

Houses adjourned for fourth day

By Our Special Correspondent

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The Prime Minister's presence in the Rajya Sabha ten minutes before the commencement of the House appeared to galvanize members on both sides of the divide.

The Opposition MPs moved to the well of the House raising slogans demanding the resignation of three Ministers and a retraction of the Prime Minister's statement.

The Treasury benches were quick to respond and raised slo-

gans hailing the leadership qualities of the Prime Minister. Sensing the mood of the House, the Chairman of the Rajya Sabha Mr. Krishna Kant adjourned the House for the day.

Similar scenes were witnessed in the Lok Sabha as well as slogan-shouting Opposition MPs moved into the well of the House even before the question hour had begun.

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They were joined by the TDP members who were trying to raise the farmers issue in AP.

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THE HINDU

8 DEC 2000

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HD-13/12

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THE HINDU

8 DEC 2000

Opp paralyses Houses on PM's remark

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 7. — The Prime Minister's statement on the Ram temple yesterday gave fresh impetus to the Opposition in both Houses of Parliament today as the members demanded an apology from Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee for "endorsing" the construction of the temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya.

Even before the Speaker, Mr GMC Balayogi, arrived in the Lok Sabha, the entire Opposition was on its feet and some even entered the well of the House.

There was a chorus of protests and almost nothing could be heard. The Speaker had a tough time persuading the members to return to their seats and let the House conduct the Question Hour.

But the Opposition was unrelenting, forcing the Speaker to adjourn the Lok Sabha for the fourth consecutive day today without transacting any business.

A similar fate awaited the Rajya Sabha where the chairman, Mr Krishna Kant, adjourned the Upper House after the Opposition disrupted proceedings on the same issue.

The Congress changed its tack today after a meeting at Mrs Sonia Gandhi's house. The party has demanded a special discussion in both the Houses tomorrow on the Prime

Minister's comment that the construction of the Ram temple was an expression of national sentiment and that the task was still incomplete.

A Parliament official has denied the AICC general secretary Mr Ghulam Nabi Azads' comment that the party had given notice to the Speaker and the Chairman to suspend the Question Hour tomorrow and allow a special discussion on the Prime Minister's statement. "No notice for any discussion could be given in advance," the official said.

Mr Raghuvans Prasad Singh (RJD) said that since the House was adjourned today without transacting any business, all notices given today have become redundant. He, however, agreed that notice for discussion or adjournment could not be given in advance.

Mr Azad made another faux pas by referring to the observations made by the special designated court in Lucknow on 9 September 1997 while taking cognisance of the CBI chargesheet against all the 49 accused, including Mr LK Advani, as the "judgment of the court".

He said: "How could the honourable Prime Minister give a clean chit to Mr LK Advani, Dr Murli Manohar Joshi and Miss Uma Bharati in the Babari Masjid case when the judgement of the court said otherwise."

THE STATESMAN

8 DEC 2000

HD-1
10/12
OPPOSITION BLAMED FOR CONTROVERSY

PM to clarify in Parliament

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 9. The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, today blamed the Opposition for starting the controversy on Ayodhya by raising the demand for the resignation of the three Ministers "with an eye on December 6". He refused to accept any responsibility for the controversy.

His remarks came at a lunch hosted by the BJP parliamentary party spokesman, Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra. Speaking to presspersons, Mr. Vajpayee asked, "Why this demand, they have been Ministers for years, there is no question of their resignation." On the Opposition stalling Parliament proceedings, he said this was not a healthy sign. "The Opposition blames me for talking outside Parliament, now I will say whatever I have to in the House."

The Prime Minister said he was prepared for a discussion. "The rule under which a motion is to be discussed is always decided by the Speaker. I will accept whatever decision he takes." He sought to make light of the noises ema-



A.B. Vajpayee

nating from within the NDA ranks. "None of the allies has complained to me". He said he would welcome a meeting of the NDA alliance partners. (A PTI report quoting sources said an NDA meeting had been convened tomorrow.)

Mr. Vajpayee refused comment on the remarks of the RSS chief, Mr. K. Sudarshan, that the

mosque was brought down by a bomb in 1992. "I have read about it, but cannot react to it."

Despite Mr. Vajpayee readiness to have a discussion in Parliament, the other BJP leaders continued to goad the Opposition, particularly the Congress, into moving a no-confidence motion. Mr. Malhotra felt it was the only option before the Opposition as

the subject did not fall under the purview of Rule 184 as suggested by the Congress.

The BJP president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, said after the Prime Minister left, that the controversy had been generated by the Opposition because the minorities were coming close to the BJP after his Nagpur call.

Minister explains: Page 11

Mamata 'embarrassed'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 9. Even as the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, insisted that the NDA allies had no cause to be dissatisfied with his remarks on the Ayodhya controversy, Ms. Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress asserted that it was not proper for him to deviate from the common agenda and any deviation would only lead to a conflict within the ruling alliance.

Ms. Banerjee, who is also a Union Minister, pronounced herself to be "embarrassed" over the Prime Minister's statements and said "we want the issue to be sorted out immediately." She also revealed that her party had sought a meeting of the NDA coordination committee to discuss the recent controversy. The Trinamool Congress leader noted that the Government could be formed only because the common agenda had jettisoned contentious issues such as Article 370, uniform civil code and the Ayodhya temple. The Railway Minister is believed to be in touch with the Telugu Desam Party and the DMK.

THE HINDU

10 DEC 2000

9-2-1992
9-11/12
HID-13

AYODHYA IN PARLIAMENT / OPPOSITION TO PUT HEADS TOGETHER

Speaker's meeting will be crucial

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, DEC. 10. The Congress is insisting on a discussion in Parliament under a substantive motion on its demand for the resignations of three Cabinet Ministers charged with conspiring to demolish the Babri Masjid on December 2, 1992. But, should the Opposition parties decide to change their tactics at a meeting tomorrow, before all party leaders meet in the Speaker's chamber, they may find that the admissibility Rule 186, Clause VIII, could stump them.

The Rule clearly states that a discussion "shall not relate to any matter which is under adjudication by a court of law having jurisdiction in any part of India," and the Babri demolition case is certainly in court. The fear in the Opposition camp is that the Speaker will not be able to rule in their favour if the Congress insists on discussing the resignations.

A way out for the Opposition would be to change the tactics and discuss the Prime Minister's controversial statements on Ayodhya;

but a consensus on that would have to await the Opposition's strategy meeting. The Speaker has called a meeting of all party leaders at 10 a.m. to arrive at a decision which would allow Parliament to function normally after a week of adjournments.

Whatever form the discussion takes, the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, has been forced by his allies at the NDA meeting today to agree to take a strongly secular stand on the Ayodhya issue in Parliament. Even so, it is certain that Opposition parties, and perhaps even the allies, will query him hard on his controversial statements made earlier this week.

Mr. Pramod Mahajan, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, made it clear that the Government will be willing to accept whatever decision the presiding officers in the two Houses take. The Government stand is that it will be up to the Opposition to convince the presiding officers to accept their motions, and clearly the Government is depending on the Opposition not being able to find the appro-

priate rules to discuss the demand for the Ministers' resignations.

The Congress spokesperson, Mr. Anil Shastri, reiterated that his party will not budge from its demand for a discussion on the resignations of the three Ministers.

The ruling parties are also likely to exploit the antipathy between the Congress and the Samajwadi Party which is loathe to allow the Congress the lead role on the Ayodhya issue as it blames the Narasimha Rao and the Rajiv Gandhi Governments as much as the BJP for what happened on December 6, 1992.

The Left has been trying to smoothen things out so that the Opposition does not present a divided house tomorrow. It also seems that the Congress may be reluctant to discuss the larger Ayodhya issue as the heat would also be on it — after all, the unlocking of the disputed structure for 'pooja' and the 'shilanyas' (laying of foundation stone) in Ayodhya took place under Congress regimes. This is a major reason for disagreements within the Opposition.

THE HINDU

11 DEC 2000

Parliament still in turmoil

Houses adjourned as Speaker disallows censure motion

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 11

PARLIAMENT WAS adjourned on Monday following uproarious scenes in both Houses over the Ayodhya issue and the Speaker's decision to disallow a censure motion against three senior ministers. The Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha could not conduct any business and it looked as if the deadlock, which gripped both Houses through most of last week, would continue evading a solution.

In his ruling delivered amid pandemonium, the Speaker held out two proposals for the members as possible solutions to the stalemate. Either the members who desire a discussion give notice under the rules in "appropriate form for discussion at an appropriate time." Or, alternatively, the House could suspend the rules.

