive here tonight. The decision of the BJP to ignore the claims of Mr. Soren and the latter's consequent decision to pull out of the NDA has allowed dissent within the BJP to come to the fore.

Apparently taking advantage of the party's weakness, the supporters of the former Union Minister, Mr. Karia Munda, MP, urged their leader not to take oath as a Minister of State in the Union Council of Ministers.

Sources in the BJP said that legislators supporting Mr. Munda faxed letters asking him to decline the offer which they regarded as insulting him, particularly after denying him the Chief Minister's post and disregarding the fact that he happened to be a Union Minister in Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's 13-day Ministry in 1996.

Most of these legislators are likely to be in Patna from tomorrow to attend the three-day session of the Legislature when members belonging to the Jharkhand region would be accorded a farewell. The session will give an opportunity for hectic political parleys to decide the first government at Ranchi.

8 NOV 2000

SOREN: JMM-S chief complains to President

(Continued from page 1)

Ranchi, which is to be the capital of India's 28th state, looks more like a police camp with heavily armed policemen patrolling every nook and cranny.

Ranchi's senior SP Mr Gupteshwar Pandey said 31 companies of paramilitary forces had been pressed into service to ensure a peaceful swearing-in of the Governor and the chief minister on 14-15 November midnight.

Wary of the JMM-S call for a chief minister's darshan rally on the day of the swearing-in, the administration has put up barricades manned by jawans on all main roads. All entry points leading to the Raj Bhavan have been sealed.

But, Jharkhand Mukti Manch, the frontal organisation of the outlawed Maoist Communist

Centre, has withdrawn the call for its rally on 15 November.

The build-up has made Mr Soren very angry. "It's a rape of the Constitution. How could the administration give Mr Marandi all facilities meant for a chief minister even before his election as the NDA Legislature Party leader? Mr Marandi is not even a CM designate. How is the DGP wagging his tail before a man yet to be called by the Governor to take oath?"

The JMM-S secretary, Mr Shailendra Bhattacharya, said the Union home minister, Mr LK Advani, had asked state officers to treat Mr Marandi as the chief minister.

Mr Soren has faxed a letter to the President drawing his attention to the flouting of norms by the administration. Mr Soren has also asked Mr KR Narayanan how the new Governor would verify claims to

the chief minister's post within five minutes of his taking oath.

"The way things are shaping I fear that the Governor will invite the NDA nominee for taking oath without verifying my claim to the CMs post," Mr Soren said in his letter.

The Governor, Mr Prabhat Kumar, is scheduled to take oath five minutes past midnight. Five minutes later, he will administer oath of office and secrecy to the chief minister. Mr Soren said he would stake claim to form a government two minutes after the Governor takes oath.

But the Guruji did not sound too hopeful of success when he said: "I carried out my struggle against the mafiosi exploiting the innocent tribals for three decades... the same mafia elements led by Mr Marandi are now going to take over Jharkhand."

Quit NDA and be CM, Soren tells Munda

NALIN VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

RANCHI, Nov. 13. — The JMM-S today said it would accept BJP MP Karia Munda as the Jharkhand chief minister — but only if he snapped ties with the NDA. Senior BJP leader Mr Reetlal Verma joined Mr Siby Soren in supporting Mr Munda's claim for the chief minister's post.

The JMM's decision, however, appeared to have little effect on Mr Babulal Marandi, tipped as the BJP's man for the top job in Jharkhand.

As Mr Marandi's bullet-proof white Ambassador screeched to a halt at the Jharkhand state BJP office here, party workers shouted: "Mukhyamantri zindabad". Security personnel, toting carbines and self-loading rifles, rushed up to keep the enthusiastic supporters at bay.

Mr Marandi has surprised one and all in Ranchi by acting as chief minister two days before even the Governor could be sworn in. And the administration top brass, including the newly-appointed director general of police, is responding to Mr Marandi's instructions as

if he was already in the chief minister's chair.

Mr Marandi, yet to be formally elected as the NDA Legislature Party leader, did not hesitate in spelling out his priorities as chief minister. "My first priority is to control the law and order situation," he said. The government, he insists, will be run with the cooperation of all NDA constituents.

Mr Marandi, however, turned defensive conscious the moment he is asked when he came to know that he would be sworn in as Jharkhand's first chief minister. "I still don't know whether I will be the chief minister. It's for the NDA legislators to elect their leader. In fact, the NDA is slated to elect its leader at its meeting here tomorrow," he said.

But, he appeared unruffled when asked how he would tackle Mr Karia Munda's supporters. "Mundaji is a senior vice-president of the party... a respected party leader. He will guide me and cooperate with me. There are no differences in the party on the issue of chief minister," Mr Marandi said.

■ See SOREN: page 8

THE STATESMAN

10 NOV 2000

Mamata woos minorities, warns majority partner

OUR BUREAU

Nov. 14: Betraying her anxiety to win back the minority vote before the Assembly elections, Mamata Banerjee today split hair before a convention of Muslims in a bid to convince them that her loyalty extended only till Atal Behari Vajpayee and not the BJP.

She also indicated that her alliance was not a permanent arrangement. "We are supporting only Atalji because he is secular-minded. The day we find a crack in the secular framework of the National Democratic Alliance government, we will walk out," Mamata told a meeting organised by the West Bengal Pradesh Quami Tanzeem, a welfare organisation.

The railway minister said she had decided to join the Central alliance to articulate the grievances of the minorities. "I beseech you not to take a wrong decision when casting your vote. Please remember I have no relationship with the BJP and I will never do anything that will harm Muslims and other minorities. If the minorities

unite, it will take us a few seconds to bring down the Left," she said, drawing applause.

The convention at the Netaji Indoor Stadium in Calcutta is being seen as proof of Mamata's realisation that her Trinamul Congress cannot hope to capture Writers' Buildings next year unless the minority community, which constitutes over 24 per cent of the population, backed her.

She spoke in favour of reservation for Muslims in jobs and education. "Any state where Muslims account for more than 10 per cent of population should have Urdu as the second language in schools," she said.

Taking the cue from Mamata, mayor Subrata Mukherjee said civic authorities would ensure 50 per cent job reservation for Muslims in the CMC.

Mamata's speech also appeared to have been conditioned by her resentment at the Vajpayee government for dragging its feet on the oil price rollback.

The NDA is meeting at Vajpayee's residence on Sunday evening

on the eve of the winter session of the Parliament. Finance minister Yashwant Sinha and petroleum minister Ram Naik will be present at the meeting to brief the partners, including Mamata, about the difficulties in reducing the prices. The Vajpayee administration has been at pains to explain that the party's demand is not supported by any other ally of the BJP now.

On the other hand, Mamata has been insisting that she is not alone in raising her voice. Her party has claimed that the Telugu Desam, the Akali Dal and Indian National Lok Dal are with her. A Telugu Desam MP attended today's convention.

But the government knows that Badal camp has mellowed after the appointment of S.S. Barnala as Uttaranchal Governor and that Chandrababu Naidu's rollback plea was just a political stand. Unlike Mamata, none faces an election next year.

CPM state secretary Anil Biswas charged Mamata with trying to "fool the Muslims".

THE TELEGRAPH

15 NOV 2000

Mamata is confident of price roll-back decision by Monday

By Biswajit Roy
The Times of India News Service

CALCUTTA: Union railway minister Mamata Banerjee is confident that a decision on roll-back of prices of LPG and kerosene will be announced by Monday.

Ms Banerjee told this newspaper here on Wednesday that the issue of oil price would come up for discussion at a National Democratic Alliance meeting on Sunday. She would attend the meeting.

Ms Banerjee had told her confidantes that the rollback decision was likely to be announced before the opposition could catch the government on the wrong foot on Monday, when Parliament would be convened for its winter session.

She indicated that she would also press for a reduction in the price of diesel. "I thank Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee for his move to expedite the partial rollback in petro prices," a smiling Ms Banerjee said. "While the hike in kerosene and LPG prices hit the poor and middle class directly, costlier diesel also hurts them. Both the rail as well as road transport depends on diesel and the increase will have a cascading effect on the common people."

Ms Banerjee, however, made it clear that she would not support the Centre's move to lower the

government stakes in nationalised banks below 30 per cent.

Neither would her party support the government on the anti-terrorist bill which would be tabled in Parliament.

She has also directed her party MPs to raise the demand of job reservations for the minorities with the hope of getting support from the second largest NDA ally Telugu Desam Party.

Indicating that she will continue to keep the BJP under pressure, Ms Banerjee said there was nothing wrong if the nine NDA allies joined hands to voice their own position on several issues in Parliament.

Mamata has the last laugh, LPG & kerosene cheaper

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 19

PRIME MINISTER A.B. Vajpayee today kept his promise to Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee and other BJP allies by announcing a roll back in the price of domestic LPG by Rs 10 per cylinder and that of kerosene by one rupee a litre.

Addressing a meeting of the NDA's Coordination Committee on the eve of Parliament's winter session, Mr Vajpayee informed the allies that the decision had been taken in deference to the concern expressed by the allies about the impact of the hike, which came into effect on September 29, on the weaker sections.

This partial rollback, which is likely to be effected through a reduction in the excise duty on these products, is expected to cost the Government Rs 139 crore per month. Consequently, the extra

burden on the national exchequer for the remaining four months of the current financial year will work out to around Rs 600 crore.

Petroleum Minister Ram Naik will make a formal announcement about the roll-back in Parliament on Tuesday, Defence Minister and NDA convenor George Fernandes told reporters.

The Government had increased the price of LPG by Rs 36.20 per cylinder and raised the cost of kerosene by Rs 2.81 per litre from midnight on September 29-30. With today's decision the subsidy on LPG and kerosene will go up again.

Petrol price will remain unchanged. As for the diesel price, the NDA panel was informed that



THE ROLLBACK

- LPG cheaper by Rs 10
- Kerosene by Re 1 a litre
- Petrol prices unchanged
- Diesel price rollback only if crude prices come down

the Government could consider a cut only if the international crude prices came down.

Denying that the Government was succumbing to pressure from the allies, particularly Ms Banerjee, Mr Fernandes said all NDA leaders including Ms Banerjee were aware of the situation faced by the Government in view of the continuing surge in international prices of crude.

The Government was under pressure from Ms Banerjee to effect a roll back before Parliament's session. She had threatened to resign and pull out

from the NDA, forcing the PM to assure her of a "re-look" soon after the hike was effected on September 29. TDP chief N. Chandrababu Naidu too had been seeking a cut in LPG price because of a scheme to provide gas connections to the poor.

Due to the skyrocketing international prices of crude oil this year, the subsidy on LPG in the country had risen to Rs 170 per litre and that of kerosene had shot up to Rs 8 litre. The increase in the prices of five petroleum products was undertaken to pass on to consumers one-third of the Rs 24,000 crore oil pool account deficit.

While the crude oil produced by state-run ONGC helps the Government to meet around Rs 10,000 crore of the oil pool account deficit, the issuing of financial bonds to the national refining companies enabled the Government to hold back part of the remaining payments.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 NOV 2000

300 Trinamul activists return home

SR-9
2/11

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NERADEUL (Kespur), Nov. 23. — About 300 Trinamul Congress activists, including some women and children, who had to desert homes from different villages in Kespur block in August following CPI-M atrocities, returned this evening. They were escorted by a dozen of party leaders, including Mr Pankaj Banerjee, Mr Sovandev Chattopadhyay, Mr Sanjay Bakshi, Mr Mukul Roy, Mr Dipak Ghosh, Mr Sisir Adhikary, Mr Nirmal Ghosh, Mr Biplab Roychowdhury and Mr Tushar Mandal in 12 buses from Calcutta.

They were taken to Calcutta early this month where they put up in a camp in front of the Gandhi statue demanding safe rehabilitation.

Trinamul Congress chief Miss Mamata Banerjee said the state government had done nothing for their safe return which prompted her to ask Trinamul leaders to take the oustees back to their village.

About 500 Trinamul supporters arrived here in the first phase of whom 300 are residents of Kespur and the rest from Hooghly and Bankura, Mr Pankaj Banerjee said. Villagers of Hooghly and Bankura will be escorted by Mr Banerjee himself tomorrow. About 150 villagers are still staying in Calcutta as their relatives are undergoing treatment.

In the second phase, about 200 oustees, staying in Midnapore and Debra camps, will be taken to their homes, Mr Banerjee said.

However party insiders said those staying in Midnapore and Debra fear fresh clashes and are reluctant to return.

The party activists will return tomorrow after making a night's stay at party offices in

Kespur and Neradeul which were reopened today after three months. While Mr Mukul Roy and Dr Nirmal Maji will stay with them at Neradeul, Mr Biplab Roychowdhury and Mr Nirmal Ghosh will stay at Kespur party office.

But panic gripped the villagers after the leaders had left. Mr Biswanath Panja of Hijli said he did not know what awaits him during the few next months. Similar is the reaction of Mr Khokan Kolay whose house was looted and torched.

Mr Banerjee said they were hopeful of a better future following assurance given by chief minister Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya.

"We want peace and a free political environment where our activist can participate in party programmes without fear," he said.

Mr Entaz Ali, CPI-M leader of Kespur, said their party cadres never resort to violence unless they are provoked. He fears that despite his party's best effort to maintain peace, Miss Mamata Banerjee will again spread violence after her scheduled meeting at Kespur in December.

NRS scuffle

CALCUTTA, Nov. 23. — Three people, including two guards of the NRS Medical College Hospital, were arrested today.

An NRS student, Sheikh Motin, accompanied by other students, had gone to visit another student, Shafikul Islam, in the ward after midnight. The guard did not allow them to enter. This led to scuffle between the two groups — the guards and the students. Following this, Ram Bhagat Ram and Sivdhar Prasad, the two guards, and Misra Roy, a mess boarder were arrested today. — SNS

THE STATESMAN

24 NOV 2000

Saifuddin floats people's front

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Nov. 24. — Former CPI-M MP, Mr Saifuddin Choudhury, today launched his forum, Jana Chetana Mancha. He cautioned the Trinamul Congress and the CPI-M, without naming them, against the "futility of rigging".

Making a plea for value-based politics whose essence is democracy, Mr Choudhury told a convention at Nazrul Mancha that the use of muscle power and rigging in elections would have to be stopped.

He said: "Those, who rig elections to ensure their grip on power, and those, who think that without rigging they can't capture power, are resorting to a needless tactic since the people's voice cannot always be suppressed. This was proved when Mr Sharad Yadav won the last Lok Sabha elections despite rigging by Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav".

The rebel Marxist leader urged the Election Commission to eliminate all electoral malpractices, "which is well within the realms of possibility".

Mr Choudhury complained that many posters of the forum had been torn by "political opponents". They also tried to prevent its supporters from attending the convention through a fear campaign. In fact, it took time for the auditorium to fill up. It was never quite full to the capacity.

The mancha, Mr Choudhury explained, will follow the middle path between the traditional Left and the Right reactionary. Democracy will be the means for implementing socialism. "Some of us were Marxists and some of us still are. But all of us believe democratic centralism that the former USSR adopted has become an anachronism. In fact, democracy itself has a core of centralism," he said.

The mancha will not denounce any political party but will work for development that can



Mr Saifuddin Choudhury addresses the convention at Nazrul Mancha on Friday. — The Statesman

be harnessed by democracy. "Democracy is no longer a dirty word, a weapon for the bourgeoisie. It has lost its previous nakedly monopolistic tendency and it alone can help man tap all the resources. We welcome globalisation and modern technology for the uplift of the poor. We will fight multinational corporations if they try to trample the poor," Mr Choudhury asserted.

He said he does not subscribe to the view that the Left Front government has not achieved anything during its rule of 24 years. "There have been land reforms, installation of the panchayati raj and agricultural development. But then development stopped midway for dogmatic approach to economic principles," he said.

The mancha is also opposed to chanting the development slogan with an eye on the elections.

Mr Choudhury welcomed the chief minister's visit to the dac-

oity victims' houses at Kasba. "It is the duty of the chief minister to stand by afflicted people. But what is more important is to probe into the socio-economic-political reasons for the spurt in dacoity.

The failure to generate employment makes people turn into criminals," he said.

He refuted the allegation that he is being funded by the USA. "We have among us highly respected freedom fighters who fought against foreign rule. But now certain people, who were born after the Independence and have been enjoying all the fruits of parliamentary democracy, are accusing us of receiving US funds," he rued.

Mr Choudhury explained that secularism is a basic tenet of the mancha. "We are against cynical use of religion for electoral gain. We follow secularism that respects all religions for their contributions to the moral growth of man," he said.

THE STATESMAN

24 NOV 1977

Sena holds fire on truce call

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MUMBAI, Nov. 25. — The Shiv Sena is "content" with the Prime Minister's ceasefire offer and is not planning to make it an issue any more, though it sticks to its views.

"After all, we want the government to run," said Sena Rajya Sabha member, Mr Sanjay Nirupam. The party has also accepted that Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee did not mean what he was quoted as saying over opposition to the ceasefire call.

The change of heart comes after Mr Vajpayee went all out to smoothen the ruffled feathers of his ally. First, he gave Sena leaders a patient hearing, then promised to look into Sena chief Mr Bal Thackeray's security, and third, dashed off the minister of state for disinvestment, Mr Arun Shourie, today to meet Mr Thackeray.

The Sena leader of the Upper House, Mr Satish Pradhan, said: "I checked the speech recording on Thursday and found that Mr Vajpayee did not mean what has been reported."

Asked to elaborate, he said he could not recall the import, but the Prime Minister never meant the Shiv Sena when he said "one party" was posing greater danger than extremists. The Sena is, therefore, convinced with Mr Vajpayee's explanation that he has been quoted out of context.

The clarification made by the

foreign minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, in the Rajya Sabha has pacified the Sena for the time being. Mr Singh yesterday said that though the government might not agree with its ally, it did take note of its views.

Mr Thackeray himself seems to have decided not to push the matter. He was briefed about the government's stand today by Mr Shourie. Their meeting lasted about four hours. Mr Shourie was accompanied by the heavy industries minister, Mr Manohar Joshi.

Asked if the Sena would

continue to oppose the ceasefire on the floor of the House, Mr Pradhan said the party would voice its opinion against the idea whenever the topic comes up. "We oppose the decision and feel that only a policy of tit-for-tat would work with terrorists."

Mr Nirupam added the Sena would continue to be the "lonely voice", as Mr Vajpayee put it, against the ceasefire. "We will not disturb the proceedings of the House,

but our disagreement will stay."

Mr Pradhan said much was being read into the return of several Sena MPs to Mumbai. "We come back every Saturday," he quipped. There were no definite plans to discuss the fallout of the fracas, he said.

The Sena delegation that called on Mr Vajpayee yesterday apprised him of the situation in Mumbai. Four Lashkar-e-Taiyaba terrorists have been arrested in Thane with plans to eliminate Mr Thackeray.

NEW DELHI, Nov. 25. — The CBI has secured conviction against Mohammad Yasin Bhat for kidnapping Ms Nahida Imtiaz, daughter of Mr Saifuddin Soz, former Lok Sabha MP.

The accused, along with some others, kidnapped Ms Imtiaz on February 27, 1991, and demanded the release of five J&K Student Liberation Front militants from custody as ransom. Some militants had to be released to secure Ms Imtiaz's release on March 8, 1991.