"I would not like to stand in the way of any discussion under any rule if all sections of the House were agreeable to suspension of relevant rules on a proper motion to that effect to enable a discussion on the matter," he observed.

The second proposal almost put the ball back into the government's court, especially when Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan had yesterday assured that the Treasury would be willing for a discussion under any rule in both Houses on motions meeting procedural requirements and having the Chair's sanction.

"We will continue pressing for a debate. It's for the government to prove its bona fides by volunteering a discussion under Rule 184,"

Congress deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Madhavrao Scindia remarked after the Speaker's ruling.

However, Mr Mahajan's plain 'no' to suspension of rules and the BJP's challenge to the Opposition to bring a no-trust motion against

WHAT BALAYOGI SAID

- Parties interested in a discussion either give notices that are admissible under the rules or all parties agree to suspend relevant rules to enable a discussion on the matter.
- House is supreme in procedural matters and it can suspend rules if circumstances so demand.
- A censure motion seeking to drop a minister from the Council of Ministers is inadmissible as the Council of Ministers is collectively responsible to the Lok Sabha.



the government, appeared to eliminate the chances of an early end to the imbroglio.

Upwilling to give up the fight, the Congress gave fresh notices for discussion under Rule 184 even as other non-NDA parties, led by the Left, hinted that at a joint strategy session tomorrow they might decide to bring separate

motions for discussing the PM's recent remarks on Ayodhya.

If that happens, fissures might surface in the Opposition ranks, the Congress having consistently made a distinction between Mr Vajpayee's comments on temple construction and its demand for the exit of ministers chargesheeted for demolition of Babri Masjid.

In the din that marked the brief House proceedings today, the Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Singh was heard demanding the PM's resignation. A fairly large crowd of SP, RJD, CPI(M) and Congress MPs had thronged to the left and right of Mr Balayogi as he read out his decision on the notice for censure motion by Mr S. Jaipal Reddy (Congress) and others.

In fact, the Congress's fresh notices, numbering 45, could set the stage for another procedural wrangle in the House tomorrow. Citing precedents of parliamentary debates on so-called sub-judice matters, the party's chief whip in the Lok Sabha, Priyaranjan Dasmunshi insisted that by making Mr Hiren Pathak's recent resignation the basis for its demand for the exit of three sitting ministers, the Congress also met the topicality criterion for discussion followed by a vote.

Mr Dasmunshi refused to disclose the content of fresh notices by his party. But informed sources said the revised censure motions focused on the "propriety" of Mr L. K. Advani, Dr M. M. Joshi and Ms Uma Bharti continuing in office when Mr Pathak has resigned after being chargesheeted, like his senior colleagues now under attack, for actions in his personal capacity and not as a Central Minister.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 DEC 2000

Ayodhya issue to be debated, put to vote

of Parliament

HT Correspondent

New Delhi, December 12 *HTT*

THE WEEK-LONG impasse in Parliament over the Opposition's demand for the resignation of Union Ministers chargesheeted in the Babri Masjid demolition case and the PM's comments on the construction of a Ram temple in Ayodhya ended today as the Government softened its stand and agreed to a discussion followed by a House vote.

The breakthrough came after two rounds of meetings of leaders of political parties convened by Lok Sabha Speaker G.M.C. Balayogi. But the Government conceded the Opposition's demand for a debate (under Rule 184) only after the first round of parleys failed to break the logjam and both Houses adjourned for the eighth consecutive day.

The settlement reached in the Lok Sabha has prepared ground for a similar understanding in the Upper House. The matter is expected to be resolved tomorrow by Chairman Krishan Kant in consultation with party leaders and Leader of the House Jaswant Singh without whose consent no motion entailing a vote

18/12
can be taken up.

At the second meeting in the Speaker's chambers, it was agreed that the exact language of the proposed motion will be determined by Mr Balayogi. The draft would reflect the spirit and the substance of 53 notices moved by various Opposition parties. While as many as 45 of these notices stand in the name of Congress members, the remaining have been submitted by the Left parties, the SP, the RJD, the Muslim League and the AIADMK.

Effectively, this means that the text of the motion will admix both elements - the propriety issue raised by the Congress to demand the exit of Mr L. K. Advani, Dr M. M. Joshi and Uma Bharti and the PM's recent statements on Ayodhya, to which other parties have taken exception.

In the balloting held here this evening by the Lok Sabha Secretariat, the responsibility of moving the motion has fallen on the Congress which has already decided to field Mr S. Jaipal Reddy to open the daylong debate. The discussion would be taken up at 12.30 p.m. tomorrow, immediately after the Question Hour and tabling of papers.

The PM will make his speech on Thursday after which Mr Reddy would wind up the discussion and the motion will be put to vote.

In a day of fast-paced developments, the first meeting convened by the Speaker at 10.30 a.m. had ended in a deadlock with Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan insisting that the PM be allowed to make a suo motu statement to which the Opposition could respond through the motion under Rule 184. This was favoured by the BJP's allies too. But the Opposition leaders, including the SP's Mulayam Singh Yadav, rejected outright the Government's offer.

"This would have helped Mr Vajpayee dilute, if not entirely deviate, from his original remarks which have caused uproar. Moreover, the proposed arrangement would have enabled him to speak twice (before and during the debate) to our disadvantage," a senior Opposition leader present at the meeting later remarked. He said the ice was broken during the second meeting at 12.30 p.m. when the government agreed to a discussion under Rule 184 without insisting on a suo motu statement by the PM.

See also page 11

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 DEC 2000

Deadlock continues in Rajya Sabha

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 13. The deadlock over the Ayodhya issue continued to cast its shadow on the Rajya Sabha which was adjourned for the eighth day without transacting any business even as a discussion on it got underway in the Lok Sabha.

What led to the adjournment after two brief sessions today was the Government's agreeing for a discussion in the Lok Sabha under a substantive motion entailing voting but not allowing it under a similar provision in the Rajya Sabha.

The Opposition members, including those from the Congress, the CPI(M), the CPI, the RJD, the Samajwadi Party, the RSP, the AIADMK, the Forward Bloc and the United Parliamentary Group, insisted that they wanted a discussion culminating in a vote. The Government was reluctant to concede this, considering that their strength was less than that of the Opposition.

In the morning, the Rajya Sabha Chairman, Mr. Krishan Kant, adjourned the House till 2.00 p.m., and the Deputy Chairperson, Dr. Najma Heptulla, wound it up for the day after pandemonium broke out with the Congress MP, Mr. Suresh Pachauri, wanting to know the fate of the motion moved by him along with Mr. Pranab Mukherjee and Mr. Kapil

Sibal for a discussion under Rule 168. As other members joined the chorus, those on the Treasury Benches objected to it. Dr. Heptulla said that the House was being adjourned till tomorrow since a meeting to find a way to resolve the deadlock was going on.

After a meeting of Opposition leaders, the MPs released a joint statement blaming the Government for disagreeing to have a discussion on the impropriety of the statement of the Prime Minister exonerating the three Union Cabinet Ministers against whom chargesheets have been filed in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

The joint statement was signed by Mr. Pranab Mukherjee (Congress), Dr. Biplab Dasgupta (CPI-M), Mr. Ranjan Prasad Yadav (RJD), Prof. Ram Gopal Yadav (Samajwadi Party), Mr. Abani Roy (RSP), Mr. R. Margabandhu (AIADMK), Mr. B.S. Ramoowalia (United Parliamentary Group), Mr. Gaya Singh (CPI) and Mr. Debabrata Biswas (Forward Bloc).

Meanwhile, the Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. O. Rajagopal, told *The Hindu*, that the Government was willing to allow a discussion under Rules of the House and had offered two options — the Prime Minister would make a statement followed by a discussion or a short-duration discussion.

THE HINDU

14 DEC 2000

After the logjam, a lively debate in LS

Law ministry's opinion sought on how to end postal agitation

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 13

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee's carefully cultivated moderate-secular image came under attack in the Lok Sabha today. Opposition MPs attributed motives to his defence of the chargesheeted ministers and his remarks proposing construction of a Ram Temple on the disputed site in Ayodhya.

A lively debate, often peppered with references to literature and history, ensued following a consensus decision to break the seven-day-long Parliamentary deadlock over the Opposition's demand for admission of a censure motion. The Speaker had allowed a discussion under Rule 184 (which entails voting) through a meticulously worded resolution that apparently pleased all Opposition parties.