Bhat was convicted under Section 364, 365 and 120B of the IPC and under Section 3 of Tada, and sentenced to six-year rigorous imprisonment with a fine of Rs 13,000. — SNS

THE STATESMAN

28 NOV 7 1991

Cautious reaction to Rao conviction

By Our Special Correspondent

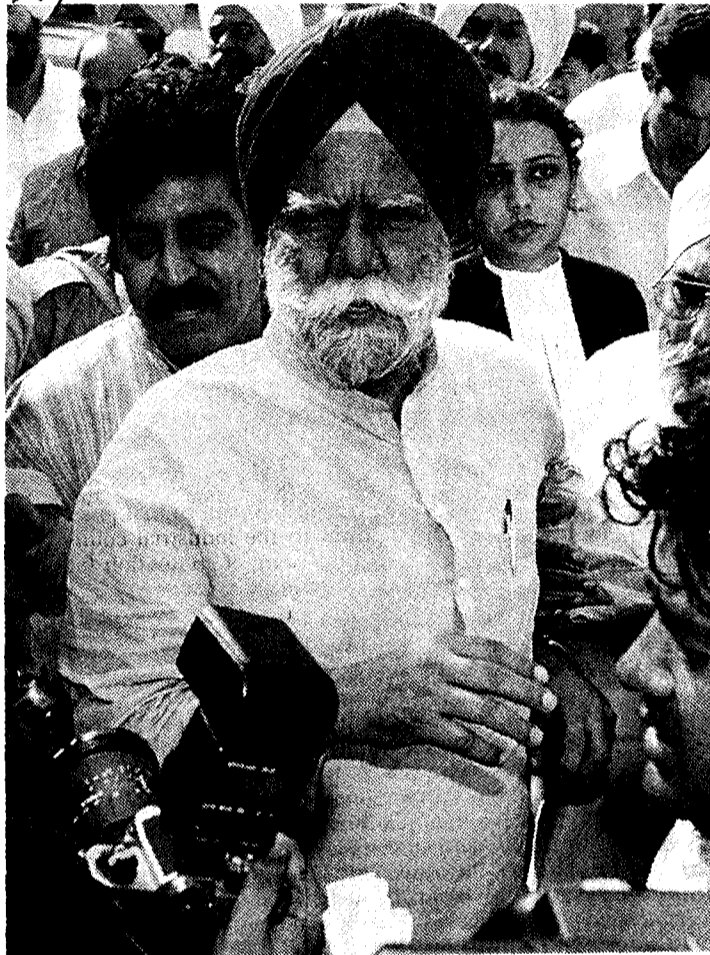
NEW DELHI, SEPT. 29. Most political parties reacted cautiously to the conviction of the former Prime Minister, Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao, and his Cabinet colleague, Mr. Buta Singh, by a designated court in the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha bribery case — perhaps because they did not quite relish the stern message sent out to the entire political class.

Reticence on the part of the Congress(I), whose Government Mr. Rao headed for full five years was but natural — party spokesperson, Mr. Ajit Jogi, said the party would "like to read and study the judgment before making any comments."

But even the Bharatiya Janata Party, whose Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, had at that time led the charge against Mr. Rao as the Leader of Opposition, preferred to simply state blandly that law had taken its own course.

Only the CPI(M) was more forthcoming. Mr. Prakash Karat, Polit Bureau member, felt that "the judgement was appropriate given the case and the circumstances in which the then Rao Government foiled the no-confidence motion against it."

On the other hand, the Janata Dal (United) spokesperson, Mr. Mohan Prakash, had only two words to say: "no comment," while Samata Party spokesperson, Mr. Shambhu Srivastawa, said "this conviction should deter all political executives from indulging in such unworthy practices and it is also a lesson to the Congress Party against whom judgement has been given by the people in successive elections."



The former Union Home Minister, Mr. Buta Singh coming out from the court after being convicted in the JMM case in New Delhi on Friday.— Photo: Shanker Chakravarty

The Bahujan Samaj Party leader, Ms. Mayawati, said her party had always opposed political corruption of which it had been a victim in Uttar Pradesh. The courts,

she hoped, would also take interest in the case relating to a split in her party's U.P. unit.

One reason for the cautious approach was that the full text of the

judgement was not yet available and the order on the punishment to be meted out to Mr. Rao and Mr. Buta Singh yet to be pronounced, both of whom are expected to appeal to a higher court against the judgement.

Mr. Ajit Singh, one of the accused who was given the benefit of doubt later, said he had in fact voted against the Rao Government during the no-trust motion on July 28, 1993. Implication in the case, he added, "was an unnecessary headache for me."

BJP leaders Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi and Mr. Venkaiah Naidu noted that for the first time a former Indian Prime Minister had been found guilty of a corruption charge relating to the time he held office. They promised a more detailed comment later. Mr. Krishnamurthi added: "it will have to be seen whether the judge had found Mr. Rao guilty on a substantive matter or on a technical point," while Mr. Naidu described the judgement as "historic" and said "the conviction itself would have a salutary effect on the polity, especially with regard to the role of money in influencing political decisions."

Surprisingly, there were also some Rao sympathisers in the BJP camp. "Everyone knows that money plays a role in politics ... but one cannot forget that as Prime Minister, Mr. Rao, ended terrorism in Punjab, made elections possible in Kashmir, and initiated much-needed reforms in the economy," a senior BJP leader who did not want to be identified said.

AGP lashes out at Cong, Jagdish Tytler

P.P. Singh

GUWAHATI 29 NOVEMBER

AGP VICE president and minister for cooperatives Nurul Hussein on Wednesday accused the Congress of bringing people like Jagdish Tytler, "who played the leading role in the massacre of Sikhs by Congressmen in Delhi and other places in retaliation to the murder of Indira Gandhi in 1984."

Nurul Hussein said he has serious doubts about the entire exercise of bringing these people to the state. He felt that these leaders did not come to Assam to study the state's situation, "but to give expert advice to their party-men in Assam for more large-scale massacre of innocent people."

He criticised the Congress party for importing leaders from outside to communicate the Assam problem to Assamese, but these people, he said, cannot understand the situa-



AGP vice president Nurul Hussein at a press meet in Guwahati on Wednesday.

— Caroline Singh

tion in a day or two, when the party's state leaders have failed to understand the ground realities for so long.

Party spokesman Moidul Islam Bora said

since the Congress lost power in the state in 1996, it has been trying to destabilise the AGP-led government in the state by "inciting terrorism and violence in Assam."

He said the Congress has been using the anti-national outfits for gaining political power in the state. During the Lok Sabha polls they had used these very outfits and now they are working on ominous gameplan, hand in glove with Ulfa.

Criticising the demand of imposition of President's Rule in the state, made by the Congress leaders on Tuesday he said it is ironical that the same party is opposing President's Rule in Bihar, where even the courts have termed the situation as "Jungle Raj."

He said with improved law and order situation in the state, there is no justification of such a demand except by those who want to kill the democratic institutions in the state with the help of militants.

The Economic Times

30 NOV 2000

Firm Mamata can't force oil price rollback

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA/NEW DELHI, Oct. 1. — Mr George Fernandes today tried for hours to make Miss Mamata Banerjee change her mind, but the Trinamul Congress chief stuck to her decision to quit the Vajpayee government. The BJP, however, ruled out a rollback of the petroleum price hike to appease its recalcitrant ally.

Speaking to reporters after the BJP's national executive meeting in Delhi, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee shrugged off the chances of a rollback saying: "Kahaan ho sakta hain rollback (how can there be a rollback)?" But, he hoped Miss Banerjee would continue to support the NDA government at the Centre.

Petroleum minister Mr Ram Naik, too, asserted that a rollback was impossible.

Mr Vajpayee, however, sent senior PMO official Mr Sudhendra Kulkarni, to Calcutta today to speak to Miss Banerjee. He, like Mr Fernandes, has excellent rapport with the Trinamul chief, sources said.

In Calcutta, Miss Banerjee told the defence minister: "When people's interests are hurt, we also hurt. Our decision is in the interest of the people".

Mr Fernandes had airdashed to the city last evening, sent by the Prime Minister to persuade Miss Banerjee to withdraw her resignation. But he failed to extract any promise from Miss Banerjee.

Miss Banerjee and Mr Ajit Panja, minister of state for foreign affairs, faxed their resignation letters to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee yesterday.

Reliable sources said that Mr Vajpayee thrice tried to contact Miss Banerjee at her residence during the day, but could not get through to the Trinamul chief.

Trinamul members said Miss

Banerjee is in no mood to get into any fruitless dialogue with the Centre. She can rejoin the ministry only if her demand for a rollback is accepted, they said.

BJP leaders in Delhi, however, were confident that Miss Banerjee would withdraw her resignation.

The party's West Bengal unit president, Mr Asim Ghosh, felt certain that she would not leave the alliance. He said the BJP and the Trinamul would contest the Assembly polls



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee: more than a storm in a teacup

- Editorial: Politics!
- Politics! page 6
- Another report on page 4

together.

Neither Miss Banerjee nor Mr Fernandes divulged details of their dialogue to the press. The Trinamul chief only said that she had "tried to convey to Mr Fernandes the sentiments of the people that forced the decision (to quit)". "We can't be part of a government whose action we do not approve of," she said.

A Union minister told **The Statesman** in Delhi that Mr Fernandes had told Miss Banerjee that the government was determined on the price

hike and populism would not pay.

A BJP office-bearer felt Miss Banerjee was probably weighing whether she would be able to bring another populist railway budget for West Bengal. She might even have to go for an immediate price hike because of the increase of diesel prices, some party leaders said.

When every other department was adopting austerity measures, she was allowed a populist budget this year, a BJP leader said. Whether she would find the same support this time is the main issue.

Third front: Senior Congress leader Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi today hinted at the emergence of a third front in West Bengal sans the CPI(M) and the BJP under Miss Banerjee's leadership.

"If the distance between the BJP and the Trinamul Congress further widens in the context of the present impasse created by Miss Banerjee's decision to quit the Cabinet, there is a possibility of a secular democratic front to come into being in the state," he said over phone from Delhi.

Badal protest: Punjab chief minister and Akali Dal president Mr Parkash Singh Badal has asked the Centre to reconsider the price hike. The steep increase will hit the farmers and urban lower classes most, he said in an official statement in Chandigarh today.

Rail roko: Six Opposition parties in Orissa today called a token rail roko agitation — for an hour or two — in the state on 3 October in protest against the hike in prices of petroleum products, reports PTI.

AGP threat: Assam's ruling Asom Gana Parishad has threatened to launch agitations from 3 October if the Centre did not roll back the price hike. Demonstrations would be held in every district headquarters.

'My smile says it all,' says PM emissary after meeting

Centre dishes out Cabinet & flood lollies for Mamata

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA/NEW DELHI, Oct. 2. — With just 24 hours remaining of the 72-hour deadline set by Miss Mamata Banerjee, the Centre has offered her a face-saver in the form of additional ministerial berths for the Trinamul and a "Mamata-inspired impressive flood-relief package" for West Bengal.

The Prime Minister's special messenger, Mr Sudheendra Kulkarni, returned to Delhi this evening with a "mixed bag of good and bad news". He was rushed back to Calcutta soon after for further negotiations with a fresh set of proposals from Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee. He held a late night meeting at Miss Banerjee's residence that ended around 2 a.m. After the meeting, a visibly elated Mr Kulkarni, when prodded by eager reporters on the outcome of the parleys, said: "My smile says it all."

There will be another meeting tomorrow, followed by a joint press conference, said Trinamul leaders.

Miss Banerjee is said to have shown "some flexibility" at least on the question of the Trinamul's remaining in the NDA fold, said sources, but was bargaining hard for a partial rollback of kerosene price to give a pro-poor touch to the deal.

That the Trinamul leader might have softened her demand of a total rollback in petro-

leum prices was evident in her party's new stress on "relief to the people".

Trinamul leader Mr Pankaj Banerjee said Miss Banerjee had urged the Centre to "reconsider the issue of price hike and give relief to the people".

He, however, refused to specify whether Miss Banerjee wanted "relief in the form of full or partial rollback".

Miss Banerjee is learnt to have made it clear that the government's determination to stand by the price hike has closed the door on her return to the Cabinet, but at the same time she is said to have been "moved by the Prime Minister's appeal to her not to end the Trinamul-NDA ties".

The Prime Minister's Office started working on the face-saver in consultation with Mr LK Advani and Mr George Fernandes. If Miss Banerjee remains adamant on staying out of the government, the Centre is willing to offer one, if not two, additional Cabinet berths to her party.

The government will also declare "an impressive" flood relief package with the "imprint of Mamata's efforts" on it. "The one factor that weighed heavily on the mind of the government was the need to check her tilt towards the Congress. We are aware of the Congress's efforts to drive a wedge between the Trinamul and the BJP," said a source.

Trinamul cold shoulder to Cong courting

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & PTI

NEW DELHI, Oct. 2. — Two days after Miss Mamata Banerjee's resignation, the Congress today asked her to leave the NDA and lead a movement against the Left Front government, an offer which the Trinamul rebuffed.

"If she leaves the NDA, there would be no problem in working with her," PCC president Mr Pranab Mukherjee said.

In Calcutta, Mr Saugata Roy, Congress leader, echoed him, saying he welcomed Miss Banerjee's decision to resign. He said Congress was ready to join hands with her.

Mr Mukherjee, also a CWC member, said if Miss Banerjee was keen on reviving the mahajot and snap ties with the NDA, the party would welcome it. But he stressed that the Congress would have no direct or indirect truck with the BJP. He denied the Congress had sent feelers to Miss Banerjee.

Mr Mukherjee also parried questions on Miss Banerjee's seriousness and said only she could say how serious her ultimatum was. "But if it materialises it is the beginning of disintegration of NDA", he said.

However, Mr Sudip Bandyopadhyay, Trinamul spokesman, clearly ruled out any tie-up with the Congress, saying his party still considered the Congress as a 'B team of the CPI-M'.

Alleging that the Congress was being 'remote controlled' by the CPI-M general secretary, Mr HS Surjeet, he said "by going with such a party, we will only strengthen the CPI-M".

BASU AMAZED

CALCUTTA, Oct. 2. — Transport fares would have to be hiked because of the rise in petroleum product prices, Mr Jyoti Basu said today. Reacting to Miss Mamata Banerjee's threat to resign, the chief minister said the price-hike decision had been taken in her presence. Even the Prime Minister said the decision was unanimous. "And now she resigns in protest when she could have raised her voice at the NDA and Union Cabinet meetings," he said.

Asked if Miss Banerjee would now lean towards the Congress, Mr Basu said he did not know about the Trinamul leader's brand of politics. — SNS

Trinamul set to accept partial rollback

The Times of India News Service

CALCUTTA: The Trinamul Congress (TC) on Tuesday appeared ready to accept a 'partial rollback' in the prices of kerosene, LPG and diesel. Another indication of the Trinamul softening its stand was Mamata Banerjee's refusal throughout the day to react to Jyoti Basu ridiculing her on the question of her resignation. Uncharacteristically, Ms Banerjee kept the hordes of newsmen and television crew at arm's length on Tuesday and refused to come out of her residence to face them.

Trinamul spokesman Pankaj Banerjee claimed that Mamata was hopeful of a settlement and that some kind of negoti-

ation was going on with officials in the PMO. Indeed, the leaders claimed that Sudheendra Kulkarni from the PMO had spoken to Ms Banerjee three times on Monday.

While formally sticking to the demand of 'a complete rollback', Mr Pankaj Banerjee indicated that the Trinamul leader was putting pressure on the Centre to lower the quantum of the price hike on kerosene, LPG and diesel.

"We knew that the hike was inevitable in view of the international situation and our oil pool deficit. But how could we accept the 50 per cent hike in kerosene which is an essential item for poor households," Mr Banerjee said, while justifying his party's decision to with-

draw from the Union council of ministers.

Admitting that the Trinamul chief was present in the last NDA meeting when the decision to hike petro-prices was discussed, Mr Banerjee said that the quantum of the price hike was beyond his party's expectations.

The pressure to lower the quantum of the increase in diesel prices was more related to Ms Banerjee's problems as the railway minister, some Trinamul Congress leaders argued. "As the largest consumer of diesel, the railway minister's shoes will pinch first. And, definitely, she cannot afford it when the West Bengal assembly elections are round the corner," argued a senior party leader.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

3 OCT 2000

Resignation rollback after Cabinet meeting on Friday

Centre bows to Mamata's oil price wish

SFA
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9-10 PM
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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Oct. 3. — The stalemate over the Trinamul Congress's pullout from the Union Cabinet appeared to have been resolved today following the Prime Minister's assurance of a partial rollback of the petro price hike.

Miss Mamata Banerjee also hinted that the withdrawal of her and Mr Ajit Panja's resignation was now a matter of time.

The quantum of the rollback would be decided at an "urgent"

Cabinet meeting on Friday, Miss Banerjee said at her residence this afternoon. The Trinamul would decide its course of

action after the Centre announces the price reduction after the meeting, she said.

On the withdrawal of her resignation, she said: "We will wait till 6 October. Let the formalities be over. We will take a decision after that." She said she would not take part in Friday's meeting as she would be "busy with flood relief".

Miss Banerjee said Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee had assured her that prices of kerosene, diesel and LPG would be reduced. Refusing to say if he had specified the amount of the cut,

she said: "We are happy with the assurance." Observers, however, say she is aware of the extent of the rollback and wouldn't have cut a deal otherwise.

The Trinamul leader was all praise for Mr Vajpayee for his 'initiative and assurance'.

Miss Banerjee said she had demanded the rollback "not as a minister", but as a Trinamul worker and an "ordinary person". The Prime Minister's assurance will "benefit the people of the country", she said.

If the rollback comes about, it will cause considerable embarrassment to the CPI-M. The party, perhaps in anticipation of such a move and the political mileage Miss Banerjee would derive from it, had said earlier in the day that her demand was just a "political gimmick" and that she was "more interested in Article 356".

"Miss Banerjee's gimmick may lead to a marginal rollback, only to mislead the people," said CPI-M Politburo member Mr Anil Biswas. He alleged that Miss Banerjee was "not at all serious" about people's plight. Had she been so, he said, she'd have opposed the Centre's "anti-people" economic policy.

Compromise may cost govt Rs 2,150 cr

NEW DELHI, Oct. 3. — The Prime Minister's concessions to Miss Mamata Banerjee may cost Rs 2,150 crore over a six-month period, say petroleum ministry sources.

This is calculated on the basis of a possible rollback of Rs 10 in LPG (Rs 300 crore), Re 1 in kerosene (Rs 600 crore) and 50 paise in diesel (Rs 1,250 crore). If the petrol price is slashed by Re 1 as well, there will be an additional burden of Rs 425 crore.

Petroleum minister Mr Ram Naik refused comment on the possibility of a rollback, saying the calculations for the hike were made based on all considerations, including the likelihood of a demand for rollback.

He said he had no information if a rollback formula was being worked out with Miss Banerjee, adding that the Prime Minister was the best judge of the situation.

The Prime Minister would not take any decision without consulting his Cabinet colleagues, he said. — SNS

■ Editorial: Oil hike, page 6

■ NDA wary of more Mamata antics post-Putin, page 8

THE STATESMAN

4 OCT 2000

Rock and rollback

SAY THIS for Mamata Banerjee: she knows how to get what she wants. The critics have had their say. And most of what they say is not wrong. Ms Banerjee is still fixated on Bengal. Every decision is reviewed not from a national perspective but on the basis of how it will play in Calcutta. Nor does she care for the big picture: an economically strong and self-reliant India cannot afford to continue with a regime of subsidies. Yes, there is a case for protecting the poor. But India's subsidy-regime crosses all reasonable limits. Kerosene in India, for instance, is far cheaper than the same product in Pakistan or Bangladesh, and even Ms Banerjee will concede that these countries are poorer than India. But from her perspective, any populist stunt that gets her an immediate reward is of more value than a long-term view of India's economic interests.