Arguing for the Government, Law Minister Arun Jaitley said the Motion was "politically motivated with an element of constitutional impropriety and seeks to introduce new jurisprudence whereby a man is held guilty from the moment charges are framed against him". Besides another party member, Mr V.K. Malhotra, the PM and his three ministerial colleagues --- Mr L.K.Advani, Dr M.M.Joshi and Ms Uma Bharati -- received strong support from NDA allies such as the MDMK's Vaiko, the Shiv Sena's Anant Geete and the Samata Party's George Fernandes.

All of them, including Mr Jaitley, swore by the NDA's agenda of governance while rubbishing the Motion as an instrument to embarrass the Government. On their part, the Opposition's key

Debating Points

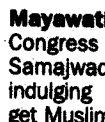


Jaipal Reddy (Cong): The PM may have the legal right to govern but has lost the moral right to rule. He is now a lame-duck PM.

Arun Jaitley (BJP): The motion is politically motivated and an attempt at introducing new jurisprudence.



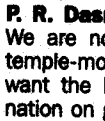
Somnath Chatterjee (CPM): The Prime Minister is trying to influence the course of justice in Ayodhya case.



Mayawati (BSP): The Congress and the Samajwadi Party are indulging in theatrics to get Muslim votes.



Mulayam Singh (SP): The PM should resign if he doesn't have the courage to drop the three chargesheeted Ministers.



P. R. Desmunshi (Cong): We are not debating the temple-mosque issue. We want the Ministers' resignation on grounds of public morality & Constitutional propriety.



speakers singled Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani out for a vitriolic attack. While Mr Somnath Chatterjee accused the PM of "interfering in the process of law" by having extended the clean chit to his Cabinet colleagues, Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav (SP) went so far as to demand Mr Vajpayee's resignation. "If the PM resigns, the three Ministers will automatically go," he declared. Earlier, while moving the Motion, Mr S. Jaipal Reddy (Congress) had pronounced that Mr Vajpayee has lost the moral right to govern. Besides, his mask as a moderate was off.

To take the sting out of the Opposition's offensive, Mr Harin Pathak, the junior minister whose resignation had triggered the demand for the exit of his seniors accused in the Ayodhya case, intervened in the debate to clarify that he had stepped down on his own volition. Some wind was also taken off the Opposition's sails when Ms Mayawati (BSP) announced her party's decision to abstain from the vote after the debate.

While bringing the Motion, the Opposition had not expected it to be carried in the House. But Mayawati's decision is indeed a setback to their proposed show of unity on the issues under debate. The marathon discussion also brought to the fore the Congress' running feud with the SP, over the Uttar Pradesh turf.

But, refraining to return the compliment to the SP, Congress chief whip Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, said his party was not interested in getting dragged into the Temple-Mosque controversy. "Our fight is for constitutional propriety, public morality and democratic probity."

Related reports on Page 11

THE UNION communications ministry has sought the law ministry's opinion on how to tackle the nation-wide postal strike that entered its ninth day on Wednesday. The request follows a Delhi High Court's directive to the Centre earlier in the day that the strike be resolved by Friday. The strikers are pushing for higher wages and regularisation of 3 lakh extra-departmental employees.

The court expressed its surprise at the communications ministry (the respondent in a public interest petition filed last week) did not make serious attempts - including the invocation of the Essential Services Maintenance Act (Esma) - to resolve the stand-off.

Under Esma, a striker may be arrested and/or dismissed from service. But the three federations spearheading 22 unions with a membership of around 5 lakh said they will "ignore such black laws and continue till our demands are met." When reporters asked communications minister Ram Vilas Paswan whether Esma would be invoked to break the strike, he said the Centre could "only recommend its use. It was for the states to implement it."

Mr Paswan said he told the employee unions not to prolong the agitation as "most of their demands had already been met and the rest were being considered by a Group of Ministers".

UNI reports that the Orissa High Court has directed the state treasury to make all payments due to individuals without revenue stamps. This follows a public interest petition that said revenue stamps were being sold at Rs 50 each because of their non-availability.

MTC, New Delhi

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 DEC 2000

Govt will abide by SC verdict on Ayodhya: PM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 14. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today told the Lok Sabha that his government was "fully committed to abide by the Supreme Court verdict on Ayodhya".

The government would not resort to amending the Constitution to bypass the court's ruling as was done by the Congress government in the past, he said.

Mr Vajpayee "justified" his statement that the Ram temple construction was an expression of national feeling by referring to the reconstruction of Somnath temple in the 1950's and Dr Rajendra Prasad's description of the movement as an expression of national sentiment. "Nobody took objection to it then. Similar is the feeling associated with Ram temple," he said.

"The construction of the temple would be possible with the consent of all," the Prime Minister said. There were only two ways to resolve the dispute, he said — "either go by the court's verdict or let the Hindus and Muslims sit together and thrash it out".

Mr Vajpayee blamed the Opposition for raking up the Ayodhya issue by paralysing Parliament. "I was not making any statement on Ayodhya, but I was provoked by the Opposition's behaviour in Parliament to issue a statement," he said. The Prime Minister denied he acted under the pressures of his party or the Sangh Parivar. "If there was any pressure it was the pressure of the media," he said.

Referring to the *shilanyas* in 1989 during Rajiv Gandhi's

tenure, Mr Vajpayee said: "I don't blame the then Prime Minister who allowed *shilanyas* thinking it was a good job".

At this point, Mr ND Tewari interrupted, saying the *shilanyas* was performed outside the precincts of the mosque.

Mr Vajpayee's 50-minute speech was interrupted several times by the Opposition members who questioned his role in not responding to their demand to issue a clarification on his statement on the Ram temple.

Some members also charged the Prime Minister with attempting to influence the court by saying that the three ministers chargesheeted in the case were innocent.

To this Mr Vajpayee said: "I was not trying to influence the

■ More reports on page 8

court and I am sure the court would not be influenced in any case by what I say."

He advised the Opposition to exercise restraint in raising such matters since Ayodhya was a "delicate issue".

He told the House that the three contentious issues dear to the BJP — including the Ram temple — was dropped from the agenda "because we kept the national interests in mind and also that was the call of the situation". He iterated that the government was bound to follow the common agenda of the NDA.

Mr Vajpayee's supplementary on abiding by the court's verdict came just before the Opposition censure motion calling upon the Prime Minister to drop the three Union ministers

chargesheeted in the Babari case was put to vote.

At the last minute Mr Vajpayee clarified to a point raised by the Trinamul.

(Not satisfied with the Prime Minister's speech the Trinamul chief Miss Mamata Banerjee left the House along with her party colleagues and was soon closeted with TDP leader, Mr K Yerran Naidu, adds PTI.

(Trinamul leader Mr Sudip Bandyopadhyay told reporters that it was decided that her party would abstain from the vote on the motion in view of the "unsatisfactory and unclear" statement of the Prime Minister on his remarks regarding temple construction.

(After some persuasion, the Trinamul members trooped back to the House and Mr Bandyopadhyay asked Mr Vajpayee to clarify whether the government would stand by the court verdict. "We will abide by the court judgment," the Prime Minister said.

The allies — TDP, Trinamul and the INLD — later said they were "reasonably satisfied" with the Prime Minister's clarification.

The Opposition motion was defeated by 271 to 179 votes with 14 abstentions as BSP members didn't cast their ballot. All the allies, including the TDP and Trinamul voted against the censure motion.

Mr S Jaipal Reddy (Congress), while winding up the debate as the mover of the censure motion, described Mr Vajpayee's reply as "poor" saying "the Prime Minister's reply mystified the stand on Ayodhya rather than clarifying the matter".

THE STATESMAN

15 DEC 2000

Govt relents on Ayodhya vote in RS

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 15 DECEMBER

THE GOVERNMENT finally resolved the 8-day eyeball to eyeball confrontation in the Rajya Sabha on Friday by agreeing to discuss the Opposition motion on the Ayodhya issue under a section which culminates in voting, following chairman Krishan Kant's ruling that he had admitted the nine-party motion. It will be taken up on Monday.

Mr Kant's announcement on the admission of the Opposition motion, with a reply from the Prime Minister to the 8-hour debate on Tuesday, followed by voting, came soon after the House assembled on Friday morning.

The motion on Ayodhya has been admitted under Rule 168 as demanded consistently by the Opposition parties, including division under Rule 170.

At the meeting of party leaders of the House, the government expressed its willingness to buckle down on the demand for a discussion under Rule 168, with voting under Rule 170, on the condition that the Opposition peripherally rephrased its motion.

Unlike in the Lok Sabha, the wording of the motion is not pegged on the resignation of the three chargesheeted ministers but on the impropriety of the PM's remarks exonerating them.

This is perceived as being particularly embarrassing to the government, given the reading that it amounted virtually to a moral censure of Mr Vajpayee. In the event, parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan asked that the Opposition to drop the word "anguish" in the motion and substitute it with "disagreement."



LAUGHTER IS THE BEST MEDICINE: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee sharing a joke with BJP president Bangaru Laxman at a lunch hosted by Union minister Venkaiah Naidu at his residence in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

The government is in a minority in the Rajya Sabha and is, therefore, expected to lose the vote unless it can manage significant abstentions on Tuesday.

The government's assent after eight days of unsuccessful attempts on its part to convince the Opposition to settle for a discussion without voting. Apprehensive of an embarrassing moral censure, it even considered the possibility of adjournment sine die.

Not surprisingly, the Opposition promptly pounced upon this and blamed the government for stalling the normal business of the House.

Setting the stage for the Opposition to score brownie points over the ruling regime on this count, leaders of both the Congress and the Left parties on Friday pointedly accused the gov-

ernment of creating hurdles to conduct of normal business in the House.

The sudden change of heart by the government on the sensitive Ayodhya discussion despite facing an almost certain defeat is perceived as having been based primarily on two calculations.

One, that the resounding victory on the issue in the Lok Sabha has virtually taken the sting out of any possible embarrassment in the Upper House.

And two, it was the fear that the Opposition — faced with the possibility of the government adjourning the House sine die in a bid to escape moral embarrassment — would take its appeal against the "deliberate and repeated downgrading of the Rajya Sabha" right up to the President that stayed the government's hand.

The Economic Times

16 DEC 2000

RS vote could embarrass Govt

Vinod Sharma
New Delhi, December 17

ANOTHER LAMENT in Parliament's eight-year-long elegy on Ayodhya would find expression in the Rajya Sabha tomorrow. Over the next two days, the Elders would be discussing an Opposition motion against Mr

Vajpayee's 'clean chit' to ministers chargesheeted in the Babri masjid demolition case.

Unwittingly or by design, Mr L K Advani, himself an accused in the CBI case, has set the tone for the debate by his public denunciation of the CBI.

In the Opposition's view, the Home Minister's eminently avoidable comments (regardless of his disclaimer today) have made all the more untenable the PM's defense of his colleagues.

As the ruling coalition is a minority in the Upper House, the vote on the Motion, admitted under Rule 170, is expected to go

the Opposition's way. The Council of Ministers being accountable to the Lok Sabha alone, the resolution wouldn't be binding on the Government. But it would further embarrass NDA partners with secular claims and deny BJP the satisfaction of an omnibus Parliamentary 'endorsement' of the PM's good conduct certificate to the chargesheeted triumvirate.

In fact, the Rajya Sabha motion does not stop at questioning the PM's comments exonerating Mr Advani, Dr Joshi and Ms Bharti. It says the PM's statement has "prejudiced the issue" in the backdrop of the CBI case.

In a sense, Mr Advani's clerisy appraisal of the CBI case has provided the Opposition an opportunity to take the edge off the Treasury's much-flaunted success in obtaining LS's approval for the Ministers' continuation in Government. Unmindful of their allies' discomfiture, some BJP

'It was Uma'

HOME Minister L K Advani on Sunday denied having made any comment on the functioning of the CBI regarding the preparing of chargesheet against him in the Ayodhya demolition case. "I never made the remarks. In fact, the remarks attributed to me were made by Sports Minister Uma Bharati at a luncheon hosted by Venkaiah Naidu on Friday after reading the chargesheet against me," Advani told reporters.

PTI, Ahmedabad

PARTY POSITION IN RAJYA SABHA*

BJP & ALLIES		OPPOSITION	
BJP	47	Cong	57
TDP	13	CPI-M	15
DMK	9	RJD	10
Shiv Sena	5	SP	9
SAD	5	JD	6
BJD	3	CPI	6
J&K NC	3	AIADMK	5
AGP	2	TMC	3
JMM	2	RSP	3
INLD	2	Muslim League	2
ASDC	1	Forward Bloc	1
HVC	1	Kerala Cong	1
HVP	1	RPI	1
SDF	1	NCP	1
Samata	1		
Loktantrik			
Cong	1		

* Total strength of the House is 245, including Independents (13) and Nominated (11). BSP's 4 MPs might not vote.

leaders have gone to the extent of describing the vote as an attestation of their stand on the temple.

How the Prime Minister, in his

intervention slated for Tuesday, responds to the debate would be watched more closely by his secular allies, notably the TDP and the Trinamool. It goes without saying that Mr Vajpayee's task has been rendered a trifle more difficult by Mr Advani's recent comments.

The Congress' main speaker and the mover of the Opposition Motion, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, has denounced in equal measure Mr Advani's denunciatory references to the CBI. Leaving the rest for his speech in the House, he termed the Home Minister's statement as an attempt to "put fear in the mind of the investigators."

Mr Mukherjee said such remarks weren't expected from any minister of the Union, not to speak of the Home Minister. He reminded Mr Advani that the CBI was a federal investigating agency under direct control of a Government to which he belonged: "And in the instant (Ayodhya) case, the Government itself is the prosecutor."

The Congress leader felt the Minister's comments constituted gross interference with CBI's independence. He said the principles of joint responsibility have been forgotten and the Government's political wing was undermining another wing represented by the investigating agency.

TDP forces LS adjournment, Congress walks out

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 18

THE PLIGHT of farmers in Andhra Pradesh rocked the Lok Sabha today with agitated members of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), which supports the NDA from outside, forcing adjournment of the Question Hour to highlight the Centre's apathy on the issue.

Opposition parties led by the Congress also walked out of the House to focus on the problems faced by the farm sector on account of the Centre's policies.

As soon as the Lok Sabha House assembled, TDP members trooped into the well demanding that the AP farmers' hardships, in the absence of procurement of rice and paddy, be taken up immediately. The agitated TDP members stalled the Question

Hour, forcing Speaker G.M.C. Balayogi to adjourn the House for an hour.

However, it was a slanging match between some members from the Congress and the TDP that caused chaos and pandemonium in the House. Congress member Renuka Choudhary blasted the TDP for not voting with her party on the adjournment motion brought by Leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi at the beginning of the Winter Session.

Replying to this charge, Mr Yerramaidu (TDP) was heard saying that his party did not vote with the Congress as the latter's intentions were "not good." While Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra (BJP) accused the Congress of trying to draw political mileage from the issue, Mr Jaipal Reddy (Congress) said Mr Naidu was the "wrong

member from a wrong party" to raise the right issue.

Commotion prevailed in the House during Zero Hour as well when TDP members got on their feet and clashed repeatedly with Congress MPs. Mr Naidu said that despite repeated efforts by Andhra

tonnes of rice has been procured from the State. This, he pointed out, was four lakh tonnes more, compared to the corresponding period in 1999.

The Minister said the Centre has decided to raise the admixture limit of "swarna masoori" rice from 10 to 13 per cent in response to the AP Government's demand. Opposition members, on their part, accused the Centre of "discriminating" in the procurement of farm produce and warned that this would not be tolerated. Some RJD members trooped into the well of the House to highlight problems faced by Bihar farmers. These members demanded that Mr Shanta Kumar's reply should not be restricted to AP farmers but should address the larger issue. Later, the entire Opposition staged a walkout over the

Plight of Andhra farmers

Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, farmers were not getting the minimum support price for their produce. He said the Centre has not acted on assurances given to the State Government by Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Shanta Kumar. However, Mr Shanta Kumar rejected the charge. He maintained that 13.15 lakh

issue. Mr Naidu, who sought admission of his party's notice for an adjournment motion, did not press for it after the Minister's response. He said that the Food Corporation of India (FCI) was not following the Centre's directive and the Andhra Chief Minister wrote a letter to the Prime Minister yesterday in this regard. He alleged that only 3.86 lakh tonne rice had been procured this month as against 10 lakh tonnes promised by Mr Shanta Kumar.

Mr Shanta Kumar assured TDP members that the Centre would stick to its assurance of procuring 10 lakh tonne rice this month. On the paddy front, he pointed out that Central agencies have already procured 11,000 tonnes but State agencies were lagging behind and had only procured 900 tonnes.

LCA, Akash missile programme delayed Assam killings: Cong, RJD stage walkout

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 18

THE DEFENCE Research and Development Organisation (DRDO)'s capabilities have come into question with a Parliamentary Committee report indicating that the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) programme as well as the induction of surface-to air missiles Akash and Trishul have been delayed. This is said to have triggered a threat of "technological obsolescence" in the combat capabilities of Indian Air Force.