Equally, it is hard to deny that once you come to terms with Ms Banerjee's rather limited worldview, you have to give her credit for coming out on top of most confrontations. This time around, all the pundits had predicted that there would be no rollback and that Ms Banerjee would be told to lump it. By persisting with her demand and by beating down the Prime Minister's emissary, Ms Banerjee has demonstrated that the pundits were wrong. Mr Vajpayee may have been motivated by two factors. One: even though the general point about reducing subsidies is well-taken, never before had kerosene prices gone up by so large a quantum. And two: Ms Banerjee had made her position clear. As Assembly elections approach in West Bengal, she is beginning to find her BJP links something of a liability. To stand any chance of defeating the Left Front, she needs the minority vote and the Congress vote bank, as shrunk as it might be. If the Prime Minister had not given in, she would have left the NDA in a blaze of glory — and the loss would have been the BJP's.

Nevertheless, the rollback is bad news for the NDA. Over the last few months, the Prime Minister had conveyed the impression that no matter how insidious his critics within the Sangh parivar were, he was firmly in control of the allies. Mr Vajpayee will be concerned by the fact that while Ms Banerjee made the most noise, Chandrababu Naidu also held a press conference to denounce the price hike. Once the allies smell blood and know that they can get the Government to go back on its policies, the NDA will find it hard to remain either stable or effective. Mr Vajpayee may have had no choice but to give in this time but it will take just one more about-turn or rollback for the Government to seem much shakier than it appears now.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 OCT 2000

Advisers tell Mamata not to snap ties with Vajpayee

Suspense over pullout

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, Oct. 5: Trinamul leader Mamata Banerjee will not revoke her and Ajit Panja's resignations in deference to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's wishes as the Centre "has failed to keep its commitment on a rollback of the petroleum price hike".

In a hint of her resolve, Mamata has returned to Calcutta. Telephones the additional phone she was given as railway minister. The 14 commandos of the Railway Protection Force posted at her residence left in the afternoon, each having been gifted a bag, a diary and a greetings card signed by Mamata.

After Vajpayee made it clear yesterday that her demand for rollback will be addressed, if at all, only on his return from Mumbai, Mamata is left with little option than to carry out her threat of withdrawing from the National Democratic Alliance.

Her advisers were counselling restraint, even telling her to find some way of returning to the ministry after obtaining an assurance from Vajpayee that a rollback would be considered at the Prime Minister's convenience.

Evidence that such a line of thinking does exist in the Trinamul appeared in a Panja statement on a TV programme. He said since Vajpayee had promised a second look at petroleum prices after his return from Mumbai, his

word should be respected.

This group pointed out to Mamata the advantages of being in power and warned her of the consequences of unfulfilled promises about creating railway jobs for Bengal. The ruling CPM will lose no time to highlight this failure.

The downside to a return to the Cabinet after yesterday's humiliation where Vajpayee sent the message that she can come back only on his terms is the loss of face. Vajpayee has not offered her a half-decent facesaver.

Another is the danger of a repetition of the same drama, of more intensity, when the time comes for raising railway tariff with Mamata as minister. If Vajpayee doesn't do a third flip, the road of return to the Cabinet is as

good as closed for Mamata.

Whether she will stay out of the ministry but stay in the NDA is the question she would be expected to address at tomorrow's news conference. But to keep the negotiating window open, she may choose not to announce a break with the NDA just yet. Party sources were saying she does not wish to take any step that might destabilise the government. If there was a message in this, it was fuzzy since her pullout is no threat to the government's majority.

Mamata has chosen not to clear the muddle until tomorrow. She has been avoiding the media for the past couple of days. Throughout the afternoon and evening today, she kept herself locked in her room writing poems.

THE TELEGRAPH

6 OCT 2000

Trinamul, Cong get cozy as Sonia okays *mahajot*

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 4. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi today authorised Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury to negotiate with Miss Mamata Banerjee on the formation of the anti-Left "grand alliance" in West Bengal.

The Congress president, however, put in a rider that there could be no direct or indirect link with the BJP in the alliance, a condition that the Pradesh Congress leaders have apparently agreed to.

With Mrs Gandhi's go-ahead and last evening's meeting between Mr Khan Chowdhury and Miss Banerjee, the distinction between the Trinamul Congress and its parent state unit looked increasingly blurred.

Today, the newly-elected Rajya Sabha MP, Mr Jayanta Bhattacharya of the Trinamul Congress, was seen chatting informally with reporters at Mr Khan Chowdhury's residence, while Miss Banerjee, addressing a press conference at Rail Bhavan, happily introduced two Congress MLAs, known to be Mr Somen Mitra's loyalists, as her "colleagues".

At a press conference on the proposed "grand alliance", the PCC president, Mr Khan Chowdhury, said: "Without sacrificing our ideology, we are in for a grand alliance ... Miss Banerjee knows me, I know her. If there is any understand-

ing, that will be between us."

To repeated questions on whether the WBPC has agreed to the no-truck-with-BJP condition, Mr Khan Chowdhury gave a reply that could be open to interpretations.

He said: "I am saying categorically that we have nothing to do with the BJP. We will talk to Miss Banerjee and to no one else." But, "sitting in Delhi, you think of one kind of reality. In West Bengal, the reality is otherwise."

And Mr Khan Chowdhury's protegee and the former PCC president, Mr Somen Mitra, made things curiously say-

■ State BJP watches grand alliance move closely, page 4
■ Mamata won't leave govt, page 8

ing, "so long as we are in the Congress, we will go by the directives of the high command".

He was quick to add though, that the expression "so long" did not mean they were planning to leave the party.

Asked if it was right to talk about an alliance with the Trinamul Congress, which is a partner in the NDA government at the Centre, Mr Mitra said: "Today is not the final day in politics. Miss Banerjee is in the NDA today, and as of today we don't have any alliance."

Mr Khan Chowdhury and Mr

Mitra called on Mrs Gandhi this morning to discuss the "grand alliance" with her. The meeting came after Miss Banerjee called on Mr Khan Chowdhury last evening.

"With Miss Banerjee I had a frank discussion," Mr Khan Chowdhury said. She had taken certain steps which were praiseworthy, he felt.

"I have told Mrs Gandhi that if we have to make the organisation stronger, we'll have to follow in the footsteps of Miss Banerjee. The Congress president has expressed full confidence in me and given me the go-ahead."

The Congress spokesman, Mr Ajit Jogi, too said the central leadership had no objection to the PCC president's talking with Miss Banerjee. "Mr Khan Chowdhury is the PCC president and a senior leader of the party. He is free to discuss with Miss Banerjee."

It was the turn today of the PCC working president, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, to welcome the "grand alliance" proposal. The idea was originally his, he claimed. "I had always maintained that neither the Congress nor the Trinamul Congress alone can remove the Left Front from the state. We have to come together," he said.

But then, if Miss Banerjee touches the BJP with her right hand and the Congress with her left hand, "that sort of an arrangement cannot work".

THE STATESMAN

4 MAY 2000

DMK retracts, gives PM a free hand

Govt. concerned over Pak attempts to fish in Lankan waters

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Blood may be thicker than water but the bogey of Pakistan is the thickest of them all. Forsaking for the moment the emotive pull of ethnic solidarity with the Tamils of Sri Lanka, Dravidian stalwart M. Karunanidhi on Friday said *seri*—"OK"—to the Centre's request for a free hand to deal with the emerging crisis in the island state. Emerging from a 90-minute meeting with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, the Tamil Nadu chief minister announced that his party "would not tie the hands of the Centre". This perceptible shift in the DMK's position is being seen as a response to the Centre's fears—expressed on Thursday and again in the meeting with Karunanidhi—that Colombo might turn to Pakistan and Israel for arms in case India does not respond to its appeal for help.

At the same time, Mr Karunanidhi made it clear he did not favour armed intervention or any kind of help being offered to the Sri Lankan forces battling it out with the Tamil Tigers in the Jaffna peninsula.

In a carefully-worded statement, Mr Karunanidhi maintained it was the Centre's prerogative "to take any approach in the interest of the nation... we do not want to interfere with that." But he also cautioned that "we should not forget the past". It was clear the chief minister was referring to New Delhi's misadventure in 1987, when Indian soldiers assisted the Sri Lankan army in its fight against the LTTE.

The PM's meeting with Mr Karunanidhi, coming a day after a similar meeting with Tamil political parties, was meant to appease the BJP's key regional allies unhappy



STATE AND THE UNION: Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi presents a shawl to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Friday as they meet to discuss the Sri Lankan problem in New Delhi on Friday. Looking on are home minister L.K. Advani and defence minister George Fernandes.

at not being consulted earlier on the Sri Lanka issue. The Centre, it is learnt, reiterated at both these meetings that India would not extend military help to the besieged Sri Lankan soldiers, nor would it sell arms to Colombo. The issue of

humanitarian aid, however, was left open. At the same time, the diplomatic and strategic implications in case other countries like Pakistan step in to bail out Sri Lanka were also explained.

While Mr Karunanidhi described

his discussions with Vajpayee as "free and frank", he had made it clear on Thursday that he did not favour any move which would harm the Sri Lankan Tamils.

► See Edit: Colombo Plan, Page 18
► If Palaly falls... Page 17

K.K. Laskar

THE TIMES OF INDIA

6 MAY 2000

Why DMK had to distance itself from LTTE

G C Shekhar
Chennai, May 16

HC-12 17/5
THE MDMK and the PMK now stand completely isolated within the NDA following Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Karunanidhi's categorical remarks that he would not prefer the LTTE to preside over a Tamil Eelam since it was not the ideal representative of Sri Lankan Tamils.

By coming out openly in the state Assembly that the DMK had always kept its distance from the LTTE and viewed it with trepidation due to its penchant to bump of fellow Tamil leaders, Mr. Karunanidhi has made his strongest statement against the Tigers.

According to observers, Mr Karunanidhi's remarks amount to finally toeing Delhi's line on the Sri Lankan crisis, after sending a conflicting signal that he would be happy if Eelam was formed after war or talks. Such an open change of stand could have come about, observers feel, only after the Centre sternly told Tamil Nadu to fall in line with Delhi's policy.

Such a message from Delhi would have become all the

more urgent and necessary in view of the relentless pro-LTTE propaganda being carried on by two other NDA constituents -- the MDMK and the PMK. So by getting the DMK to express its strongest reservations against the LTTE in public, the Vajpayee Government has succeeded in isolating the MDMK and PMK, which are trying to whip up an illusion that entire Tamil Nadu was agog over the Lankan crisis and that the last Tamil was behind the Tigers.

News Analysis

Mr Karunanidhi's refusal to view the LTTE as the ideal leader of the Lanka Tamils means two things in the immediate context. One, the Tigers cannot count on Tamil Nadu to be a base for their activities and nor could they expect the DMK to give it moral support in its present battle or the formation of an Eelam in future.

Secondly, the DMK could have come out with such a strong statement only because it is privy to sensitive information that the LTTE would not be able to convert its Elephant Pass victory into recapturing Jaffna. It also sends a

message to the Tigers that they would be better off if a solution to the ethnic crisis involved other Tamil groups and political parties as well.

In the last week, Mr Karunanidhi had been caught off guard on the LTTE question. After saying he would be happy over the formation of Eelam, which went against India's foreign policy, he had to correct himself that he had only meant the resolution of the ethnic problem.

Apparently, the DMK chief could not resist the temptation of playing the defender of Tamil rights and was unwilling to let the MDMK usurp that role which he had donned for over almost two decades, ever since the Lankan issue boiled up.

In correcting the DMK's drift on the LTTE, Mr Karunanidhi would also have been impelled by the fact that in spite of the emotive strings attached to it, the Lankan ethnic tangle has never been a major election issue in the state. Hence, even if the MDMK and PMK attempt to whip up some emotion on the issue now they would never be able to sustain it till the Assembly elections. Moreover, the average Tamil voter's sympathy for the Lankan Tamils has ebbed considerably since 1989 and the support for the Tigers has completely evaporated.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 MAY 2000

Mamata forces BJP to settle for 23 seats

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 20

THE WEST Bengal BJP unit, under pressure from the Prime Minister's Office and the party high command, today settled for 23 Calcutta Municipal Corporation seats against its original demand of 45.

The Trinamool Congress will put up candidates in 109 of the 141 seats. The remainder would be set aside for other anti-CPI(M) forces.

Earlier, Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee had threatened to pull out of the NDA, after seat-sharing talks with the BJP hit a logjam.

The seats deal, announced separately by Banerjee and the BJP's Rahul Sinha, was hammered out after the two parties burnt the midnight oil, literally, to arrive at this agreement.

A beaming Banerjee later told reporters: "I am grateful to Atal Behari Vajpayee for the understanding reached."

It all began with Banerjee threatening to quit the ministry. To signal that she was serious about pulling out of the NDA, the Railway Minister cleared all her files on Thursday, cancelled official engagements for the day and issued a late-

night ultimatum to the BJP.

This prompted the PMO and the BJP high command to swing into action. Urgent summons were sent to State party leaders Rahul Sinha, P D Chitlangiya and Shanti Lal Jain.

Immediately after they arrived here late last night, key Vajpayee aide Sudheendra Kulkarni escort-

ed them for a meeting with party chief Kushabhau Thakre.

The pep talk on avoiding a clash with the Trinamool over, they went in for the crucial meeting with Banerjee and Sudip Bandhopadhyaya, which began at 1 am and continued till 4 am.

Later in the day, there were another two rounds of talks. The discussions were wrapped up with the Prime Minister having a word with the Trinamool leaders and the State BJP leaders confabulating with their party chief.

It was during this period that the seat-sharing "arrangement", as worked out by Banerjee, was arrived at.

The Trinamool agreed to give the BJP four extra seats to the 19 it was ready to concede earlier. The

Trinamool plans to field more than 50 women and give 20 tickets to minority community candidates, Banerjee later said.

The heartburns in the two parties sprang from their individual ambitions to assert their presence in the June 25 polls. Banerjee saw Calcutta as her bastion, wanted to use the polls to signal her dominance, particularly after the *Mahajot* failed to get off the ground. She was also peeved because the BJP had unilaterally announced its decision to field 45 candidates.

Banerjee, who has had a running battle with Union Minister of State for Communications Tapan Sikdar, believed that some BJP men led by him were trying to displace the Trinamool as the State's major anti-Left force.

CMC Polls

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 MAY 2000

Mamata took BJP into confidence before planning alliance move

SANJAY BASAK
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 4. — The railway minister set the anti-CPM *mahajot* (grand alliance) ball rolling "only after a green light was shown by the saffron camp".

Sources disclosed Miss Mamata Banerjee proposed the Trinamul-

BJP-Congress axis after discussions with the BJP top brass. The BJP is working on a plan to storm the red bastion on the Trinamul's steam. "We have been experimenting in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa and Tamil Nadu. Perhaps it is time to take our presence felt in West Bengal," a senior BJP leader declared. For his party, Miss Banerjee is the

"natural choice to lead the NDA" in the state. "The Trinamul is the main opposition. We do not have much presence. She is the accepted leader in West Bengal."

Still, the BJP has its own ideas about the *mahajot*.

To begin with, it says, state Congressmen must first dump their party. "We have no problems strik-

ing an alliance with Congressmen. But they should delink themselves from the party," a senior saffron leader said. These Congressmen, he suggested, could float a regional outfit and then hitch on to the NDA bandwagon.

This split in the Congress is, for the BJP, only logical.

Explained the leader: "It would not

be on principle proper for us and also for the Congress to fight at the Centre and play friends in the state. We are all for ending the Marxists' rule in West Bengal. And the Congressmen in the state can't possibly do so because their party chief, Sonajji, is dependent on the CPI-M general secretary, Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet, at the Centre."

Also, as the BJP sees it, the grand alliance is needed, but there's a hurry. The Assemblé elections due only in March 1977, and the haste now might see the burst during the polls. Ideally, the launch of the *mahajot* and split in the Congress "should coincide with the elections," the leader said.

THE STATESMAN

- 5 APR 2000

Trinamool youth leader shot dead

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, April 1

TRINAMOOL CONGRESS leader and president of the youth wing of the party in North 24-Parganas, Bikash Basu, was shot dead at Ichhapur on Monday. The 48-year-old teacher of North Land High School was preparing to attend a party meeting at Kancharapara along with his fellow party member Bijoy Mukherjee when armed youths surrounded them and fired at Basu from point-blank range. He was rushed to the nearby Ichhapur Metal Hospital where he was declared dead.

In protest, the Trinamool Congress has called a 12-hour

bandh in North 24-Parganas on Monday while the youth wing of the party has decided to observe the day as 'Kala Divas'.

Trinamool chief and Railways Minister Mamata Banerjee received the news of the murder while she was on board the inau-

Back in Calcutta, Banerjee rushed to Ichhapur to take stock of the situation.

As news of the killing spread, angry Trinamool workers took to the streets, blocking railway tracks and roads. When the police arrived, they attacked the cops

According to police, Basu was sitting in a tea stall with a few party workers when two youths demanded a certificate from him. Basu was also the councillor of Ward 4 of Barrackpur Municipality. The Trinamool leader asked the youths to come to his residence at Netaji Pally later. At this point, the two

Bandh call in North 24-Parganas

Trinamool district observer Jyotipriya Basu Mullick alleged that Basu was killed by goons hired by local CPI(M) leaders. He said that an attempt on Basu's life was made in April 13, 1995. Senior Trinamool leader Sovandev Chattapadhyay added that Basu's murder was just the beginning of the violence that was in store in the runup to the Assembly polls.

with stones and damaged a RAF van. The police resorted to lathi charge and fired a few rounds in the air. Fifty people, including 12 women, were injured. Later, superintendent of police Kuldip Singh went to the spot with other senior officers and brought the situation under control.

gural Rupashi Bangla train to Purulia. "I had left Calcutta with a happy heart after inaugurating the broad gauge line to Bankura. I thought I would not talk about politics on this trip. But after I heard the news of the murder, I am indeed sad," Banerjee told reporters on the train.

Any which way she can

The kaleidoscopic changes in Opposition politics in West Bengal over the past fortnight prove that Mamata Banerjee has mastered the art of garnishing with strategy and stunt what gifts the stars have delivered, writes UDAY BASU

WHAT'S the secret of Mamata Banerjee's success? While most may oversimplify matters by pointing to a combination of three "S"s — stars, strategy and stunts — CPI-M state secretary Anil Biswas is a lot more forthright. He says the *raison d'être* of her brand of politics is a single "S" thrice repeated — namely, stunts, stunts and stunts.

"Stunts are the be-all and end-all of Trinamul politics," he asserts. It is shorn of any philosophy, any ideology. The Congress for long had an ideological basis. Even the BJP has an ideology, whatever its worth."

The kaleidoscopic changes in Opposition politics in West Bengal over the past fortnight prove the Trinamul chief has mastered the art. For her, the political windfall this time around began as a gift of the stars which she garnished with strategy and stunts. The result? An upheaval in the state Congress, something Miss Banerjee has, for the past 18 months, devoutly wished for. It also unleashed the process of redefining political equations among the Opposition parties.

Let us first examine how the stars contrived to create a political situation that even Miss Banerjee could not, by the wildest stretch of her imagination, have foreseen. Had she been able to, she wouldn't have gone, in all humility, to her sworn enemy, Jyoti Basu, urging him to throw his weight behind her scheme of things.

She had, in keeping with her tried method of springing surprises, announced (stunning even her colleagues in Calcutta) that Trinamul would field film star Mithun Chakraborty as its candidate for the Rajya Sabha elections. This move was prompted by the shrewd calculation that the people would look upon her kindly — whether it succeeded or not.

Were Mr Basu to get his party to approve Miss Banerjee's proposal, all credit would have gone to her and she would have been hailed as one capable of rising above narrow politics in championing West Bengal's interests. Were the move to fail, she would still have got enough material to paint the CPI-M as a narrow-minded party that couldn't rise above petty politics.

When Mithun Chakraborty himself dragged his feet at the prompting of his patron and state transport minister Subhas Chakraborty, Miss Banerjee waited for the Congress to select its candidate. It was sheer luck that the AICC fell in with her plan to deny nomination to two-time PCC chief and legislator Somen Mitra. Even till the evening before the last date for nomination, Trinamul leaders in Calcutta were on tenterhooks, waiting for a phone call from Miss Banerjee in Delhi to know whether the party would at all field a candidate.