The Standing Committee on Defence in its ninth report has expressed its "unhappiness" after it found that the LCA will only be operational by 2012 and that there was "considerable delay" in the planned induction time frame of the Akash and Trishul missiles. The report on modernisation of the IAF was tabled in the House this morning.

The Committee has pulled up the government for being "remiss" in strengthening the IAF. The report says that the technological obsolescence was not only affecting the fighter aircrafts, but also the air defence radars and missiles.

The report says, "Almost Rs 3,000 crore have been invested in the LCA and the Committee tend to agree with the assessment of the IAF that it may not be inducted before 2015. This would mean that it would take 32 years before the LCA would be inducted.

The Committee strongly feels that the government should review the situation seriously and conduct a performance audit of the project."

On induction of force multipliers like air-borne warning and control systems (AWACS) and air refuellers, the report says that these acquisitions were taking time, as these were not available from a single vendor.

According to the report, the Defence Ministry had informed the Committee that major reductions in the defence allocation during the past decade had put the modernisation of air force out of sync.

It said that the IAF top brass had placed before the government the estimate or resources for the required modernisation plan.

The Committee had also been informed that the government had stepped up the momentum by speeding up induction of upgraded multi-role SU-30 fighters as well as their assembly in

India and acquisition of more Mirage-2000-5 fighters to offset the delay in LCA programme.

The report says that the government was also going ahead with mid-life upgradation of other IAF aircraft such as the MiG-29, MiG-27, MiG-23 and MiG-21 BIs as well as deep penetration Jaguars, light transport AN-32 aircraft and buying more Mi-17 transport helicopters.

The Committee has asked the government to accord top priority to the modernisation drive of the Air Force and provide adequate resources to the force.

It has taken serious note of the Defence Ministry repeatedly extending the time period for upgradation of the MiG 21 fleet. The report indicates that the upgraded MiG-21 would only roll out by 2004.

On the induction of advanced jet trainer (AJT) Hawk, the Government has informed the Committee that the deal was likely to be signed by next month or in February.

The delay was on account of the IAF asking the manufacturers to have customer furnished replacement equipment for the US-manufactured components in the advanced jet trainers (AJT).

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 18

CONGRESS AND RJD members today staged a walkout in the Lok Sabha to express their dissatisfaction over Home Minister L K Advani's reply to a debate on insurgency in the northeast, with special reference to the recent killings in Assam.

The protesting MPs claimed Advani had not specified the measures that would be taken to bring down militancy in the State.

Advani, while responding to a calling attention motion on the subject, said he would soon visit Assam to take stock of the situation.

While seeking clarifications from the Minister, members expressed concern over the deteriorating situation in all the eight northeastern states. G M Banatwala (IUMI) and Raghuvansh Prasad Singh (RJD) made a strong case for deployment of more security forces in the troubled states.

Drawing attention to the recent killings in Assam, Paban Singh

Ghatowar (Congress) said the situation in the State was worse than that of Kashmir.

Some members were upset over reported remarks of the Assam Governor, who had asked Hindi-speaking people in the State to fight back in self-defence. However, Advani, during his reply, defended the Assam Governor and said that his remarks had in no way "provoked any parochial sentiment".

The Minister admitted that the situation in Assam, Tripura and Manipur was a matter of concern. "We are constantly watching the situation in Manipur. The State Government has been advised to deal firmly with the police personnel responsible for loss of weapons and also deploy more forces for counter insurgency operations," he said.

The Home Minister informed the House that the Government was in touch with neighbouring countries such as Nepal, Bangladesh and Bhutan to ensure that terrorists did not take shelter there.

Govt under attack in Oppn-dominated RS

Oppn denounces PM for giving clean chit to 3 charge-sheeted ministers; allies TDP, DMK put up terms for back up

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, DEC 18

GOVERNMENT today came under attack in the Opposition-dominated Rajya Sabha during a discussion on a motion on the Ayodhya issue and asked not to compromise with secularism but its key allies DMK and TDP openly came in its support with the condition that no communal agenda should be pursued.

The censure motion disapproving Vajpayee's statement ruling out the resignation of three Union ministers, charge-sheeted in the Babri masjid demolition case, will be the first major showdown the government will be facing in the Upper House. A similar censure motion was rejected by the

Lok Sabha last week. Voting on the motion is likely on Tuesday after Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's reply.

A defeat for the government appeared looming large as BJP and its allies have strength of only 97 as against 120 of the Opposition in a House of 245. But the reverse would not affect the survival of the government as defeat in the Upper House has no constitutional implications.

As the treasury benches hit back by saying the issue was being raked up for political gains, DMK and TDP made it clear that they were with the government following his assurance that the coalition would abide by the court ruling on the Ayodhya issue.

Moving the motion, senior Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee said the Prime Minister giving

clean chit to the three ministers tantamounted to his pre-judging the issue.

Mukherjee said a clear message had to go from the House that no compromise would be made with the secular character of the Constitution and this should be reflected in terms of the outcome of the voting.

Spearheading the ruling party's battle, Information and Broadcasting Minister Sushma Swaraj denied the Opposition charge that the Prime Minister was trying to influence the CBI probe by giving a clean chit to the three ministers.

"Vajpayee has categorically stated that the law will take its own course. But he personally believed that the three ministers were innocent," she said.

Striking a similar chord, Rural Development Minister Venkaiah Naidu accused the Congress of raising the issue to arouse communal passion.

Rejecting the demand for resignation of the three ministers, Naidu held out an olive branch saying that the NDA government

was committed to keep out the contentious issues and the government was ready for a political consensus on Ayodhya.

Another Congress stalwart, Kapil Sibal made a scathing attack on Vajpayee saying his recent utterances were against the rule of law and in direct conflict with the findings of the CBI and the trial court.

"It is time to clear the mess. On

December 6, the country saw the violators of law and you say it is an expression of National sentiment", Sibal said addressing the Prime Minister in a poetic manner.

Ruling alliance partner DMK member P N Siva warned the government to put a "moratorium" on contentious issues saying that his party would not remain at a place where there is a "bad odour" of communalism.

Shiva said his party stood by the NDA government as the Prime Minister had assured that he will stand by the verdict of the Supreme Court on the issue.

K M Saifullah (TDP) said his party would part ways with NDA if it compromised with national agenda of governance.

Supporting the motion, Left party members wanted the three ministers to resign in line with the

tradition. If they do not quit on their own, Prime Minister should intervene, they said.

Defending the Prime Minister's remarks, Sanjay Nirupam (Shiv Sena) said all that Vajpayee had said it was national sentiment that a temple should be built at Ayodhya which did not mean that the NDA Government was going ahead with temple construction.

He said that Vajpayee had strived to honour the sensitivity of both the Hindus and Muslims and this was apparent from his recent decision to announce a unilateral ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir during the holy month of Ramzan.

The Samajwadi Party as the RJD made it clear that they would support the motion. However, the BSP group which had abstained in the Lok Sabha, had not made their intentions clear.

INDIAN EXPRESS

19 DEC 2000

GOVT. SUFFERS EMBARRASSING DEFEAT IN RS

We will abide by court verdict: Vajpayee

By K. V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, DEC. 19. The Rajya Sabha today handed the Vajpayee Government a major embarrassment when it adopted, by a 121-86 margin, a motion recording its "disagreement" with the Prime Minister over his strong defence of his three Cabinet colleagues charged in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

Though the vote gave the Opposition only moral satisfaction and carried with it practically no constitutional significance, the debate provided the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, another opportunity to clarify, for the benefit of the NDA allies as well as the entire nation, his stand on the issue. In his 36-minute intervention, the Prime Minister managed the difficult task of retracting himself to a reasonable stance and yet reaffirming his "Hindu" identity.

Mr. Vajpayee made a number of propositions. (A) He never supported the demolition of the structure at Ayodhya. "I had opposed it, criticised it." (B) The Ayodhya movement began as a movement but it got distorted and restricted, and then the unfortunate incident of the demolition took place. (C) He had never said the Ram Mandir should be constructed at the disputed site. The Prime Minister reaffirmed his Government's commitment made in the Lok Sabha last week to abide by the court's decision in the ongoing Ayodhya dispute and to the NDA agenda. The other alternative was through unconditional negotiations between the two communities, he

said and accused the then Prime Minister, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, of having "deliberately delayed" the decision that could have led to a resolution of the issue.

Despite laboured efforts to come across as a reasonably moderate voice, Mr. Vajpayee could not resist reaffirming his "Hindu" identity and insisted on reciting a poem he had penned as a 10th class student. (This poem had first brought forth the young Atal in the right quarters).