A senior Trinamul leader then said: "We cannot give a walkover to the Congress. We have to field a candidate since we have three MLAs in addition to the lone BJP legislator."

With the stars having played their role, Miss Banerjee began to restructure her strategy. Skills towards which end she has improved vastly over the years. It was the stars which catapulted her to the centrestage of Opposition politics in West Bengal. Her career graph began to rise phenomenally from the day some alleged CPI-M activists made the mistake of raining lathis on her head and hands. She became the rallying point for anti-CPI-M forces.

Initially her strategy was crude. She overworked her shrill tongue and resorted to histri-

onics of the low order. Her blockade of Writers' Buildings, which led to the death of 13 youths, boomeranged on her. That was the turning point. She took special care to shed the image of being an architect of the politics of violence.

Her elevation to the office of railway minister brought about a transformation. For the past few months, her main slogan has been: "Don't mix development with politics." With this mantra, she shared the platform with Left Front stalwarts — Mr Basu, Mr Chakraborty and Kshiti Goswami, state PWD minister. She even partly succeeded in driving a wedge between Mr Chakraborty and Alimuddin Street, on the one hand, and Mr Goswami and his CPI-

M colleagues in the cabinet, on the other.

But how serious is Miss Banerjee with her new-fangled development politics? Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, PCC working president, has doubts. "It's strange Miss Banerjee forgot this slogan when she had been opposing the Left Front government's developmental schemes."

Be that as it may, Miss Banerjee has been playing her cards adroitly, though without expecting immediate, dramatic results.

The moment fortune favoured her in the form of widening fissures in the PCC over the nomination of the party's Rajya Sabha nominee, Miss Banerjee went ahead with her mix of strategy and stunt. She and trusted lieutenant and Rajya Sabha candidate Jayanta Bhattacharya worked overtime to cause a split among Congress legislators. And the impossible happened. Miss Banerjee joined hands with Somen Mitra who, it is widely known, played a key role in her ouster from the party.

Once she got her candidate elected, turning political arithmetic topsy turvy, she pulled from her hat one surprise after another. The first in a series was the proposal of a "Mahajot" (grand alliance) by which she held out the olive branch to the entire Congress establishment. Many expected this move to be part of Miss Banerjee's grand design to render the Congress insignificant in West Bengal politics and portray her party as the true heir. But she caught everyone off guard by announcing that she would be happy if present PCC chief ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury became the chief minister of a grand alliance government.

For her detractors in the Congress, the announcement is nothing but a gambit, even if others see a touch of the genuine in this magnanimity.

Left Front critics believe the political developments of the past fortnight must have forced the CPI-M on to the backfoot. "No," says Anil Biswas. "Such developments occur in many places. There was the Praja Socialist Party which got a number of seats. There was also the Lok Sevak Party in Purulia. But both faded into oblivion. A similar fate is in store for the new formulations. The Trinamul is aligning with a group of Congress leaders who reek of the rotten politics of the 1970s. Leaders of both the parties separated for personal ambitions and they are uniting for the same cause."

Mr Biswas explains that the Congress split in West Bengal gave birth to the Trinamul purely because of the personal agenda of some leaders. "These two parties have virtually no offices. The residences of factional leaders function as party offices."

(The author is on the Staff of The Statesman.)



Mamata Banerjee: 'S' thrice repeated — stunts, stunts and stunts!

THE STATESMAN

3 2 APR 2001

Mamata brims with *mahajot* confidence

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, April 12. — The *mahajot* (grand alliance) of the Trinamul, Congress and the BJP will take shape, and all doubts about its formation will soon be cleared, Miss Mamata Banerjee declared today.

The Ghani Khan Chowdhury-Somen Mitra camp echoed the railway minister's views with the difference that it did not want to attach importance to the presence of the BJP in the alliance, since the latter's presence in the state "is insignificant".

On the other hand, followers of Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi said an alliance with the Trinamul would be possible only if the BJP is kept out or if it publicly announces it has no links with the RSS or the Sangh Parivar.

The Trinamul chief said only a grand alliance of anti-Left forces can dislodge the CPI-M-led Left Front government. "I am in regular touch with the PCC chief, Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury, regarding the formation of the alliance. I am not bothered about what any other leaders of the PCC say about the feasibility of the alliance. The debate whether the Congress can join the alliance with or without the participation of the BJP is an internal matter of the Congress and I have nothing to do with it," she said.

Miss Banerjee said the compulsions of regional politics are different from those of national politics. That is why the Congress could join the RJD government in Bihar even after having fought the elections as a rival of the RJD.

She felt the grand alliance — should it be formed and contest the polls — had the potential

to secure two-thirds majority in the Assembly.

Mr Das Munshi on the other hand, spent the day meeting with party MLAs and district leaders, and briefing them on his discussions with both Mrs Sonia Gandhi and Miss Mamata Banerjee.

Mr Saugata Roy, PCC vice president, said the high command was clear that no direct or indirect link with the BJP was acceptable in any alliance with the Trinamul.

"Mr Das Munshi explained to us that we are ready to forge an alliance with the Trinamul. If the BJP is a part of it, we would campaign against it in the coming civic elections, if not field candidates against the latter," Mr Roy said.

Mr Sultan Ahmed, close to Mr Khan Chowdhury and Mr Mitra, said no clear-cut strategy had been worked out till now on how the party could join the grand alliance with the BJP as a constituent. Negotiations were on between local leaders of both the Congress and the Trinamul for sharing seats for the polls for the 82 municipalities in May-June, he said.

According to insiders, one possibility would be to have an informal alliance with the Trinamul in the civic elections, and then chalk out a full-fledged policy before the Assembly elections scheduled in 2001.

Mr Manash Bhuniya, PCC general secretary and a Khan Chowdhury camp man, said the question of the BJP being part of the grand alliance was being deliberately dragged in to scuttle the formation of the *mahajot*.

"We are committed to our party and there will be no dilution of the policy of having no truck with the BJP," he said.

THE STATESMAN

13 APR 2000

India will seek deportation of Chhota Rajan, says Advani

HTF
13/10
HT Correspondent
New Delhi/Mumbai, October 12

INDIA WILL seek the deportation of the gangster, Chhota Rajan, from Thailand, Union Home Minister L.K. Advani said today. An MEA spokesperson said Thailand has been asked to keep Chota Rajan under "provisional arrest pending his extradition or deportation."

Mr Advani's statement indicates that while New Delhi is also pursuing extradition, it feels the lack of an extradition treaty with Thailand could be an obstacle.

Both the home and external affairs ministries sought to dispel criticism they were going slow on bringing back Rajan Sadashiv Nikalje, alias Chhota Rajan alias Vijay Kadam. Both ministries claimed they were working hard to complete the necessary paperwork.

The home ministry spokesperson said Chhota Rajan had been issued a show cause notice as to why his travel documents should not be revoked. The deadline for the notice is tomorrow. The Centre reportedly received the necessary documentation from Maharashtra following a telephone conversation between Mr Advani and Maharashtra deputy

chief minister Chaggan Bhujbal. Mr Advani was said to have told Mr Bhujbal that the papers the state government had sent earlier were incomplete. An MEA spokesperson, however, said his ministry was "actively" awaiting further documents from Mumbai.

MEA said a demarche had been "very recently" issued to Thailand. The demarche was "to

the effect that a final request for the extradition of Chota Rajan to India is being prepared" and would be forwarded shortly. The spokesperson said the Indian embassy in Thailand had "already taken action" to

revoke Chota Rajan's passport "as it was issued on the basis of false personal particulars." He said, "The Thai authorities have been informed about this." MEA spoke of pursuing both extradition and deportation, "whichever is feasible under Thai laws and regulations."

A joint commissioner of the Mumbai police has reportedly arrived in the capital to coordinate with MEA and the home ministry on the case. In Mumbai, the city police commissioner, M.N. Singh, said that if Chota Rajan's passport is revoked, he expected the gangster to be brought to Mumbai "in a day or two."



Both the home and external affairs ministries sought to dispel criticism they were going slow on bringing back Chhota Rajan. The ministries claimed they were working hard to complete the necessary paperwork

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 OCT 2000

Christianity is more about politics than religion: RSS

By Rajesh Ramachandran
The Times of India News Service

AGRA: Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh sarsanghchalak K.S. Sudarshan on Sunday came down heavily on the church, saying that today "Christianity is more about politics than religion". Insurgency in the north-east was a result of U.S. conspiracy with the help of the church, he said during a press conference at the end of the Rashtriya Raksha Mahashivir (national security grand camp) here.

Mr Sudarshan said that during the cold war, when India refused military bases for the U.S., it used the church to get access to the strategically important north-east. The church, he said, was part of the West's armies through which it could guide Christians into political action in domestic as well as international politics. Thus, he argued, an "indigenous church is essential for national security".

Interestingly, earlier at a public meeting, Mr Sudarshan hinted about the Congress involvement in bringing down the Babri Masjid. He said a fax message was sent by a senior leader from Maharashtra to the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao saying that RSS should not be solely blamed because even the "Congress kitchen cabinet was also involved in the destruction of the structure".

Calling for the Indianisation of Islam, Mr Sudarshan asked Muslim clergy to stop exploiting illiterate Muslims who are being told to call Hindus kafirs. He said just as the Muslims of Indonesia still carry Hindu names and honour their Hindu ancestry, Muslims of India also should accept Hindu gods as part of their ancestry.

Earlier, while addressing RSS volunteers, Mr Sudarshan vehemently opposed the Western model of development, capitalism and foreign investment. Later, at the press conference he explained that the RSS would in two years come out with an alternative model of development based on swadeshi principles.

Curiously, instead of blaming the BJP-led government for pursuing policies of globalisation, Mr Sudarshan defended it by saying that the government has three limitations: the policies of the former governments, the compulsions of coalition politics and a recalcitrant bureaucracy.

Thus the "balancing act of the Sangh"—supporting the BJP government and opposing its policies—was once again confirmed on Sunday. After giving a clean chit to the BJP-led government, Mr Sudarshan said, "Till an alternative model is unfolded, organisations like the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch will tell the government where it has gone wrong."

He also offered a new swadeshi slogan, "Work for everyone and water for every field." Expressing concern on the increasing poverty, Mr Sudarshan said information technology cannot mitigate hunger in villages.

All through the two-and-a-half hour programme, Union home minister L.K. Advani—along with other guests, including Uttar Pradesh chief minister Ram Prakash Gupta—sat in the sun away from the stage. Mr Advani was seen reciting the Sangh songs and doing the Sangh salute.

Amte to embark on a peace mission to Pak

The Times of India News Service

WARORA (Nagpur): His spinal chord stopped supporting him long ago. Two pacemakers keep his heart ticking. But the ageless activist of Anandvan is undaunted. He intends to embark on a mission to Pakistan soon, to restore peace across the border. His slogan will be "people for peace, peace for people".

"If all goes well, I should be celebrating my 87th birthday (on December 26) in Pakistan," Baba Amte, winner of Magasaysay Award, Gandhi Peace Prize and innumerable other honours, told this newspaper on Saturday. He has already applied for the visa and the Centre has granted him permission to visit the neighbouring country in his special vehicle donated by the Tatas.

indiatimes.com POLL

YESTERDAY'S POLL RESULTS
Should India mediate to resolve the West Asia crisis?

Yes	No	Can't say
47%	50%	3%

7,113 VOTES IN ALL

* The poll reflects the opinions of Net users who chose to participate, and not necessarily of the general public.

TODAY'S QUESTION

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

15 OCT 2000

Christianity now is less of Sudarshan sees virtues of religion and more politics' Gandhian economic philosophy

Hemendra Singh Bartwal
Agra, October 15

THE FUROR over the suggestion of a Swadeshi Church in India had hardly died down when RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan again made a controversial remark saying that Christianity today is "less of religion and more of politics".

"Because that politics is detrimental to the interest of our country, we oppose the policies of the church," he stated while replying to a query from a foreign journalist at the conclusion of the Rashtra Raksha Mahashivir here.

He said the Baptist Church was encouraging extremist activity in the North-East, which had given rise to separatist tendencies. It was the Americans who had first started promoting the foreign missions in the North-East decades ago with the idea of setting up

their military bases in the region to encircle the then USSR, he said.

The conversions carried out by the foreign missionaries in the North-East had resulted in the Hindus becoming a minority there. And wherever the Hindus were in a minority, separatist tendencies had sprung up, he stressed.

Referring to the Vatican statement issued after the World Peace Conference that other religions were not equal to Christianity, he said they must at least acknowledge the validity of other religions and that they too offer the path to salvation.

Emphasising the need for Indian Christians to free themselves from the domination of foreigners, he said they must create their own separate Churches here.

He said he was certain that most Christians in India did not agree with the Vatican's view that other religions were inferior to

Christianity. Such people must make an effort to break away from the Roman Catholic Church, he said. For the first time, perhaps, the RSS chief made several references to the words of Mahatma Gandhi, B. R. Ambedkar, Jawaharlal Nehru and even quoted an incident

from the life of former Prime Minister Indira Gandhi while speaking on the issue of Christians and Muslims.

He emphasised that the Muslims and Christians in India must attempt to assimilate with the ancient culture and identity of the country in order to merge with its mainstream.

Both these religions may continue to pursue their religions but they must at least acknowledge that their forefathers were Hindus born here and not outsiders, Mr Sudarshan said

HT Correspondent
Agra, October 15

LABELLING THE country's economic policy as unsound, RSS chief K. S. Sudarshan today criticised the Vajpayee Government for adopting the Western model of development, which according to him, was totally unsuited to the country.

Village-based economy, as suggested by Mahatma Gandhi, was ideal for the country and the RSS was working on a model for the same, the RSS chief said.

"Aping the US developmental model, based on capitalist thinking, would not help India, which has an unemployed population of 10 crore," he said

Ridiculing the government's "over-enthusiasm" for the spread of information technology, he

questioned whether taking computers to every village would provide food and jobs to all in a country where 75 per cent of the population were farmers.

Though Sudarshan avoided direct reference to the BJP-led government, his displeasure with its failure in implementing the policy of swadeshi — as advocated by the Sangh — was evident.

The need of the hour was to evolve a self-reliant swadeshi model of development, which would be India's specific, the RSS chief said. Such a model should also be village-centric whereby agriculture and agro-industry would form the base of the economy.

Recalling Mahatma Gandhi's suggestion for a village-based economy, Sudarshan said the RSS was preparing such a model, to be called the 'Swadeshi Vikas Path'. The model, being prepared with

the help of experts, would be ready in two years time, the Sarsangchalak said.

The switchover would take time and would be brought about gradually, he said. The RSS would reach out to rural masses to inculcate a feeling of self-development and confidence, he added.

RSS sources confirmed that the organisation was planning to launch a nation-wide swadeshi movement. Mass mobilisation of Sangh cadres would be done and they would visit villages and towns all over the country to instil a feeling of swadeshi, the sources said.

During today's meeting, Sudarshan again talked about the need for a 'Swadeshi Church' and the 'Indianisation' of Islam.

Speaking to newsmen later, he said the Vatican should at least admit that other religions are equal to Christianity and also offer the path to salvation.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 OCT 2000

BRIEFLY...**One injured in Pak shelling in Uri sector**

Srinagar: One person was critically injured and four houses damaged as Pakistani troops resorted to shelling in Uri sector of north Kashmir, official sources said on Monday. Mohammad Rafiq (30) was injured when Pakistani troops shelled Indian installations in Uri sector on Sunday targeting Hajjpeer and Bonyar areas, the sources

Advani must clarify RSS remark: Congress

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Oct. 16: Objecting strongly to the statement by the RSS chief, Mr K.S. Sudershan, about Christians and Muslims, the Congress on Monday asked Union home minister L.K. Advani to make clarification about this as the speech was delivered in his presence at the RSS' Rashtra Raksha Mahashivr (grand camp on national security) held at Agra.

The Union "home minister must clarify what he announced with her of all and their

harmony and mutual respect. The RSS doctrine goes against the very ethos of our liberal democracy, he added.

"The nation is well aware of the terror campaign to intimidate religious minorities carried out by outfits like the VHP and Bajrang Dal. What adds a serious dimension is the presence of Mr Advani during the concluding remarks of the RSS chief at the convention," he said.

He alleged the prescriptions of the RSS chief were calculated to create "disaffection and distrust" among different religious communities and would further heighten prevailing sense of insecurity among the minorities.

"The pronouncement made at Agra will only embolden the fanat-

ic within the Sangh Parivar who have targeted Christians in the recent months," he said.

While launching a scathing attack on the Sangh Parivar, another Congress spokesman Anil Shastri said such forces raise their heads only when there was instability and disorder in the society.

He also accused the National Democratic Alliance government over its alleged failure on all fronts and coming out with advertisement claiming that the BJP-led coalition had performed well during the last one year.

The coalition government also lacked cohesiveness as its partners were taking different stands on various national issues, Mr Sharma said.

'Vajpayee will lead BJP in 2004 Lok Sabha polls'

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Oct. 16: The BJP on Monday brushed aside reports on the issue of a successor to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, saying he will lead the party to victory in the next Lok Sabha elections in 2004 as well. "Vajpayee is with us and would lead the party in the 2004 Lok Sabha elections," party vice-president Jena Krishnamurthy told reporters, following publication of a report that the RSS favoured Mr Advani as Mr Vajpayee's successor.

Besides there also was an opinion poll on the issue along similar lines in another national newspaper.

Mr Krishnamurthy said, "It is too premature to discuss the issue of succession to Vajpayee. It was the unanimous view that he should be the leader and it was this opinion of the party that was expressed by L.K. Advani at the 1995 BJP session at Mumbai that Vajpayee would be its prime ministerial candidate."

As to appointment of a successor, he said "we are a democratic party and no leader appoints his successor."

He said, Mr Vajpayee's recovery from the knee operation was "progressing satisfactorily and he is likely to return to Delhi on October 20."

Mr Krishnamurthy refused to comment on the RSS chief's comments on minorities, saying he still has to go through the details.

"Until I get the full details of his remark, I would not like to comment on it," Mr Krishnamurthy said.

He said as far as the BJP was concerned, the minorities should feel that they are part of the mainstream and not have any reservation.

"BJP does not consider a person's religion as eligibility for joining the party. You can have your own way of worship but as long as you subscribe to the ideology of the party and you are above 18 years of age, the person is eligible for membership," he said.

He said every citizen in the country is part of the nation and has equal rights and obligations. "BJP's doors are open to everyone," Mr Krishnamurthy added.

The Hindus in Times

RSS repackaged

THE TASKS to which the RSS has rededicated itself might have unnerved a less purposeful organisation. But for an outfit which has had to face accusations ranging from complicity in Mahatma Gandhi's assassination to keeping a distance from the freedom movement, which would have been unbearable for any other outfit, the latest agenda might not initially appear to be too difficult. In fact, with a friendly Government at the Centre and in some of the states, it may well feel that a chance to achieve what it wants may never come again. However, there are contradictory aspects in its programme which may not be easy to resolve. The reason is that there are two items on it. The first is an old one calling for the implementation of its philosophy of 'cultural nationalism' and the other is the need to refrain from doing so in a manner which will embarrass the Vajpayee Government.

While the exhortation to the Muslims to accept Hindu mythological heroes as part of their 'cultural' heritage, as in Indonesia, is an old one, the RSS' latest preoccupation with Christians has made it come up with ideas which have a more specific connotation. It is not only that the suggestion for a *swadeshi* church can be resented by a community, whose faith is claimed to be older than that of Europeans, as unwarranted advice on its institutional framework; it is also a slur which is more explicit in the allegations of subversive activity by Christians in the North-east. The broad hint in these statements — that the Muslims and Christians cannot be regarded as 'nationalists' unless they 'Indianise' or 'Hinduise' themselves — is as old as the RSS, and the Hindu Right-wing leaders and organisations like Savarkar and Hindu Mahasabha. What is new is the boost which such ideas have received because of the BJP's present stint in power.

The RSS' realisation, however, that it cannot press its agenda too eagerly in case it has an unsettling effect on the Vajpayee Government has complicated its task, for it cannot be too forthright about its own propaganda. It is not only in the 'cultural' field that this restraint has to be observed, but also in the economic sector where it will voice its opposition to globalisation but will not force the issue. The same ambivalence is evident in its desire to construct the Ram temple but only after the judicial verdict. Arguably, the taming of the BJP because of the compulsions of power now includes the RSS as well. The only difference is that while the BJP is at present also restrained in its utterances, the RSS has no such need. The result is that its divisive thesis will continue to sow seeds of doubt among Indians of different faiths.

RSS: *BJP toes Sudershan line*

5/8/10

(Continued from page 1)

at their alliance with the BJP.”

Addressing a Press conference, the CPI general secretary, Mr AB Bardhan, said under the rule of Sangh Parivar, “education and culture are being saffronised and myths are being substituted for objective and scientific history and archaeology”. He called upon the progressive sections of society to “form a broad popular movement to fight the communal designs of the Vajpayee government, RSS and other members of the Sangh Parivar.”

The CPI general secretary also termed the one-year rule of the Vajpayee government as “complete failure” in the field of economy and law & order, “affecting the life of the common man”. Mr Bardhan accused the government of surrendering to the “pressure tactics of the USA by diluting India’s non-alignment foreign policy” and “bowing to WTO pressure which will affect the economic interests of the country”.

The CPI-ML general secretary, Mr Dipanakar Bhattacharya, called the RSS leader’s statements a “thinly disguised attempt to lend an element of psuedo-philosophical gloss to the crude politics of religious cleansing being preached and practised by outfits like the VHP and Bajrang Dal under the political patronage of parties like the Shiv Sena and the BJP.”

The BJP, refusing to make any direct comment on Mr Sudarshan’s statement, more or less echoed the RSS chief’s line. Senior BJP leader, Mr JP Mathur, said today all Muslims in the country were converts primarily from Hindus.

The party asked the minorities to shed their minority complex and accept the society as their own. The BJP’s concept of the country’s mainstream included a feeling that the minorities should not develop an outlook of being ever in a minority, the senior party vice-president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, said.

In the context of the minority issue attracting attention, Mr Mathur said he did not consider Miss Mamata Banerjee attending the conference by the Shahi Imam of Delhi was minority appeasement.

She had not gone there as a representative of the NDA, he said. Regarding the Union home minister’s presence in the RSS meet, he said Mr Advani participated as a swayamsewak.

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JAI KISAN

NDA makes kulaks — and rats — happy

THE government successfully postponed an oil price roll back even though Mamata Banerjee, a crucial ally, was playing hardball. And, mind you, Mamata wasn't asking anything for her narrow constituency. So, how come the same government caved in almost the moment the Akalis, speaking exclusively for rich Punjab farmers, started making noises? Where's the overwhelming political compulsion? The Akalis cannot bring down the government, not even shake it up violently. True, SS Dhindsa threatened to resign. And if he had the Cabinet would have had no Sikhs. Big deal. Such calculations are important only when political voice behind them are strong. Which isn't the case. Thus coalition arithmetic does not really explain why Punjab's rich farmers have been gifted Rs 300 crore out of taxpayers' pockets (remember, farmers pay no taxes; they also pay a pittance for power and water). What probably does is the hold Indian kulaks have on *all* political parties, across the "ideological" and geographical spectrum. It was no coincidence that the NDA government quickly agreed to Andhra tobacco growers' bellicose demands that their crop be bought by state agencies at a premium over market prices. Or that in state after state, power reform is being held back because no chief minister has the gumption to hike user charges.

The problem the Punjab farmers had been agitating about was that the *low* quality portion of their paddy crop was not being bought up in entirety, and the price was less than that for the superior variety. The government was right in doing so because, first, that is what any sensible policy advocates and, second, poor quality, unmilled paddy from the last season is rotting in godowns; there was no need for more of the same. The farmers thought this was outrageous, because they are accustomed to the government buying whatever they produce at more or less the price they ask. And, of course, government has now done exactly that — the minimum support price for sub-standard paddy will now be the same as for the superior variety and procurement will be higher. Since there is a general situation of foodgrain abundance, with FCI storage space at a premium, most low quality paddy, which millers do not want, will rot, as it did last year. Rats and rich farmers will be very happy.

But at least the rats did not create the problem. The poor quality paddy grown in Punjab is a direct result of its rich farmers' altering crop planting schedules, so as to take advantage of cheap migrant workforce. The early planting, in May, means the crop cycle ends in September, before the monsoon is over. The resultant high water content of the crop is what degrades its quality. One solution is for the farmers to plant other crops. Others will have to come from agricultural experts, of which we have many, and very competent ones, too. Why go through all that hassle, though? Rich farmers know the government will jump at every revving of their tractors.

THE STATESMAN

19 OCT 2000

EARLY DAYS

Milosevic wounded but dangerous

THE Yugoslav revolution is only days old, and still in need of consolidation. A new government is not yet in place; Milosevic's supporters remain entrenched in government institutions and the political establishment. Kostunica and the Democratic Opposition of Serbia (DOS) have just concluded a deal with Milosevic's Socialist Party for the constitution of an interim government, pending elections in December. But it is unclear how much leverage this gives Milosevic, a wily and tenacious survivor who is lurking somewhere in the background. The army has stayed neutral so far but its top brass is packed with Milosevic henchmen; Gen Nebojsa Pavlovic, its chief of staff, does not recognise Kostunica's authority. Meanwhile, workers are forcibly seizing factories, businesses, banks, universities, and the civil service from their old Milosevic appointed bosses, with considerable scope for abuse of power as well as the upstaging of Kostunica by rivals within the DOS. The democratic opposition managed to dislodge the Milosevic regime because of the unity it displayed. The falling apart of that unity and the emergence of a naked power struggle within its camps could endanger the revolution and portend anarchy for Yugoslavia — causing Kostunica to admit that the country at present is like a "volcano".

In mitigation, however, there have been a number of positive developments. Europe and the US have lifted sanctions and promised long-term aid to reconstruct Yugoslavia. Apart from economic help, as Kostunica has pointed out, this is going to lift an important psychological barrier for Serbs living in a state of siege. To brighten the picture further, there is now a revolt against Milosevic within his own Socialist Party, with branch after branch calling for an extraordinary congress, which will debate the sacking of Milosevic as party president. His principal international backers, China and Russia, have walked out on him. Kostunica has committed not to surrender him to an international war crimes tribunal in the Hague, because of anger at the NATO bombing of Yugoslavia. He could, however, seize the initiative by placing Milosevic on trial inside Yugoslavia, for horrendous war crimes committed in Bosnia and Kosovo as well as for subverting the people's verdict during the recent presidential elections. Such a move would consolidate democratic authority and neutralise Milosevic as a political force. The inexperienced Kostunica's leadership skills are about to be sorely tested. Whether he will rise to the occasion, remains the big question.

Saffron is thicker than...

The apparently contradictory statements made by Mr. Laxman and Mr. Advani on the RSS are being seen as an attempt by the BJP to keep two options open, writes NEENA VYAS.

CURIOSLY, THE Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, which has always considered itself to be a super patriotic organisation, cannot explain why it never participated in the freedom struggle in any meaningful manner. It did not respond to the calls given by Mahatma Gandhi, nor did it organise any independent protests against the British. And yet, it has never tired of preaching lessons in patriotism, especially to Muslims and Christians.

The writings by RSS leaders, beginning with 'Guru' M. S. Golwalkar, reek of a hatred of Muslims and Christians, and it is well known that he stopped just short of recommending Hitler's method of dealing with what he called "the problem of the minorities". Writing about the purge of the Jews by Hitler, he affirmed: "Germany has shown how well nigh impossible it is for races and cultures, having differences going to the roots, to be assimilated into one united whole, a good lesson for us in Hindustan to learn and profit by."

That may have been a long time ago, but the fact remains that to this day Golwalkar is revered by the RSS, and even the present BJP leadership, including the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister, acknowledge Golwalkar as the "guru" at whose feet they imbibed the lessons in what constitutes nationalism. Let alone repudiate his views, the portraits of Golwalkar now adorn some rooms in Parliament House.

At the Agra camp of the RSS last weekend, its 'Sarsanghachalak', Mr. K. S. Sudarshan, could not help dishing out the old and familiar views. The Christians must Indianise the church, the Muslims must accept Rama and Krishna as their heroes, and only then can they become part of the national mainstream. The view was often expressed by Mr. L. K. Advani during the days of the Ayodhya agitation.

This view is hardly different from that of Golwalkar who prescribed the five points needed to be part of the nation of Hindustan. "In this country, Hindustan, the Hindu Race with its Hindu religion, Hindu culture and Hindu language (the family of Sanskrit and her offsprings) complete the Nation concept." And not wishing to leave anything ambiguous, he further wrote: "we must bear in mind that so far as 'nation' is concerned, all those, who fall outside the five-fold limits of that idea, can have no place in national life, unless they abandon their differences, adopt the religion, culture and language of the Nation and completely merge themselves in the national race. So long, however, as they maintain their racial,

religious and cultural differences, they cannot but be only foreigners, who may be either friendly or inimical to the Nation."

Mr. Sudarshan's call to Muslims and Christians to revere Rama and Krishna is a step in the direction of asking them to adopt the Hindu religion if they wished to be part of the nation. The war cries of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal on the conversions issue, the call by

the Prime Minister for a "national debate" on the subject, all fall into place. In fact, even the review of the Constitution was a demand made by Golwalkar barely a few years after it took shape.

No wonder then that the statement by the new BJP president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, at the party's recent Nagpur conclave that "Muslims were flesh of our flesh and blood of our blood" did not go

down too well with the hardcore saffron constituents of the BJP. In fact, fears were expressed by some in the party that while the Muslims would not be fooled into voting for the BJP, such a stance might cost the BJP dearly by loosening its grip over the hardcore Hindutva votebank, especially in the Hindi heartland.

What happened at Agra last weekend — the reassertion of Hindutva, the

"suggestion" to the minorities to "Indianise" (as if they were not Indians), the criticism of the Government's economic policies and approval of 'swadeshi' economics, and more importantly the participation by the Union Home Minister — was perhaps an attempt to keep the Hindutva constituents solidly behind the BJP.

In fact, given the RSS views over the last 75 years since it came into existence, what Mr. Sudarshan, Mr. Mohan Bhagwat and Mr. H. V. Seshadiri, said was no surprise. The RSS has never strayed from the Hindutva course, and one could even say, never will. The difference was that these strident speeches were made to coincide with the one year of the Vajpayee Government.

The BJP has been trying to finetune its own views and approach so as not to frighten its political friends, most of whom have a sizeable support among the minorities. It does not suit the BJP to come out strongly in support of Hindutva at the moment, not till it finds itself in a position to form a Government on its own. But Mr. Advani's presence at Agra seemed to suggest that at least he was very much in tune with the RSS views, and he could jump back on the Hindutva bandwagon.

Ironically, the party seems to have also come to the conclusion that to surge ahead electorally it cannot continue to alienate the minorities. With the total strength of minorities around 15 to 20 per cent of the population, it does not

A cat and mouse game

The RSS was sending out the message that when the time comes, and if it does not behave, it will turn the tiger back into a mouse.

AN INTERESTING sidelight at the recent Agra camp organised by the RSS was the telling of this story from the Panchatantra by a senior RSS functionary, Mr. H. V. Seshadiri. And it was not difficult to read the political message he was conveying.

There was a 'rishi' (sage) who lived in the forest and nearby lived a mouse who played around the dwelling of the 'rishi.' One day the mouse said to the 'rishi' that he often felt afraid for his life as there were fat cats around. Could the 'rishi' help? Certainly, was the response, and using his extraordinary powers he turned the mouse into a cat.

The mouse-turned-cat was happy, but not for too long. One day it pleaded with the 'rishi' once again. It was frightened of the jackal which was threatening its life. The kind 'rishi' once again came to its help, instantly turning the mouse-turned-cat into a jackal.

But that was not the end of the story. After a decent interval of time, the mouse-turned-cat-turned-jackal approached his friend once again. How could it be safe in the jungle where the tiger ruled supreme? What could the jackal do when a hungry tiger was on the prowl? The trusting 'rishi' took pity on the creature and changed it once again into a tiger.

The mouse-turned-cat-turned-jackal-turned-tiger took no time at all to try and pounce on its former friend and mentor, the 'rishi.' But, said Mr. Seshadiri, the 'rishi' had the presence of mind to immediately turn the tiger back into a mouse.

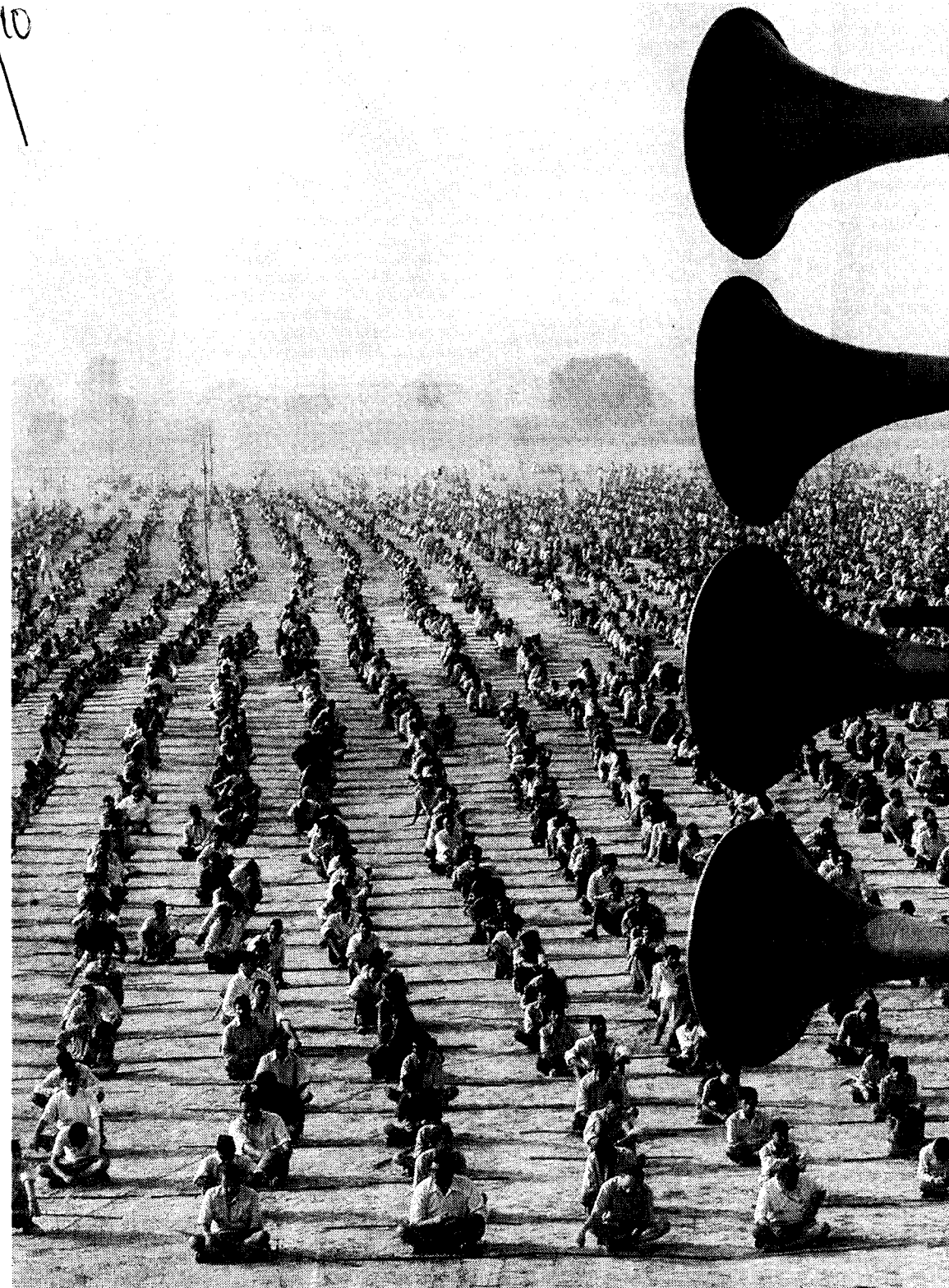
The story seemed to make the 'swayamsevaks' feel a little taller, and a lot stronger. For undoubtedly the 'rishi' was the RSS, and

the mouse-turned-cat-turned-jackal-turned-tiger was none else than the party and the person who now ruled India — the BJP and the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee. At least, that is how the "lesson" taught by Mr. Seshadiri was taken. The RSS was sending out the message that when the time comes, and if the tiger does not behave, if it threatens the RSS agenda, it will turn the tiger back into a mouse.

In fact more than a month before the RSS camp one senior BJP leader spoke about the growing disenchantment with the Government's policies among those in the BJP who had been brought up on RSS ideology. Speaking on condition of anonymity, he had warned that if this continued, there was a possibility, however remote, of a serious break between the RSS and the BJP.

The debate within the BJP has already begun. One day, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, who was present at the concluding function of the Agra camp, let it be known that there was no question of the BJP distancing itself from the RSS. Two days later, the BJP president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, stated that the BJP's views on the question of minorities "were significantly different" from those of the RSS, that the RSS had its own agenda, the BJP its own. Earlier, a similar point had been made strongly by the party in relation to economic issues after the RSS chief, Mr. K. S. Sudarshan, chose to speak rather sharply against Government economic policies describing them as "not in national interest".

The debate in the party is likely to continue. — N. V.



SHRILL PROPAGANDA: a view of the RSS' recent meeting at Agra.

make for good electoral arithmetic to begin with a minus 15 or minus 20 mark. That explained the "Muslims are flesh of our flesh" appeal by Mr. Laxman.

But the new line may not have gone down too well with the BJP's own cadres, and more importantly the RSS cadres on whom the party still depends for intensive door-to-door campaigning during election time. There is a view in the party that if the minority card is played too strongly, it may lose its Hindutva votebank. And the BJP has been trying to keep the balance, alternately giving the come hither look to the minorities and then wielding the Hindutva stick to beat them with.

After the Agra camp, the strong reaction by the minorities against the speeches made Mr. Laxman jump and say that the BJP's views were "significantly different", although Mr. Advani had only a couple of days earlier hammered home the point that the erstwhile Jana Sangh had given up the Janata Party experiment rather than disassociate from the RSS, thus hinting that the BJP may not mind doing it again. After all, the temple-mosque politics played by the BJP to the hilt was part of the RSS' ideological stance long before the BJP's

Palampur resolution on Ram temple.

The apparently contradictory statements made by Mr. Laxman and Mr. Advani on the RSS are also being seen as an attempt by the party to keep two options open — pursue the soft and on the surface moderate Vajpayee line, or go back to the hard Hindutva line which became identified with Mr. Advani after he played the lead role in the Ayodhya agitation.

More than two years of coalition politics at the Centre has naturally prevented the BJP from asserting its Hindutva agenda. In Chennai last year the attempt to deny the Hindutva agenda was resisted strongly by the party forcing the leadership to change the Chennai Declaration.

No national political party, including the BJP, can rest content with heading a coalition Government. The Prime Minister also talked about "building an India of my dreams" when addressing his own VHP-dominated crowd at the Staten Island meeting in New York. And surely, the India of his dreams, as much as the India of Mr. Advani's dreams, is pretty much like the India of the dreams of Golwalkar and Hegdewar and Mr. Sudarshan.