The Prime Minister found himself in an uncomfortable position when Mr. Janeshwar Mishra of the Samajwadi Party asked him whether by insisting that the Ram temple movement was a manifestation of a

'Let not Ayodhya divide us'

NEW DELHI, DEC. 19. The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, today asserted that Ayodhya was a "movement" and appealed to Opposition parties not to politicise the issue for electoral gains as it would only divide the country.

Replying to a two-day discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the Congress sponsored nine-party motion Mr. Vajpayee also warned that communalisation of the issue would only create fresh tensions. "Let not Ayodhya divide us," he said. — PTI

"national sentiment", Mr. Vajpayee was not validating Mohammed Ali Jinnah's two-nation theory. In a rather feeble rejoinder, Mr. Vajpayee suggested that "mandir" was a neutral expression.

Rejecting the Opposition demand for the resignations of Mr. L. K. Advani, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi and Ms. Uma Bharti, he said the cases against them were a result of a "movement", a description which attracted loud protests.

Offer to Opposition

The only concession Mr. Vajpayee made was the offer inviting the Opposition to sit with the Government and codify "propriety" and draw up a code of conduct defining the situation in which those holding high offices were expected to resign.

In the same breath, he reminded the Congress that it could not adopt one yardstick in Delhi by demanding that the three BJP Ministers quit and another in Bihar, where the party was part of a coalition with the Rashtriya Janata Dal, whose Chief Minister too, was facing charges. Commenting on the motion that disagreed with his clean chit to the three Ministers, the Prime Minister said that by demanding the resignations before the court verdict, the Opposition was "prejudging" the issue. The Prime Minister expressed despair that the Opposition had sought to press for a discussion under a motion entailing vote, and pressed home the advantage of its numerical superiority in the House. He asked why it did not bring a no-confidence motion in

the Lok Sabha on the issue. Winding up the discussion, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee of the Congress urged Mr. Vajpayee not to "belittle" numbers which had a crucial role in parliamentary democracy. The Prime Minister's depiction of himself as a hapless victim of "media" pressure also did not carry much conviction. In his school-masterly manner, Mr. Mukherjee ticked him off: "It is the job of newsmen to ask questions. But it does not mean that you, Mr. Prime Minister, should have replied to these. Can you say someone asked a question and you replied to it. Your reply created a confusion."

We couldn't prevent demolition, says Uma Bharti: Page 13

J&K ceasefire may be extended

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, DEC. 19. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, is likely to announce an extension of the ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir in the Lok Sabha on Friday (December 22), last day of the winter session. By that time the Government would also know the All-Party Hurriyat Conference's latest stance.

However, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, could be heard telling everyone at the Prime Minister's Iftaar party this evening that his Government would not necessarily feel itself bound by the Centre's decision. "The Army and para-military forces could observe restraint on the border, but my police force would not feel so constrained. My people are being killed daily, and we cannot be so generous," he explained.

Indications have been available for some time now that the Vajpayee government has decided to extend the "ceasefire" beyond the month of Ramzan. But for some major violent incidents, the Government would stay with the decision. All consultations have taken place, and the Prime Minister has secured a consensus, at least, within his government. Earlier during the course of his intervention in the Rajya Sabha during the Ayodhya debate, Mr. Vajpayee patted his Government for taking the bold decision to announce a ceasefire. And he added that we are ready to talk to anyone for solving the Kashmir tangle, including our neighbour (Pakistan) provided the situation improves."

United we stand, says Hurriyat: Page 14

THE HINDU

20 DEC 2000

Parliament ends in winter of discontent

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 22

THE WINTER Session of Parliament ended on an acrimonious note today with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee reacting sharply to Mrs Sonia Gandhi's charge that the Government alone was responsible for the week-long logjam over the Ayodhya debate in the Lok Sabha.

What apparently cut the PM to the quick was the Leader of the Opposition's reference to Treasury side's "mystifying delay" in acceding to the Congress' demand for a discussion under Rule 184 on Mr Vajpayee's 'clean chit' to his ministerial colleagues chargesheeted in the Babri case.

As the Congress leader made the caustic remarks during a valedictory speech, marking the end of the Winter Session, the PM retorted by suggesting that her criticism lowered the dignity of the House.

"I have been in Parliament for the last 40 years and I have also held the position of the Leader of the Opposition. But I have always maintained the dignity of the House. This is for the first time that it has been broken," Mr Vajpayee observed.

"We would like to convene an all-Party meeting on the eve of the coming budget session to reflect on the sanctity of the Question Hour," he said.

WHERE THERE IS A BILL



The issue can be resolved by increasing the strength of the Lok Sabha by 33% and reserving the same exclusively for women.
Vasant Sathe (Cong)

The Government is not able to take up Bill because it is not serious about it.

Sitaram Yechuri (CPM)



Women should be elected by the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha members and should not be forced through the rough and tumble of a general election.
K.R. Malkani (BJP)

India can follow the Bangladeshi model in which women are elected to 10 per cent of the total seats through indirect elections.

G V G Krishnamurthy (ex-EC)



Graphic by VINEY

Mrs Gandhi accused the Government of being "non-serious" about the Women's Reservation Bill.

Mrs Gandhi said she hoped the Government has a contingency plan in case "the ceasefire in J&K is disrupted."

Today's pandemonium over the women's bill was a repeat of yesterday's and could well have been a straight lift from 1996. The House was adjourned twice amidst turmoil when slogan-shouting SP, RJD and BSP members rushed into the well demanding the withdrawal of the Bill.

The Government tried to resurrect a formula which the BJP itself was said to have discarded alongwith the Congress and the CPI-M a year ago. The Election

Commission proposal" calls for an amendment in the Representation of People's Act to make it mandatory for political parties to earmark a certain percentage of tickets for women candidates. Today, the ruling party even castigated the Congress for rejecting it.

During the 25 sittings, the Lok Sabha lost 60 hours of business because of disturbances. The Rajya Sabha lost 45 hours or eight days of business during the five-week session.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 DEC 2000

Embarrassing defeat for Govt on Ayodhya issue Govt has rough ride over disinvestment policy

Deepak Razdan

THE SESSION will be remembered for establishing that the Upper House was not a "superfluous" body. The opposition forced the government to discuss its motion "disagreeing" with the Prime Minister's remarks concerning three of his Cabinet colleagues chargesheeted in the Babri mosque demolition case.

The defeat of the government in the Upper House last week was a rare happening. The government knew that it could not escape embarrassment if it agreed for the discussion under Rule 170.

The Rule provided for a voting to establish the final view of the House. It was certain that if the discussion took place under the rule, the government's minority status would be exposed.

There was, therefore, an ambiguity for several days whether the opposition parties could get their motions admitted. While admitting the motions, Chairman Krishan Kant had to allot time and fix dates for the discussion but this could not be done without the government's consent. The Rule provided that the discussion had to be scheduled in consultation with the leader of the House, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh.

There were several rounds of discussions between the government and the opposition outside the House to have the debate under any other rule. This only hardened the opposition view, and the nine opposition parties and the group of Independents joined hands

to "fight" the government. The impasse finally broke when the government established its victory in the Lok Sabha. The Rajya Sabha debate was agreed under Rule 170 but the motion was reworded. Instead of "disapproving", the amended motion was to express "disagreement" with the prime minister's statement.

Even if the government's fear of a defeat delayed the debate, the discussion was fruitful not only for the opposition but for the government too. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was able to re-state that he never volunteered to give a "clean chit" to his colleagues in the Ayodhya case.

Mr Vajpayee also got an opportunity to explain his perception of the temple issue. This was not just

another court case, Ayodhya was a "people's movement", he said. The court could resolve the tangle but the dispute could also be settled through a Hindu-Muslim dialogue.

Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee raised some interesting points. If the temple represented "national sentiments", why was it not included in the NDA's national agenda, he asked. He laughed at the talk of "national consensus" on the temple issue when the 13 state governments of the Congress, Left Front and the RJD had rejected the idea, and there were serious reservations from NDA's own allies. The House adopted the opposition motion by a 121 to 86 vote.

Even if it could not unseat the government, the opposition used its majority to influence the final opinion of the House on the subject.

K.A. Badarinarath

AFTER HAVING rummaged the government on Ayodhya and farmers' woes in Andhra Pradesh (AP) earlier, this week the entire opposition joined hands to put the Vajpayee dispensation in a tight spot on the disinvestment of centre's equity in public sector undertakings like Maruti, Indian Airlines and Air India.

The two-day debate during the week was perhaps one of the few orderly proceedings that were recorded in the winter session that closed on a stormy note marked once again with fireworks between Sonia Gandhi and Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the Ayodhya episode.