JMM throws a challenge to BJP

By Our Staff Correspondent

PATNA, OCT. 23. Notwithstanding the problems besetting it, the JMM, the largest tribal outfit in the Jharkhand region, continues to strive to acquire the top post for its supremo, Mr. Shibu Soren, when the State comes into existence on November 15, by serving an ultimatum to the BJP ahead of its exercise to decide the leadership issue.

Mr. Soren served the notice through a mammoth rally at Ranchi, capital of the proposed Jharkhand State, yesterday. Mr. Soren has been bargaining hard with the BJP for the post on the basis of the purported assurance given to him for gaining his support to prop up an NDA government in Bihar in March last, which turned to be a worthless effort.

The JMM president decided to put his popularity in the tribal heartland on display to lend strength to his contention after failing to persuade the BJP to accept his leadership in the region particularly at the time of the creation of the new State in respect of the 50-year-old movement of the tribals.

He has thus far stayed from tak-

ing a tough stand with respect to the BJP though he initially indulged in a double deal opening up channels with the RJD-Congress(I) alliance in the hope of putting pressure on the BJP. Later when he found that the BJP was not to be cowed down, Mr. Soren even threatened to sit in the opposition if not favoured for the top job.

Perhaps the new twist to the JMM bribery case forced him to call his supporters out to press his claim for the Chief Minister's post. The directive of the special designated CBI court in Delhi to the investigating agency to file a disproportionate assets case against three JMM leaders in the bribery case has queered Mr. Soren's prospects of becoming the first Chief Minister of Jharkhand. Without commenting on the judgment of the CBI-designated court at Delhi, Mr. Soren had charged that a conspiracy had been hatched to keep him out of the race. His supporters, on condition of anonymity, wondered why the court had not covered the two prime accused, the former Prime Minister, Mr. Narasimha Rao, and the former Union Minister, Mr. Buta Singh, under the same order when

it had been proved that they themselves had been in possession of assets disproportionate to known sources of income.

Obviously, Mr. Soren is pinning all hopes on his charisma and stature as the tallest tribal leader in the Santhai Pargana and Chhotanagpur region. Yesterday's rally is being considered as one of the biggest ever organised at Ranchi by any political party thus far.

While displaying his clout in the region, he also issued an indirect threat to the BJP of the consequences it would have to face if he was denied the top post. He seemingly warned of public disorder by calling on the tribals to get their things done by force if the officials did not redress their grievances.

The BJP is comfortably placed heading the 40 MLAs of the NDA contingent and the nominated legislator too is on its side in a House of 81 with one vacancy. The death of a CPI MLA recently has been to the disadvantage of the opposition parties including the JMM. But should the JMM decide to sit in the opposition the existence of the government will be on tenterhooks.

THE HINDU

24 OCT 2000

Mamata derails eviction drive

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Oct. 23. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today frustrated the mayor's plans to evict hawkers from city streets, with a senior Trinamul Congress leader requesting the Corporation to find a way to rehabilitate them first. The CMC called off today's planned drive to clear the pavements.

Hawkers, who had put themselves out of business for the day anticipating an eviction drive, however hit the streets to defend their rights. The CMC will announce its position in the changed circumstances after Subrata Mukherjee meets the mayors-in-council tomorrow.

A dejected Mr Mukherjee, who had ruled out a rehabilitation package, said: "What can I

do if Miss Mamata Banerjee has taken this decision?" He doesn't think rehabilitation is feasible, and justifies his stand by pointing to the way Galiff Street stalls built by the previous board for Hatibagan hawkers have remained unoccupied.

His namesake, Trinamul president Subrata Bakshi said: "To honour the national chairperson's views the state Trinamul Congress requests the mayor and the board members to find out the right way to translocate hawkers after discussions with all sections of the people." Any "irresponsible decision" would be harmful for society, the Trinamul leadership said.

Miss Banerjee is expected back in Calcutta tomorrow. Her position happens to be the same as that of the Left Front and Congress municipal par-

ties. Both had pitched in with the Hawker Sangram Committee's demand that eviction include a rehabilitation scheme for the hawkers. The Statesman reported on 21 October that they also planned to make this an election issue before the Assembly polls.

Mr Kanti Ganguly, leader of the Opposition in CMC, today said Left councillors would back the eviction programme if hawkers were rehabilitated, and even ignore resistance from CITU-affiliated unions.

The Hawker Sangram Committee has been leading the anti-eviction campaign. This afternoon, about 1,000 members of the Committee and other Left-backed unions walked in a procession along Bentinck Street Madan Street, Motishil Street, S N Banerjee

Road and J L Nehru Road.

But pedestrians had an easy time on the pavements Jawaharlal Nehru Road today, with hawkers wary of eviction squads not doing business.

The mayor, who had wanted city streets to remain this way permanently, seemed to differ with his party leadership on several issues. A senior Trinamul leader today said that there were so many hawkers because there were so few jobs. The mayor felt it was the government's responsibility to create jobs.

Did he think a faction in his own party had lobbied for today decision to defer the eviction? All the mayor would say was: "It is the party's decision and even Mr Jyoti Basu has to abide by his party leadership's decision."

■ Photograph on page 3

THE STATESMAN

24 OCT 2000

'I'll take initiative to form Third Front'

Ramesh Babu
Kovalam, October 24

SEVERAL BROWS were raised when West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu said it was a 'historic blunder' when his party rejected the offer of a Prime Ministerial chair.

In an exclusive interview to *The Hindustan Times* Mr Basu claimed that since the party had given the go-ahead, he would take the initiative to regroup the Third Front.

Excerpts from the interview

Q: Given another chance will you lead a Third Front Government at the Centre?



A: I can't even perform the duties of a Chief Minister properly because of my failing health. Last December I wanted to call it day, but the party insisted that I continue. For the past six months I have been spending only three hours in office. I don't like this. So I am adamant not to contest the Assembly polls. But I will be an active party leader.

Q: In that case who will be your successor?

A: We have a good and dynamic Deputy Chief Minister. Of course, that is for the party to decide.

Q: You often call the BJP Government barbaric and uncivilised? What prompted you to say so?

A: Nothing, their actions itself. When Vajpayee became the Prime

Minister I once asked him: Now you are the Prime Minister of the country, will you leave the RSS? He just smiled. You might have heard what he said in the US. So I call the BJP barbaric and uncivilised. It believes in Godse's ideology. Everyday it attacks the fabric of the country.

Q: What future do you foresee for Mamata Banerjee?

A: The people of Bengal will never forgive her for bringing the BJP to Bengal. I will not comment about Mamata's future. But one thing is clear, next time too, we will be in power in West Bengal.

Q: How will you form a Third Front now? The JD has split into three parties and some of your old allies such as the TDP and DMK are with the BJP combine.

A: All partners of the NDA are not communal. Some are carried away by an opportunistic alliance. They will soon realise their follies. More over, there are powerful regional people like: Mulayam, Laloo and Mahanta. We will try to bring them together.

Q: Do you see a radical shift in party policy with the decision to bring in foreign investment in areas such as science and technology?

A: No. This is in tune with the changed situation. Since ours is a poor country, the party is of the view that there is no harm in allowing entry of foreign capital in select areas without endangering country's interests, without sacrificing poor peasants and farmers' interests.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 OCT 2000

25 OCT 2000



Democratic presidential candidate Vice President Al Gore gets his 3,217th hug from wife Tipper at a campaign rally during the Great Lakes Prosperity Tour in East Lansing, Michigan. And this was only on Sunday.

Q & A

"I don't aspire to be chief minister of Chhatisgarh" says Congress spokesperson Ajit Jogi "it is for Sonia Gandhi to decide". Page 12.

indiatimes.com POLL

YESTERDAY'S POLL RESULTS

Can Jitendra Prasad make a better Congress President than Sonia Gandhi?

Yes	No	Can't say
56%	39%	5%

7,973 VOTES IN ALL

* The poll reflects the opinions of Net users who chose to participate, and not necessarily of the general public.

TODAY'S QUESTION

Will the leadership tussle in the Congress affect the party's prospects in the forthcoming Assembly polls?

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Mamata reminds PM of promise to roll back prices

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: A sulking Mamata Banerjee on Monday reminded Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee of his "personal" promise to reduce the prices of petroleum products after she had threatened to quit the Union cabinet.

The railway minister did not raise the issue in Monday's cabinet meeting, but handed the PM, after the meeting, a letter containing suggestions on how to go about rolling back the oil prices.

She later told reporters that she was hopeful that steps would be taken in keeping with the PM's promise. "It was a personal assurance from the Prime Minister," she said, recalling how she had been persuaded to withdraw her resignation.

However, petroleum minister Ram Naik was of the view that reversing prices at this stage would be difficult. "The issue did not come up for discussion," parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan told newspersons.

Sources said Mr Vajpayee had spoken to Ms Banerjee over phone on Sunday evening while she was still at Calcutta. Perhaps it was because of some assurance from him that she kept quiet in Monday's meeting, they added.

The issue has acquired an urgency for Ms Banerjee as in West Bengal her political rival, the ruling Left Front, has begun a campaign on the oil price issue. On Monday, outgoing chief minister Jyoti Basu addressed a public meeting to protest the price hike. Sources close to Ms Banerjee indicated that she was expecting "at least a marginal reversal" of the prices.

Monday's cabinet meeting decided to promulgate an ordinance to create a dedicated fund—

raised from the cess on petrol and diesel—for the construction and maintenance of national highways. The government has already collected Rs 5,000 crore for the central road fund.

The Cabinet also agreed to introduce a new law with more teeth for the regulation and supervision of non-banking financial companies. The new legislation, which will replace provisions of the RBI Act, 1934, has the power to prohibit the collection of funds by un-incorporated bodies.

In another decision, it was agreed that the subsidy on Haj pilgrims would not be cut. The total subsidy for 72,000 pilgrims next year is estimated at Rs 150 crore.

The Cabinet did not discuss the issue of clearing direct-to-home (DTH) telecasting. The parliamentary affairs minister said the cabinet was expected to take a decision on DTH soon.

Monday's meeting also marked 21 obsolete laws to be cast off the statute. The oldest among them was formulated a year before the 1857 Sepoy Mutiny.

The Civil Courts Amins Act of 1856, had survived in the law books for nearly one-and-a-half century although it had ceased to be effective a long time back. Similar is the case with the Unclaimed Deposits Act of 1866. Strangely, such shibboleths had continued to clog the statute without any major move until now to throw them off.

The government said its efforts at weeding the statute book of dead Acts was a part of the administrative reforms process based on the recommendations of a commission headed by P.C. Jain. A Bill to repeal these Acts will be brought in Parliament in the coming winter session.

Third suspect held in Air-India jet bombing case

VANCOUVER: A third suspect has been arrested in connection with the 1985 bombing of an Air-India jet that killed 329 people in the world's deadliest act of civilian aviation sabotage, Canadian police said.

The suspect, who was not immediately identified, was arrested in the Vancouver area late Sunday night, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) said in a brief written statement.

The arrest came on the eve of court appearances in Vancouver on Monday by Ajaib Singh Bagri and Ripudaman Singh Malik, who are charged with murder in the case.

The RCMP said more arrests were expected and investigators, who worked for 15 years before laying charges, have received a number of new tips since Malik and Bagri were arrested on Friday.

Some of the people now providing police with information told police that they had previously been too nervous to talk, said RCMP spokeswoman Cati Galliford. "They advised us that when you have arrested people and laid charges that's when we'll come to you with information," Ms Galliford said.

Police declined to comment on a newspaper report on Sunday morning that one key suspect in the case was in Pakistan. But it is believed that Canadian authorities have launched an international man-hunt and will seek help from Pakistan, where the suspect is believed to have fled, according to a Vancouver newspaper.

The paper also said on Sunday that the RCMP was preparing to charge "several others in the next few days" in connection with the bombing which killed 329 people, the majority of them Canadian. (Reuters)

Cabinet, Mamata skirt petro price rollback issue

C. I. MANOJ
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 30. — Miss Mamata Banerjee continues to wait for the rollback of oil prices. The Union Cabinet met today but did not list the issue on its agenda.

Soon after the meeting, Miss Banerjee gave a five-page letter to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, suggesting alternative ways to raise revenue for compensating the rollback which she hopes will happen at the next Cabinet meeting.

Though Miss Banerjee did not reveal the contents of her letter to the Prime Minister, sources in the government said some of her alternative suggestions for raising revenue are "identical or a re-hash of some of the formulas the CPI-M leaders have been floating around as viable ways by which the price-hike

could have been avoided". The sources even wondered why had she not taken up the issue of raising the sales tax and thereby try to put the pressure on the Left Front government.

The sources said the clear message from Mr Vajpayee when he spoke to Miss Banerjee on telephone on the eve of the Cabinet meeting was to be patient. And to make things more complicated for her, NDA allies appear to be convinced about the logic behind the mantra of patience. Judging the mood, Miss Banerjee did not even raise the issue at today's Cabinet meeting.

"At the moment, everybody is convinced about the government reasoning against the rollback. The ball is in the Prime Minister's court. He is monitoring the situation and he could take the appropriate decision at the appropriate time," a source said.

There are three definite reasons that are working against the rollback. The fall of the rupee vis a vis the dollar has made the real oil-pool deficit more than the estimated Rs 24,000 crore (calculated on \$30 a barrel of petrol). The West Asia crisis has upset the hopes of the international oil prices coming down. Despite today's OPEC statement about increasing production, government sources said this increased production, at the best, could only stabilise the price at around \$33 to \$35 per barrel, rather than bringing it immediately to the \$30 per barrel benchmark.

Further, the decision to offer a sop to the agitating petroleum dealers in the form of hiked commission has made the calculations go against the rollback.

■ Basu hurls bluffer charge at rollback Mamata: page 2

THE STATESMAN

3 1 1 1 2 0 0 0

Mamata blasts Basu govt, yet to detail 'extreme steps'

Calcutta

3 SEPTEMBER

MOUNTING ANOTHER vitriolic attack on the Jyoti Basu government for "unleashing violence and trampling democracy" in the state, Trinamul Congress leader and railway minister Mamata Banerjee on Sunday said, the Left Front government had no right to continue in power.

Although she did not make any fresh demand for President's rule in the state, Ms Banerjee said, if the Marxists did not show respect to democracy, the people would remove them. For that, Trinamul Congress will do whatever was required.

"We will go to the extreme," she said, while addressing her party men at the end of the grand rally, in which state BJP leaders also participated. Other leaders of the party, including Trinamul Congress chief whip in the Lok Sabha Sudip Bandopadhyay, however, raised the demand for central rule in the state.

The firebrand leader, who led the rally from the Gandhi statue in central Calcutta to the five-point crossing in Shyambazar in the north, said, terror and violence against Trinamul workers were unleashed everywhere. — PTI

The Economic Times

4 SEP 2000

SC order puts Centre in a fix over Sena chief

Sena Ministers confer with PM

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, July 21

THE CENTRE appeared to be in a fix to find a way out to help Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray after the Supreme Court directed it to file an affidavit clarifying its stand on action to be taken on the report of the Sri Krishna Commission, which went into the communal riots of 1992-93.

Hitherto, the Vajpayee Government had avoided taking a stand on the report, which indicted the Sena chief for his party's role in the riots, to keep the BJP's ally in good humour.

With the apex court seeking clarity from the Government and the Sena mounting pressure on the Prime Minister to help Mr Thackeray to avoid arrest, hectic consultations began for a legal remedy.

Although the apex court gave a six-week time for the Centre to file its reply, anxiety gripped the Sena leaders after the Maharashtra Government leaders said their position on prosecuting Mr Thackeray for inflammatory writings seven years ago had been strengthened.

With the talk of Mr Thackeray's arrest over the weekend, the Sena's representatives, Union Ministers Manohar Joshi and Suresh Prabhu, met Prime Minister A B Vajpayee and Home Minister L K Advani to discuss the implications of the apex court's directive as well as the Centre's stand. Attorney-General Soli Sorabjee was also present during the discussion.

Giving an indication that there would be no let-up in their party's pressure on the Prime Minister, the Sena Ministers did not attend the Cabinet's meeting and declared that Mr Thackeray would take a final decision on their status following the Prime Minister's refusal to

accept their resignation.

The Centre's mood was dampened since morning by the Court's observation against the Union Ministers, who had come out against Mr Thackeray's prosecution on the ground that it was "time-barred."

Three Union Ministers -- Law Minister Ram Jethmalani, Petroleum Minister Ram Naik, and Information Minister Arun Jaitley

had said there was no case for prosecution of Mr Thackeray.

Mr Jethmalani, who had a gone step ahead to state that the Centre could prevent the State Government could prevent Mr Thackeray's arrest by issuing a directive under the Constitution, defended his remark despite the Court's observation. But other Ministers

were silent.

The Ministers' defence of the Sena chief was to keep him in good humour following the Sena Ministers' resignation on Wednesday. As part of its strategy, the BJP leadership decided to express solidarity with Mr Thackeray, whose supporters warned of even fall of the Vajpayee Government if he was held by the State Government.

Upset by the turn of events today, the BJP preferred to be mum on the Supreme Court's castigation of the remarks of Union Ministers on prosecution of Mr Thackeray. It, however, slammed the move by the Maharashtra Government to seek additional police force from Karnataka and Madhya Pradesh.

Home Minister L K Advani expressed the Centre's inability to despatch 3,000 additional paramilitary men to maintain law and order in the event of arrest of Mr Thackeray.

BJP vice president J P Mathur said the State Government's action would only aggravate tension in the State.



THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 JUL 2000

The 2 cases that got away & why the Sena is kicking itself

PRAFULLA MARPAKWAR
MUMBAI, JULY 22

IN the Maharashtra Assembly on Saturday, minister of State for Home, Manikrao Thakre, while defending the government's decision to sanction prosecution against Bal Thackeray asked a simple question that has been troubling the Shiv Sena the past week: "The Shiv Sena government, in 1996, withdrew four of the six cases filed against Thackeray under Sec 153A. The other two cases were not withdrawn. Who stopped them from doing it?"

Good question. The Sena has no answer.

Through all the breast-beating and Bhujbal-bashing that the Sena has resorted to, it knows it has goofed badly. Two chief ministers of the Sena were in power for four-and-a-half years, and in all 16 cases against Thackeray were withdrawn, but these two were left out. There were no legal impediments to withdrawing the two cases, nothing pending court hearings. All it required was for the chief minister to write on the two files, "permission rejected," as Manohar Joshi had done for the other four.

So, busy as it is in exploring political exit routes out of the legal mess, the Sena top-rung is wondering how it got there in the first place. Naturally, most of the attention is centred on Union Minister Manohar Joshi, who resigned earlier this week for failing to "protect his leader". That's because, he ruled for nearly four of the four-and-a-half years and it was during his tenure that all the cases against Thackeray, barring these two, were withdrawn.

A brief history of the cases first: Among the many cases filed against Thackeray over the years were six cases under Section 153A for inflammatory writings filed in 1993. Later that year, the Bombay High Court, dismissing a public interest litigation seeking action in four of the six cases, had observed that since peace had returned, it would be counter-productive to pursue the cases.

Citing this observation of the



Manohar Joshi ... The past catches up

court, Manohar Joshi rejected the Mumbai police's request for prosecuting Thackeray in the four cases (64/93, 65/93, 66/93 and 68/93). The other two cases, (420/93 and 453/93), for which the police sought permission to prosecute Thackeray, were kept pending.

In 1996, while deposing before the Srikrishna commission, Joshi said the government had withdrawn all the cases against Thackeray pertaining to Section 153A. The general impression in the Sena then was that all the cases against Thackeray had been buried.

So, the biggest question that is staring at the Sena today is, why did Joshi not shut the remaining cases too because they were at his sole discretion and he could have applied the same logic as in the other cases. It is possible that the files were not put up before him, but a top Sena leader discounts that possibility: "The general administration department handles such files and it is directly under the chief minister. Assuming that the files were not put up

AP says no to State

MUMBAI: ANDHRA Pradesh has declined Maharashtra government's request for sending paramilitary forces to the state to tackle the law and order situation in the eventuality of Shiv Sena chief Thackeray's arrest for his alleged role in the 1992-93 riots, the Minister of State for Home Kripa Shankar Singh on Saturday said.

However, Congress ruled states like Madhya Pradesh, Karnataka and Rajasthan have agreed and started sending their paramilitary forces, he told reporters at Vidhan Bhawan here.

Thackeray may get Jethmalani back in saddle

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 26. — Some Shiv Sena MPs and even some BJP leaders today suggested that Mr Bal Thackeray may get Mr Ram Jethmalani re-inducted in the Union Cabinet.

This, however, would largely depend on Mr Jethmalani's statement in the Rajya Sabha explaining why he resigned, the BJP leaders said. But they admitted that there was pressure from the Shiv Sena chief to re-induct Mr Jethmalani, whom one Sena MP described as a "personal friend" of Mr Thackeray. There was no comment from the Prime Minister's Office.

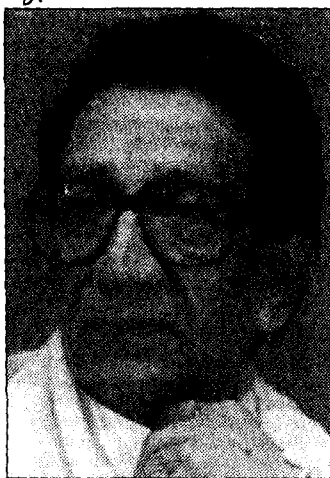
Mr Jethmalani was asked to resign after his comment on the observation of the Chief Justice of India brought the government in conflict with the judiciary.

The Prime Minister's Office has clarified that the resignation came mainly as the Prime Minister wanted the best of relations between the judiciary and the executive.

The clarification from the Prime Minister's Office was aimed at keeping the office of the Attorney-General out of controversy, a source said.

Mr Jethmalani had said that Mr Soli Sorabjee had plotted his ouster.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's emissaries to Mr Jethmalani,



Friends in need: Thackeray and Jethmalani



including the new law minister, Mr Arun Jaitley, were

reportedly confident that he would not say anything in the House to embarrass the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee. This could probably pave the way for his re-induction later.

A BJP leader said: "All of us have sympathy for him but his style of functioning creates friction." He said Mr Jethmalani could be given any portfolio other than law.

Mr Jethmalani has not been speaking to journalists for the last two days on the plea that he would do so only after speaking in the Rajya Sabha. An official said the real reason was his desire not to alienate the Prime Minister and the Home Minister.

He was scheduled to make the statement today. He did not make the statement, however, apparently because the government had raised technical objections to the statement he submitted to the secretariat.

PTI adds: Mr Jethmalani has said he would make public the circumstances leading to his exit from Cabinet if he was not allowed to make a statement in the Upper House tomorrow. "I will speak to media and public about the circumstances that led to my resignation from the Cabinet if I am not allowed a chance to make a statement in Rajya Sabha tomorrow," he said.

THE STATESMAN

27 JUL 200

Prosecuting Thackeray

By Rajeev Dhavan

It is "in the interests of justice" that Mr. Bal Thackeray be tried. His crime of inciting hatred is a serious attack on governance.

AN A person accused of creating discontent evade the legal process because his supporters threaten even more discontent? India is full of people who evade and defy the law. To the long list of frightening social subversions of the rule of law can now be added the 'Thackeray defence'. This defence consists of a combination of inter-locking strategies. The first step is to openly commit an alleged crime by provoking hatred and enmity resulting in violence. The next step is to virtually challenge the authorities to arrest him. To this social audacity is added the political comfort of knowing that the party in power will not accord 'sanction' for prosecution. This is followed by publicly continuing to violate the law, with the cowardly comfort of the double protection of party, political and other patrons from above and political gangster support from below. Then time is allowed to lapse. If arrest is threatened, the trump card of threatening dire violence is used again. When the final moment of arrest comes, the Thackeray defence recommends submission to the Court, a request for bail and release on account of delay. Part of this defence has been used by many doubtful politicians in the past. It was used in Germany in the 1930s, less successfully by some politicians in Delhi in the aftermath of the Delhi Riots of 1984 and, now, brazenly as a political art form by Mr. Bal Thackeray. If the Thackeray defence becomes a popular social defence to the rule of law, there will be total chaos in every part of India in ways far more menacing than the gangster raj exposed in the Vohra Committee Report of 1995.

In all this, there are many discriminatory ironies. Mr. Thackeray walks free. But, the distinguished painter, Mr. M. F. Husain, now faces criminal prosecution even though fundamentalist zealots destroyed his paintings and converted a victim into an accused. Posters from Sahmat's exhibition for peace were banned at the BJP's behest because they contained Prof. Romila Thapar's summary of Jain, Buddhist and other Ramayanas. The case is pending. There was an orchestrated outcry to Ms. Deepa Mehta's films, 'Fire' and 'Water', by simi-

lar zealots. The charges against Mr. Thackeray are much more serious. They go beyond offending or hurting peoples' feelings. Allegedly, he sought to incite communal violence. But he walks away scot free; and is a self-styled legend.

Although the product of colonial law, there are a group of 'hate speech' offences such as promoting enmity between groups (Sec. 153 A), undermining national integration (Sec. 153 B) injuring or defiling a place of worship (Sec. 295), outraging religious feelings (Sec. 295 A), wounding religious feelings (Sec. 298) and criminal intimidation and public mischief (Sect. 503-6 of the Indian Penal Code). So far, the retention of these 'hate speech' provisions are important to Indian democracy and governance. In fact, many of these offences have been made electoral malpractices. But, these provisions are liable to be misused if any and everyone can file these cases by filing an 'information' before the police (a FIR) or a 'complaint' before a magistrate. There is a difference between 'offensive' speech and 'incitory' speech. The latter does not just offend but incites people to a breach of peace or to violence. Fundamentalist politics is never content with being 'offensive', but favours incitement.

This is the reason the Criminal Procedure Code (Sec. 196) requires special sanction of the Central or State Government before Courts can proceed with the promoting enmity, outraging public feelings, threat to national integrity or public mischief offences. Although 'hate speech' offences undermine freedom of speech and expression, they have been indulgently interpreted by the Courts. The Courts have been lenient where there are strong bonafide expressions which may offend. These are permitted. Where 'offensive' speech has been 'deliberately and maliciously' made, the Court has been strict — aware that the secular fabric of India's rule of law does not permit

racism and communalism. Such speech is not just 'offensive' but 'incitory' in nature. Mr. Thackeray is accused of 'incitory' speech.

Caught in the labyrinth of 'mob' politics, Mr. Thackeray's case rests on otherwise salutary provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code which directed towards 'speedy investigation'. In the Antulay case (1992), Mr. Justice Jeevan Reddy's judgment elevates the right of speedy investigation and trial to the level of fundamental rights. More recently, in the Common Cause (1996) and Raj Deo Sharma cases (1998-99), the issue of speedy trial has been tackled by the Supreme Court by laying down specific time periods for various stages of a trial. But, the time periods of 'speedy investigation' are controlled by the (Criminal Procedure Codes Sections 467-473 — a whole chapter). There is no doubt that Mr. Thackeray is entitled to a speedy investigation and a speedy trial. The question is whether he deserves the benefit of this dispensation under the law.

Since the offence of promoting enmity between groups is cognisable, it had to be exclusively dealt with by the police. Since 'sanction' was required from the Government, the police could do nothing if the State Government denied sanction. Since the offence carried a punishment of three years, the case had to reach the court in three years. But, the court could (under Sec. 473) condone the delay. One of the reasons for which delay could be condoned was excluding the time taken for sanction (Sanction 470 (3)).

Mr. Thackeray showed no restraint during the Mumbai riots or after. Given his and his followers aggressive stance, the authorities knew that any attempt to arrest or prosecute Mr. Thackeray would be converted into a violent *tamasha* (spectacle). This was an unconstitutional restraint. A kind of gun was pointed at the head of governance. As events would have it, Mr. Thackeray's party and sup-

porters came to power and held up the sanction. This combination of political delay and threatened gangsterism proved to be lethal. When the judge refused cognisance of the case against Mr. Thackeray on July 25, the proceedings were too short, too much recognition was wrongly given to the public effect of Mr. Thackeray's possible trial, and little or no attention was given to the legal factor that the delay was caused because a plaintiff Government did not give sanction. The test in the Code is whether the trial should commence "in the interests of justice". Normally, delay should not be condoned. But, here, there was a valid reason for the delay. More important, it is "in the interests of justice" that Mr. Thackeray be tried. His crime of inciting hatred was a serious attack on governance which may have affected many lives and perpetrated violence. The State is right to appeal. The result in this case may impact on the Srikrishna Commission prosecutions which are equally serious. But, this case should not be a precedent. Each case should be examined on merits.

One of the victims of all this is Mr. Ram Jethmalani. Although he was speaking of this prosecution and not the Srikrishna prosecutions for which he was reprimanded by the Supreme Court, he truthfully represented that the Government was double-faced. There was a mix-up in the Supreme Court. Mr. Jethmalani was right. His comments were not on the Srikrishna Commission cases. But, they had an impact on the latter. Even if the Chief Justice may have been publicly critical of Mr. Jethmalani on the wrong case, he was right in asking the Union Government to take a clear stance. Mr. Soli Sorabji could have clarified the situation, but not on the spur of the moment. The Vajpayee Government was being Janus-faced. Publicly, it had declared Mr. Thackeray's prosecution to be within the exclusive preserve of the State Government. Privately it exerted all kinds of pressure to save its coalition's skin and retain its fundamentalist support. This side controversy should not detain us. Mr. Thackeray claims to be above the law. He has to be shown that he is not. He preaches and incites communalism. Inciting violent communalism cannot be tolerated in a civilised society.

Centre rejects DMK proposal to split Lanka into 2

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 5 JUNE

THE CENTRAL government rejected a suggestion of the DMK, the ruling party in Tamil Nadu, to divide Sri Lanka on the lines of Czechoslovakia and reaffirmed India's commitment to the territorial integrity of the island nation.

"There is no change in our position," said the spokesman of the ministry of external affairs in response to Tamil Nadu chief minister M Karunanidhi's suggestion to either give greater rights to the minority Tamil community in Sri Lanka or split Sri

Lanka on the lines of Czechoslovakia. In 1992, the Czechs and the Slovaks had agreed to peacefully form two states out of a single Czechoslovakia.

The statement of Mr Karunanidhi's party, DMK, was welcomed by other Tamil constituents of the National Democratic Alliance, PMK and MDMK.

Opposition parties, however, disapproved DMK's stand with the Congress alleging that Mr Karunanidhi's comment pointed to lack of cohesion in the ruling alliance.

Urging Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to clarify NDA's position, AICC general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad said it was strange that an NDA constituent like DMK should have made such a statement.

"The NDA leadership is talking in different voices. It is for the Prime Minister to tell the nation what the NDA wants," he said.

Party spokesperson Ajit Jogi said Karunanidhi's views were totally contrary to views which India had as a nation.

Mr Jogi said his party was against the division of Sri Lanka, calling for a peaceful solution to

the ethnic problem while keeping the territorial integrity and sovereignty of the island nation intact.

The newly-appointed TNCC president Elangovan declined to comment on Mr Karunanidhi's statement, saying there was little significance in the Tamil Nadu chief minister's comments as he had made three different statements on the issue in the last 15 days.

Mr Karunanidhi's present proposal to divide Sri Lanka along with his previous statements condemning LTTE leader V. Prabhakaran can be interpreted

ed to mean he is in favour of a Tamil Eelam but not the LTTE.

The Left parties too jumped into the fray on Monday with the CPI(M) criticising the Vajpayee government for its "silence" while demanding condemnation of the stand taken by DMK, PMK and MDMK.

The CPI(M) politburo said: "With the Tamil Nadu chief minister joining in to echo the demand made by LTTE, this campaign is sought to be raised to new heights... it is intriguing that the Prime Minister has failed to re-act to Mr Karunanidhi's assertion that he was satisfied

after his (recent) meeting with Mr Vajpayee."

The politburo said the division of Sri Lanka and creation of a separate Tamil Eelam will have "dangerous consequences" in the region and serious implications for India, where separatist movements will receive a boost and give "imperialism" more room to pursue its strategic aims in the region.

The government spokesman stressed that Sri Lanka was perfectly aware of India's stand on the issue as the two countries were in constant touch with one another.

The Economic Times

6 JUN 2000

Akali Dal expels nine dissidents

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHANDIGARH, June 13. — The ruling Shiromani Akali Dal today expelled nine dissident legislators from primary membership of the party for six years.

This, while delivering a major blow to dissidents led by former Punjab Legislature Speaker, Mr Ravi Inder Singh, has made the chief minister, Mr Parkash Singh Badal, more dependent on support from BJP in the state.

The strength of the ruling Akali Dal has come down from 75 to 66 in a House of 117 members.

The BJP, an ally, has 18 members. The state finance minister and party general secretary, Capt Kanwaljit Singh, said Akali Dal still retained a majority in the Punjab House. But he added that since Akalis were in alliance with the BJP

518 141
both parties depended on each other.

While dissidence in Akali Dal was brewing since the former SGPC chief, Mr G S Tohra, raised a banner of revolt almost one-and-a-half years ago, the recent move by dissidents to try to achieve the figure of 38 to effect a change in Akali leadership had spurred the majority Badal camp to resort to expelling the dissidents.

Most of the expelled legislators were known Tohra men though they had preferred to remain in Mr Badal's party than opt out as they didn't have the requisite strength to



Badal: will have to rely more on BJP

cause a split in the party to avoid the Anti-Defection Law.

Significantly, a petition moved earlier by the Badal camp before the Speaker of the Punjab Assembly to unseat and disqualify these members from sitting as MLAs in the House is pending and is

slated to come up for hearing shortly.

Announcing the decision of the Political Affairs Committee headed by Mr Badal here today, Capt Kanwaljit Singh said the nine members had been expelled for indulging in anti-party activities by colluding with the All-India

Shiromani Akali Dal chief, Mr G S Tohra, and the Congress.

He added that these members had been earlier issued show cause notices by the disciplinary action committee of Akali Dal and their replies were found unsatisfactory.

Those expelled are former Assembly Speaker Ravi Inder Singh, former ministers Mr Manjit Singh Calcutta and Mr Surjit Singh Kohli and legislators Ranjit Singh Chhajjajwadi, Baldev Singh Khiala, B S Khalsa, G S Sidhu, Hira Singh Gabrian and Jagat Singh.

"PAC was concerned about maintaining party discipline and this decision is painful. A resolution was passed by the PAC with all members present except Mr C S Atwal, the Assembly Speaker, Bibi Jagir Kaur, the SGPC chief, and Mr R S Brahmputra, the co-operation minister," said Capt Kanwaljit Singh.

THE STATESMAN

3 JUN 2000

'There's a bigger battle on our hands'

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 28

AS THE final tally came in, thousands of flag-waving Trinamool supporters walked in a procession and atop lorries towards Harish Chatterjee Street to congratulate their Didi. Slogans of 'Mamata Banerjee Zindabad' filled the air as Didi came out of her house to wave at her supporters. "Thank you very much. All of you have worked very hard. But do not rest. We have a bigger battle in our hands. Prepare for the Assembly elections," she said, smiling at her supporters.

"I am happy with the result. People have given a clear mandate. We are the single-largest party in the corporation and we will form the board. And if this streak continues, we will also capture Bidhannagar. The civic poll results

show that the CPI(M) is finished in Bengal. We are in and they are out," Banerjee told *The Hindustan Times*.

"On the day of the voting, the CPI(M) blatantly rigged the elections. They have created political violence and terrorised our workers. But despite all this, the people have voted for us. Today's result tells me that we will form the next Government in Bengal. The time is up for the Left Front. My Mayor-candidate Subrata Mukherjee won, but CPI(M) Mayor Prasanta Chatterjee lost. While the Trinamool candidate in my ward polled the highest number of votes in this elections, the CPI(M) candidate was defeated in Jyoti Basu's ward."

But isn't the Trinamool falling short of the magic figure of 71 out of 141 to attain a simple majority in the corporation? Banerjee

laughed that away. "Already five to six winning councillors have approached me. But I will not divulge their names. Tomorrow, all 71 of my councillors will meet me. I welcome all those who want to form the anti-CPI(M) board," she said confidently.

Banerjee categorically ruled out taking any help from the Congress. "How can we ally with the Congress when we contested against them in this elections? We will not adjust with the Congress. However, I welcome all those individuals who want to strengthen my hands against the CPI(M) here. Let me tell you the deal has already been done with the councillors who will give us the magic figure. And just like this election result, I will once again spring a surprise on the CPI(M)," she added.

The Trinamool chief said her

new party had come a long way. "We are the No 1 political party in the State today. And I throw a challenge to the Left Front for the coming Assembly polls. They rigged the civic-polls but still failed to defeat us. Even in Salt Lake, the CPI(M) ministers and leaders created a violent situation and rigged the polls openly. In spite of that the decision is tied. The people's mandate is clear. They want the CPI(M) to go," she claimed.

Banerjee threatened the CPI(M) by saying that the civic polls were conducted by the State Election Commission, but during the Assembly polls the scenario would be different and the Left Front will not get away with rigging and false-voting. "The Assembly elections will be conducted under the Election Commission of India. And then, we will see who will have the last laugh."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 JUN 2000

Discordant notes at MDMK meet

G.C. Shekhar and Agencies
Erode, July 2

THE TWO-DAY conference of the MDMK, an ally of the ruling National Democratic Alliance, reflected contrasting colours of the alliance partners, with each invitee trying to justify one's known position, be it the Sri Lankan Tamil issue or the J&K resolution on autonomy.

Home Minister L.K. Advani's rejection of Eelam looked more for the consumption of the NDA's southern ally, the PMK. Party leader Ramadoss whipped up enough emotions for its strident cadre saying that a separate Tamil

homeland for Lankan Tamils would become a "historical necessity" at some point of time.

Having forecast Eelam's birth, Ramadoss went on to assure that the new Tamil nation would pose no threat to peace in South Asia.

"Eelam will be our friendliest neighbour, our staunchest ally unlike Sri Lankan Governments that took anti-India positions during the Indo-Pak war and the Chinese aggression," he said amid wild cheers from MDMK workers.

However, on record, the MDMK, known for its pro-LTTE stand, chose to refrain from extending open support. In a resolution, the party, thanked the Government for

rejecting Colombo's appeal for military assistance.

However, it was Ramadoss who plunged into a spate of pro-Eelam rhetoric, the saving grace being that Advani had left the stage, but was still monitoring the speech from his rest room backstage.

The PMK leader said it would be impossible for Tamils and Sinhalese to co-exist any longer after successive betrayals by Sinhala governments. "Eelam will happen as that is the only solution," he asserted. He wanted the DMK chief to drop his restrained approach and become a vocal votary of a separate Eelam like Vaiko and himself.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

3 JUL 2000

Ramadoss lashes out at Eelam critics

By M.R. Venkatesh

ERODE, JULY 2. Within minutes of the Union Home Minister, Mr.L.K.Advani's lengthy homily on India's internal security concerns, aimed at having a sobering effect on the pro-Eelam parties such as the MDMK and the PMK in Tamil Nadu, the MDMK conference here witnessed a curious bout of whiplash against the 'Eelam critics' by none other than the PMK founder-leader, Dr. S. Ramadoss.

"The Sinhalese and Tamils in Sri Lanka can no longer co-exist peacefully and hence we say that the creation of a Tamil Eelam alone is the solution to the ethnic crisis there," Dr.Ramadoss declared addressing a special session at the MDMK's "Tamil Nadu Awakening Conference" today.