In the disinvestment debate, both treasury benches and opposition came up with well-rehearsed arguments heard for the fifth time during the year on sale of government equity. Outshined in the entire debate were Arun Shourie defending the Centre's aggressive policy, his old time friend on Congress ranks Mani Shankar Iyer accusing the government of making "an ideological onslaught" and P.A. Sangma, lending a sane voice to the show.

Interestingly enough, the Congress and the Left parties who were together on demanding a white paper and policy paper on disinvestment, took different line on the issue of equity sale. Kamal Nath categorically stated that the

Congress was not against disinvestment or privatisation. But, it was only against how the government was doing it. In contrast, the Left parties opposed in toto, the very idea of selling government shares. However, CPM and CPI members had red faces when Arun Shourie cited that Great Eastern Hotel in Calcutta was handed over to a foreign firm sans bidding by the Left Front Government.

Both sides doled out figures and dogma suitable to make political points. While Mani Shankar Iyer reeled out figures based on the SCOPE report, Arun Shourie was aided by a fact file compiled by Disinvestment Department on Maruti, Air India and the ITDC hotels.

If the nine-hour debate that led to opposition walk out is any indication, achieving national consensus on disinvestment seems to be a Herculean task for the Vajpayee Government.

Arun Shourie put his analytical skills to test in his reply marked by noises and trooping out by the entire opposition. The soft-spoken journalist-turned minister was firm on Centre's commitment to go ahead with disinvestment.

But for the disinvestment debate, the Centre could not succeed in getting the women's Bill discussed on the penultimate day since very little effort seems to have gone into sorting out the basic differences at the Business Advisory Council meeting in the speaker's chamber.

Rajya Sabha

Lok Sabha

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 DEC 2000

Winter of discontent may turn heat on govt.

By Anita Katyal

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The winter session of Parliament which concluded last week may prove to be a turning point in the country's polity.

An aggressive Congress, the principal opposition party, made its intentions clear from the start as it decided to lead from the front and take on the Vajpayee government. The session closed on an equally acrimonious note, with leader of opposition Sonia Gandhi and Prime Minister Vajpayee trading charges during their customary end-of-the-session addresses.

Ms Gandhi's trenchant criticism of the Prime Minister on the handling of the Ayodhya issue and the women's reservation bill drew a sharp retort from the Prime Minister, who charged her with lowering the dignity of Parliament and stalling the House unnecessarily. This exchange reflected the



A.B. Vajpayee



Sonia Gandhi

PARLIAMENT REVIEW

extent to which relations between the Congress and the BJP-led government had soured. Clearly, the gloves are off and from now the real battle may replace the sparing.

The session also altered relations within the NDA as the Ayodhya genie resulted in creating a definite schism between the BJP and its allies. Key NDA partners like the TDP, Trinamul Congress, DMK and the Indian National Lok Dal were clearly unhappy with the Prime Minister for not taking a categorical stand on the Ram temple construction. Although they eventually voted with the NDA on the opposition-sponsored motion on the issue, they still seem uncomfortable with the BJP's open reassertion of its Hindutva agenda.

To that extent, this session could well end up further widening the rift between the BJP and its allies. In fact, the BJP's allies admitted that any further attempt by the BJP to up the antenna on the mandir issue could precipitate matters.

The Congress gave a notice of its intention at the start of the session when it sought to pin the NDA on the mat on the farmers' issue. There were initial hiccups when the opposition bloc failed to act in unison, but they were eventually sorted out. The opposition adjournment motion on the plight of farmers was expectedly defeated given the arithmetic in the Lok Sabha, but the opposition managed to put the issue on the agenda.

After the formal debate, the issue figured prominently in the House subsequently. Agitated members belonging to the Samajwadi Party (SP), Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), Congress and even the TDP periodically drew attention to how liberal imports of agricultural goods, high prices of inputs and poor procurement had reduced farmers to virtual penury. The TDP went to the extent of moving a separate adjournment motion on the issue, disrupting the proceedings of the House. It proved an embarrassment for the government although the opposition was delighted. The result was a panicky NDA hurriedly gave into the TDP's demands on procurement of rice and paddy.

After the farmers' issue, the Congress sought to unsettle the government by turning its attention to the three Ayodhya chargesheeted ministers, demanding their resignation. Parliament remained paralysed for over a week as the opposition insisted on discussing the issue under rules which required voting.

The issue was further complicated by Mr Vajpayee's controversial remarks on the temple issue outside the House. The opposition motion was defeated in the Lok Sabha but carried in the Rajya Sabha where the NDA is in a minority. The victory in the Lok Sabha, however, did not bring much cheer to the government as the Prime Minister's reply left the allies virtually seething as he stuck to his original stand that the Ram temple movement was a manifestation of national sentiment.

After a few days of regular business, the Lok Sabha was once again disrupted on the last two days when the government listed the controversial women's reservation bill for consideration. The known opponents of the bill — the SP, the RJD and the BSP — along with vociferous support from allies like the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (U) ensured that it remained in the cold storage.

The government made no effort to evolve a consensus on the issue and though speaker Balayogi called a last-minute all-party meeting, the government used the opportunity to build an opinion in favour of the Election Commission's proposal that political parties be asked to give a specific percentage of tickets to women to qualify for national party status.

Winter session ends on chilly note

Govt scores with calculation

LTHE inherent weaknesses of the parliamentary system were once again exposed in the winter session of Lok Sabha that ended on Friday, putting a question mark on Parliament's ability to find solutions.

Words like decorum, dignity and decency seem to have been erased from the dictionaries of MPs. About 20 MPs from the Samajwadi Party and the RJD created pandemonium in the Lok Sabha on Thursday and Friday in order to stall the introduction of the Women's Reservation Bill.

The House had to be adjourned on both days. The Speaker was not even allowed to occupy the Chair as the leaders positioned themselves

in the well of the House before 11 a.m.

The members of the two parties refused to understand the simple fact that the introduction of a Bill does not imply its passage.

The government assured the Opposition that it would accept any amendments suggested in the course of discussion. But the SP and RJD refused to relent.

Even the Congress was willing to change tack on compartmentalising the women's quota to include OBCs, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and minorities as demanded by

the two parties. This too failed to convince the opponents of the Bill.

Nine days with no business and only disruption of proceedings, several crores lost but there seems to be no concern.

The MPs also didn't seem bothered about the delay in legislation and other business listed for the session.

As the session ended, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee repeated the appeal he made on the last day of monsoon session — an undisturbed Question Hour.

But the Prime Minister's plea went unheeded.

WEEK IN LOK SABHA

On Friday too, the leader of the House and the Opposition leader chose to target each other in their valedictory speeches.

There was no bonhomie or exchange of greetings between the Treasury bench members and the Opposition as the House was adjourned sine die.

In the monsoon session, Mrs Sonia Gandhi had, in her valedictory speech, complimented the government.

Mr Vajpayee, in turn, had praised the Opposition, and particularly the Congress for facilitating the passage of the three state reorganisation Bills.

But all that seem to be things of the past.

REGISTERING a "first", the Rajya Sabha last week censured the Prime Minister for retaining in his council ministers it did not deem fit for such high office.

The House debated the reasons for seeking the dismissal of Mr L.K. Advani, Mr M.M. Joshi and Miss Uma Bharati — all three charged with the Babari Masjid demolition case.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee asserted his right to retain a minister or to drop him, arguing that the House could not dictate terms to him on this count. The House agreed in principle, yet censured him.

The outcome was decided the moment the government conceded to discuss the issue of the 'tainted' trio under a rule that allowed a vote. The government managers had tried to soften the impact by making the Elders dilute the motion from demanding the ministers' resignations to ex-

pressing disagreement with the Prime Minister for retaining them despite the pending chargesheets. Yet the disagreement was so strong that it had the impact of censure.

Mr Vajpayee was at his reconciliatory best in the Rajya Sabha after clarifying his position on Ayodhya in the Lok Sabha.

He assured the House that the government would abide by the court verdict and clarified that he had never said a Ram temple should be constructed at the disputed site. But the Opposition refused to budge.

Mr Pranab Mukherjee (Congress) seemed to mellow down after Mr Vajpayee's speech and assured him cooperation in the country's development.

The debate that ended the deadlock was

marked by a brilliant verbal duel between Mrs Sushma Swaraj and Mr Kapil Sibal. It was one of rare the occasions when Mr Sibal was cornered by Mrs Swaraj's oratory and control over arguments.

The government could have avoided the censure but decided to have one because it did not want the House to adjourn sine die.