Repeating this thrice for emphasis, Dr. Ramadoss saw this development ('flowering of Tamil Eelam') as "news in the making" (Nadakkapogira Seithi) and lashed out at a section of the print media for attacking those who

merely suggested this as a possible solution.

Refuting criticism that he and the MDMK chief, Mr. Vaiko, spoke in "different voices" on the issue, Dr. Ramadoss said while they would not pressure or trouble the Vajpayee Government over the Sri Lanka Tamils issue, their views continued to be firm and consistent. "We have not given up our principles," he said.

"We have already made it clear that we will not act in a manner that would jeopardise the unity and integrity of India," Dr. Ramadoss asserted and asked whether as citizens of this country they did not have the freedom of speech to voice their views on the issue.

Stating that the Tamils the world over expected a more assertive stance by the DMK president and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi on the issue, the PMK leader said the former should declare that 'creation of Tamil Eelam' would not affect peace or security in India or the South Asian region.

Countering the charge that

their statements amounted to advocating 'secessionism', Dr. Ramadoss questioned the logic behind it. Asking whether the Sri Lankan Government had been friendly with India in the past, he pointed out their 'betrayal' during the Chinese aggression and during the Indo-Pakistan wars.

"We never asked for carving out a Bangladesh out of Sri Lanka," Dr. Ramadoss said and added that if need be, Mr.Karunanidhi could take the initiative for a written declaration by the DMK, the MDMK and the PMK that in the event of the creation of a 'Tamil Eelam,' no separatist demand would arise in Tamil Nadu. A 'Tamil Eelam' would also be one of the friendliest neighbours of India, he claimed.

Quoting at length the BJP leader and Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee's speech at the TESO conference in Madurai in 1986, Dr. Ramadoss said the PMK's contention was no different from the demand for a "peaceful and permanent political solution to the ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka."

THE HINDU

3 JUL 2000

Thackeray sore over portfolios

By Mahesh Vijapurkar

MUMBAI, JULY 6. Though the Shiv Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, and the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, met today and later described the relationship between the two allies as "cordial" and "friendly", the fact remains that the Sena continues to be troubled about the treatment meted out to it by the BJP. Of course, this is not a new development since Mr. Thackeray has been voicing this grievance for quite some time.

But if Mr. Thackeray had any plans of carrying his campaign for self-respect within the alliance — the NDA at the Centre and two-party tie-up in Maharashtra — to a feverish pitch at his meeting here today, he dropped it, obviously softened by the decision of the Union Cabinet on the Jammu & Kashmir Assembly's autonomy resolution. He, in fact, congratulated Mr. Advani on this "proper step" and, thereafter, Mr. Thackeray found the meeting full of honey and treacle.

Mr. Thackeray is, however, all set to carry his grievance of "dead portfolios" held by his party's Ministers, especially Mr. Manohar Joshi's PSUs and Heavy Industry after the disinvestment component was taken away and allotted to Mr. Arun Jaitley. Apparently Mr. Thackeray wants this



The Shiv Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray with the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, in Mumbai on Thursday. Photo: Vivek Bendre

slight obliterated and towards this end, he would call on the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, in New Delhi later. Neither would Mr. Thackeray upset the NDA applecart on this account where mere correctives were enough.

Mr. Advani conceded that there did remain a problem in the sense the coordination between the two parties were not enough and there was scope for improvement.

There were, he asserted, no major differences. In fact, what Mr. Advani later told newsmen was music to Mr. Thackeray's ears: the BJP-led Government did not believe in any kind of autonomy that was demanded by Dr. Farooq Abdullah but believed in devolution of more powers to the States and that the present dispensation was not inclined to put the clock back to the pre-1953 phase.

THE HINDU

- 7 JUL 2007

VHP asks UN for NGO status, Pak hackles up

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 14

THE VISHWA Hindu Parishad (VHP) has applied to the United Nations Economic and Social Council for consultative status as a non-government organisation (NGO). However, Pakistan has objected to it accusing the VHP of being in the forefront of anti-Christian attacks.

The VHP had described itself to the UN body thus: "While it has taken the responsibility of representing and promoting the welfare-related activities of Hindus, it also, without discrimination, promotes moral and ethical education, provides medical aid for the needy, relief to the poor, advances general public utility and pursues socio-religious, scientific and general research."

According to *Communalism Combat*, the VHP's application has been put on hold following objections raised by Pakistan representative on the NGO committee, which considers applications from voluntary agencies for consultative status.

The representative of the Indian Government claimed that the VHP had already responded to the Pakistan's objections.

Communalism Combat editor Javed Anand said in a release that the Pakistan Government apparently made no mention of the targeting of India's Muslims by the same body.

He said his organisation decided to

launch a campaign against the VHP's bid to be recognised as a global ambassador of peace while its record back home was just the opposite.

N. Karnataka priests get death threats

CHRISTIAN PRIESTS in the north Karnataka city of Hubli-Dharwad have received a letter that threatens them with death if they did not "stop conversions and accept Hinduism." The letter that arrived by post to almost all the priests of the Protestant order in the twin cities is sourced as "Vishwa Hindu Parishad" but it was unsigned. Belgaum Bishop Bernad Moras said these letters were received by post on July 11th and 12th only by the priests in the twin cities. A complaint has been filed by the priests with the Hubli-Dharwad police. Bishop Moras said though it had been signed with the nomenclature "Vishwa Hindu Parishad", the police would have to find out who exactly sent them. **Detailed report on Page 12**

A VHP official, when contacted, said they were not aware of Pakistan's objection. But they were not surprised by Pakistan's action because it was natural for Islamabad to oppose all Indian bodies. The charge against the VHP for anti-Christian attack was a ploy to bring a bad name to India and to divert world atten-

tion on Pakistan's role in spreading terrorism.

The VHP had applied for "consultative status" about 18 months ago but had not received any response. "It is Pakistan's foremost duty to object to recognition for any Hindu organisation. Is it not their first dharma to oppose us? Similarly, it is the duty of the Indian Government to defend an organisation, which is serving the national interest," said VHP national secretary Champat Rai.

He said the VHP's intention was not to garner any benefit from the UN but to show to the world that a Hindu organisation was also worthy of international recognition for public service. "When members belonging to religions, which spread throughout the world by sword, are projecting themselves as ambassadors of goodwill, what is the harm in a Hindu body seeking status as a true messenger of peace?"

The VHP functionary said the UN had now begun to understand the real contribution of the Hindu religion for peace. "About 100 Hindu leaders are due to attend its world peace summit in New York in August. This is an opportunity to tell the world about false propaganda against Hinduism."

Two days ago, VHP international general secretary Pravinbhai Togadia demanded that the Church groups should be prosecuted for running a "hate campaign" against the Hindu society and organisations.

See also Page 12

Thackeray unlikely to be jailed in inflammatory editorial case'

HT Correspondent
Mumbai, July 16

HT-12 17/7
DESPITE THE high drama here over the State Government's permission for the prosecution of Sena chief Bal Thackeray, it is almost certain that he will not be jailed in the case being made out against him.

The decision of the Congress-NCP Government to give the green light to the Mumbai police to prosecute Mr Thackeray under Section 153 (A) of the Indian Penal Code (IPC) on the eve of the Assembly session, has high political overtones to it.

Even though Maharashtra Home Minister Chaggaan Bhujbal has given the Mumbai police permission to prosecute Mr Thackeray, the relevant file of the case will once again be vetted by the State Home Ministry. The Ministry will then issue orders to the police Com-

missioner, who in turn will instruct the Dadar police station, where the case is registered. The police station will have to take it up with the Esplanade court.

Mr Thackeray's lawyer Adhik Shirodkar told *The Hindustan Times* that the case against the Sena chief pertains to two alleged inflammatory editorials written by him in *Saamna* during the 1992-93 riots. "It is a well documented proof (what he has written). Mr Thackeray is not denying that he has written it. So, why should the police arrest him?"

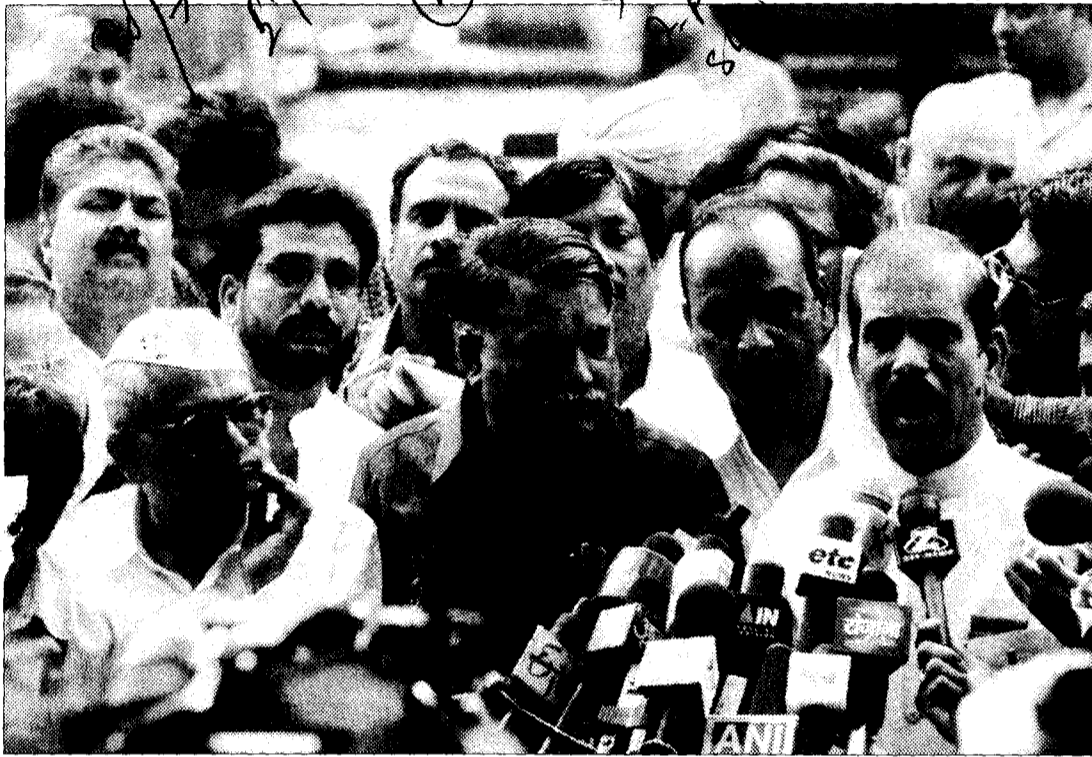
According to the veteran lawyer, Mr Thackeray will have to appear in the court but "there is no case for his detention".

Mr Thackeray's son Uddhav Thackeray told this newspaper that the Centre "would step in and dismiss the State Government if the law and order situation goes out of hand in Maharashtra".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

17 JUL 2000

Shiv Sena wants govt to act now



FIRM ON FIDELITY: Union minister Manohar Joshi addresses reporters after a meeting with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee in New Delhi on Wednesday

PTI

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 19 JULY

THE SHIV Sena, on Wednesday, warned the Centre of riots if party chief Bal Thackeray was arrested.

A delegation of Sena MPs called on Union home minister L.K. Advani to demand suspension of the Maharashtra Assembly — stopping short of calling for invoking Article 356 — to prevent communal tension in the state if Mr Thackeray was arrested.

"We told Mr Advani that instead of intervening after the riots have broken out, the Centre should act now to ensure order in the state and elsewhere," leader of the Shiv Sena in Parliament Anant Geete said.

The Sena leaders, however, made it clear that their party would continue its support to the NDA government despite resignations by its three ministerial representatives — which have been already rejected by the Prime Minister.

"We will continue to offer

unconditional support to the NDA government," Mr Joshi said after holding separate meetings with the Prime Minister and the home minister.

Later, Mr Geete told reporters that the sanction for prosecution against the Sena chief itself was "illegal" as it violated the time bar of three years provided for in Section 153(a) of the IPC for such cases.

"The Congress' malicious



UP IN ARMS: A Sena member stages a protest outside the Prime Minister's residence on Wednesday

AP

motives are evident from its decision to sanction Mr Thackeray's prosecution a good seven years after publication of the *Saamna* editorial," he said.

Both Mr Joshi and Mr Geete said the Prime Minister had hinted that Mr Thackeray might not be arrested. Mr Geete added that the Union home minister had assured the delegation that the legalities of the move to prosecute the Sena supremo would be examined by the Centre.

He argued that Mr Thackeray's "provocative" editorial in *Saamna* was brought to the notice of the Press Council of India earlier, but it had not recommended his prosecution.

The Sena leader denied that resignations by its three ministerial representatives — Mr Joshi, Mr Suresh Prabhu and Mr Vikhe Patil — was to pressurise the National Democratic Alliance government.

"At a time when our chief, to whom we attribute our political strength as well as our current positions in the central government, is facing arrest, we found it unreasonable to remain part of the ministry," he held.

Congress tries to gain mileage from Thackeray prosecution

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 19 JULY

PRESENTED WITH a fait accompli on the sanction to prosecute Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray by the NCP, the Congress leadership is now trying to make a virtue out of the situation by claiming partial credit for the decision.

Attempting to dispel the contention that the NCP had outsmarted the Congress, the party, on Wednesday, chose to point out that the decision to prosecute Mr Thackeray was a "collective" one.

The party also asserted that the controversial order was signed by chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh.

Congress' eagerness to be linked with the decision to target the Shiv Sena supremo, while disallowing the NCP to take full credit, seems to be aimed at reassuring itself on its secular credentials. The master-stroke by the deputy chief minister has suddenly put the Congress in the danger of losing the secular space, while catapulting the NCP as the new saviour of minorities in the state.

Party circles concede that the move indeed contains the potential to turn Mr Bhujbal into what Mulayam Singh is in Uttar Pradesh or Laloo Yadav is in Bihar, with a strong message being sent that the NCP may have the capacity to take on the communal forces.

Clearly, the Congress does not seem to be too happy on this count and its attempt to pitch the decision as a "collective" one is primarily seen as a bid to remain in the political reckoning.

It is, however, clear that the NCP leadership outsmarted the Congress on the issue. Party circles admit that chief minister Deshmukh was not taken into confidence till the last minute.

MINISTERS' RESIGNATION / DESHMUKH MUST BE WARNED, JOSHI TELLS PM

HD-15
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Shiv Sena wants Centre to act

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 19. Five days before the start of the monsoon session of Parliament, the National Democratic Alliance finds itself in the midst of a crisis created by the resignation of all three Ministers of the Shiv Sena from the Vajpayee Government.

Mr. Manohar Joshi, who resigned today as Minister of Heavy Industries, is understood to have told the Prime Minister that the Sena would like the Centre to summon the Maharashtra Chief Minister and warn him that it would invoke Article 355 of the Constitution if the State were to go ahead and precipitate a law and order problem by arresting the Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, a point also made by other Sena MPs who met the Prime Minister later. At yet another meeting, Mr. Joshi and other Sena MPs stressed their point to the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani. (Article 355 says it is the duty of the Centre to protect the States against external aggression and internal disturbances and ensure that the State functions in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution.)

However, the Bharatiya Janata Party remains confident that the crisis will be resolved soon and it will not in any way affect the stability at the Centre.

Of late the relationship between the BJP and the Sena has not been very smooth — the

Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister both made a trip to Mumbai recently to try to pacify an agitated Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, who let it be known that he was unhappy with the "dead portfolios" given to his Ministers.

But the BJP is finding consolation in the declaration by the Sena Ministers who quit today that their party continues to be with the NDA, and their action was a protest against the intention of the State Government to arrest their leader in connection with inflammatory writings during the 1993 Mumbai riots.

Senior BJP leaders Mr. J. P. Mathur and Mr. K. N. Govindacharya made three points — the Vajpayee Government is not in danger, the crisis will be resolved soon and the Sena action was in protest against the threat of arrest of Mr. Thackeray by the Maharashtra police. But the party is aware that the Sena will expect some "action" from the Centre if the Maharashtra Government goes ahead with Mr. Thackeray's arrest, and it would be difficult for the NDA Government to come up to the Sena's expectations.

After a meeting of Sena MPs here at Mr. Manohar Joshi's house, the Sena parliamentary party leader, Mr. Anant Geete, told reporters that his party would like the Prime Minister to summon the Chief Minister and warn him not to precipitate a law and order problem in Maharashtra — a euphemism for a warning to

the State Government of dire consequences if Mr. Thackeray was arrested.

Rules out withdrawal of support
PTI, UNI report:

The Shiv Sena today ruled out withdrawal of support to the NDA. "We will continue our support unconditionally," Mr. Manohar Joshi told reporters after a delegation of party MPs met the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee.

"The Prime Minister assured us that Thackeray will not be arrested," Mr. Anant Geete said while Mr. Joshi said Vajpayee told them that Mr. Thackeray "may not" be arrested.

However, a spokesman of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) later told reporters that the Prime Minister did not give any such assurance.

Not to attend Parliament

The Shiv Sena MPs, during their meeting with the Home Minister, said they would not attend Parliament beginning from July 24 until a decision was taken on the Thackeray issue and sought the centre's immediate intervention in the matter.

Mr. Geete said Mr. Advani had assured them that the Centre would do whatever was possible to avert the situation from worsening. Mr. Joshi said the Centre had taken up the matter very seriously and would consult the Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani.

Tough task for Trinamul in RS polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, March 18. — With only 10 days to go for the Rajya Sabha polls, the Trinamul Congress is still uncertain whether it will be able to keep its flock together, not to speak of the uphill task of weaning away a large chunk of Congress votes in favour of Mr Jayanta Bhattacharya, the Trinamul-backed Independent candidate.

Mr Bhattacharya needs 49 first preference to win.

At least seven Trinamul MLAs, out of 19, are dissatisfied with Miss Mamata Banerjee's choice and may not vote Mr Bhattacharya.

Mr Subrata Mukherjee and Mr Sovandeb Chattopadhyay are unhappy with Mr Bhattacharya's nomination. Mr Mukherjee's displeasure stems from the fact that Mr Bhattacharya had earlier been his lieutenant and owe much of his success in politics to him. A Trinamul MLA said chances of Mr Mukherjee voting Mr Bhattacharya are bleak. Similar is the case with Mr Biplab Roy Choudhury and Mr Mihir Goswami.

Mr Bhattacharya is now touring some districts to drum up support. Some North Bengal Congress MLAs owing allegiance to the Trinamul are yet to decide on voting Mr Bhattacharya, prompting him to think of having a one-to-one talk

with them.

Besides, Mr Bhattacharya has on his hand the onerous task of dividing the Congress. In this, he has the blessings of Mr Somen Mitra who has been deprived of the Rajya Sabha seat by the high command. But whether Mr Mitra's blessings can ensure Mr Bhattacharya's win is not certain, since only a few Congress MLAs are opposing their candidate, Mr DP Roy — prominent among them being Mr Sultan Ahmed.

But even some of Mr Mitra's loyalists are averse to voting the Trinamul candidate. One of them is Mr Tapas Roy, who is "very upset" over the denial of ticket to Mr Mitra. But, Mr Roy is sure to vote the Congress candidate. "How can I defy the party's decision after being elected on a Congress ticket," he said.

Mr Roy also ruled out the possibility of Mr Bhattacharya getting 30 Congress votes. Congress MLAs from Malda and Murshidabad are learnt to have thrown their weight behind Mr DP Roy.

Coupled with this is the distinct possibility of fissures appearing in the Trinamul camp — something which doesn't augur well for Mr Bhattacharya.

Withdrawal of nomination closed today: Six people will contest for five Rajya Sabha seats from West Bengal on 29 March. Today was the last day for withdrawal of nomination.

THE STATESMAN
19 MAR 2000