The Rajya Sabha has reportedly been very cooperative in passage of Bills. The government simply did not want to provoke the Opposition in the House, said a NDA leader.

Some partymen persuaded Mr Vajpayee to accept the motion as the House was merely expressing disagreement with him for keeping the chargesheeted ministers in his government, which they reportedly argued was a fact.

The calculations proved fruitful. After the reprimand, the House passed all the pending Bills of the government.

RAJYA SABHA REVIEW

Doubts and reservations

MUKUL KESAVAN

The women's bill threatens to become one of the hardy perennials of parliamentary politics. During the winter session of Parliament, the Bharatiya Janata Party, with the tacit agreement of other parties, arranged parliamentary business to make sure that there was no chance of the bill being brought to the vote. Citing the lack of "consensus" on this matter, Atal Bihari Vajpayee has begun to suggest alternative ways of getting more women into Parliament; the current favourite is a law that will force every registered political party to reserve a fixed percentage of its slate of parliamentary candidates for women. In short, the bill's in cold storage for now, but it is unlikely to stay there. When Parliament opens again, it will be back, making a nuisance of itself, distracting our august tribunes from the important business of making laws for the nation.

This means that all of us will, at some point or the other, be asked where we stand on this issue. In arguments about this bill, its supporters invariably ask (especially if you're a man) if you are willing to concede the principle of reservation for women. The specific arrangements for embodying this reservation, they say (or imply), can be worked out later; they're a matter of detail. The Principle is the thing. I'm not sure it is as simple as that because the devil may well lie in the detail. But to answer the question: I believe reservation for women is acceptable in principle; that is, I don't think it subverts the nature of representative parliamentary government. So I'm for it in principle, but I'm not sure that there is a practical way of implementing this principle without complicating the electoral process to an unacceptable degree.

Why is it in principle good to guarantee a proportion of parliamentary seats for women? The short answer to that is that women constitute half the population of any society including ours. So if the female presence in the Lok Sabha has been well short of 10 per cent for the entire history of the Indian republic, there is a case for saying that its main representative institution isn't performing its function well. More women would make parliament more representative of its electorate, which, after all, is the point of parliamentary democracy.

Yes, theoretically women today have the right to stand for elections and to vote other women into power but it obviously hasn't happened. Consider an alternative world where the norm is unisex public conveniences. Women theoretically have the right to use them but records showed that not many women log in. Would it make sense to give them ladies loos or would we be better off arguing against such a move on the grounds that it would breach the principle of procedural equality?

Having stated the principle, we need to consider the obvious objections to it.

One, does reservation for this class of persons — that is, women — deprive other



Consider an alternative world where the norm is unisex public conveniences. Women theoretically have the right to use them, but records showed that not many women log in. Would it make sense to give them ladies loos or would we be better off arguing against such a move on the grounds that it would breach the principle of procedural equality?

classes or communities of political opportunity. I don't think so. Since women occur equally within every class and community, such reservation wouldn't reduce the common pool of seats in the way that reservation for any other class of persons would. For example, to reserve seats for other backward classes or Muslims would be to limit the number of seats available for others.

Not so with women's reservation. Yes, men as a class would be debarred from the reserved seats but this wouldn't qualify as

deprivation because women of their community or class, their mothers, wives, daughters would be eligible. It's like a women's queue; all men have felt a spasm of irritation at some time or another when women cut in; but equally, all of them have taken advantage of the queue via their womenfolk.

Two, the argument that reservations for women are equivalent to reservations for a female elite, or, in Sharad Yadav's elegant phrase, *kate baal waali*, the bobbed-hair brigade. By this argument, reserva-

tion would simply facilitate the entry of the Brinda Karats, Sushma Swarajs, Margaret Alvas and Shabana Azmis of the world, who, by their connections, wealth and education, are best placed to take advantage of such reservation.

This isn't a particularly interesting objection because it applies equally to the present system of representation with equal force. The privileged status of the *savarna* elite hasn't stopped Sharad Yadav from making it to Parliament, or Mulayam Singh Yadav or Arun Katiyar; so why should it be an insuperable obstacle for their womenfolk?

Three, would reservations for women establish a dangerous precedent for further reservation? Would this mean that there would be a clamour for reservation for other kinds of communities? Muslim representation in Parliament, for example, falls far short of their percentage of the Indian population; if reserved seats brought these numbers up, wouldn't this serve the cause of representative democracy, in the same way as reservation for women does? There is already a demand that the quota of seats reserved for women be sub-divided into further quotas for OBCs, Muslims and so on. To concede these sub-quotas for the women's seats would inevitably lead to the demand that similar reservations be put in place in for the rest. So do these demands follow necessarily from reservation of seats for women? I don't think so.

It can be argued (as I have above) that reservation by gender employs a universal criterion which make it fundamentally different from reservation for communities defined by caste or religion. To make this argument more forcefully and to erase the impression that reservation for women is a kind of quota-mongering, the reservation for women should be set not at one-third, which makes no defensible sense, but a full half of all parliamentary seats.

Having said this, I would still argue that the women's bill shouldn't be put to the vote till we've discussed it threadbare. Unlike the suffragette movements in England, or the civil rights struggle in America, this bill isn't the result of a prolonged struggle during which people on both sides have had a chance to have their say and air their doubts. For example, the mechanism for rotating women's constituencies in the present bill is patently unworkable.

And there are larger doubts. Does gender reservation in politics set a precedent for gender reservation in education or employment? And if it doesn't, what makes it different? And while ladies loos and women's queues might be analogies that support the bill, I can think of other, less favourable parallels. Think of those *zenana* enclosures in Pakistan in cricket stadiums. Or those now nearly obsolete *zenana dibbas* (women's compartments) in trains. Is that where women belong? I don't know. At least, I'm not sure. Nor, I think are most of us. We need to talk this out. Whatever his motives, the prime minister did us a favour by deferring the bill.

Cong., SP wrangle in Lok Sabha over adjourn move

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI NOV. 21. An adjournment motion on the plight of farmers, which was to be moved today in the Lok Sabha by the Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, got caught in procedural wrangles and a dispute between the Congress and the Samajwadi Party. This meant a day without any business and a breather for the Government.

Strangely, it was not the Government which was averse to allowing the adjournment motion, but a quarrel between the Opposition parties prevented the matter from being taken up. At a Business Advisory Committee meeting in the afternoon, it was decided that an Opposition-sponsored adjournment motion on the issue be taken up at 2 p.m. tomorrow and there was a general agreement that Mrs. Gandhi should have her say tomorrow. But the SP member present — Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav did

not attend the BAC — did not indicate his agreement, leaving a question mark on what will happen tomorrow.

The Telugu Desam Party leader, Mr. Yerran Naidu, also indicated outside the House that the TDP would speak "frankly and strongly" on farmers' issues and even criticise Government policies, but would stop short of voting against the Government.

In the Lok Sabha, as soon as question hour began, Mrs. Gandhi was on to her feet demanding that her adjournment motion be taken up. But immediately, the SP members said they should be allowed to speak first. The tension between the SP and the Congress spilled into the open.

After a lot of din and noise, and SP members walking into the well, followed determinedly by Congress MPs, the Speaker decided to call it a day at 4 p.m., after several short adjournments led to a repetition of the scenes.

The Congress maintained that

the convention of the House was that when the Leader of the Opposition rose to speak, she should be heard before others. But the SP would have none of it.

The Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, tried in vain to restore order. He offered the agitated SP members a chance to speak later, but that plea went unheard. The Speaker then said he was "inclined to allow a discussion in any manner including by way of an adjournment motion," given the importance of the subject related to farmers; "however, since some members are unwilling to listen or allow the House to debate the issue I am adjourning the House for the day."

Mrs. Gandhi later told newsmen that her party was determined to pursue the issue concerning the farmers. The Congress Deputy Leader, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, refuted suggestions that his party had failed to take the Opposition into confidence on the issue.

THE HINDU

22 NOV 2000

Samajwadi scuttles Cong censure motion

LS adjourned
after ruckus

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 21. — Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav's Samajwadi Party today scuttled the Opposition's bid to corner the government through an adjournment motion on the farmers' issue.

SP members not only heckled Opposition leader, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, when she tried to raise the issue, but stormed the Well of the House forcing three adjournments in the Lok Sabha — thus allowing the government to slip away without facing the wrath of the combined Opposition on a popular issue. Congress leaders will move the motion again tomorrow.

The Opposition was trying to highlight the plight of farmers

BJP MPs DEMAND DIESEL ROLLBACK

NEW DELHI, Nov. 21. — A demand for rollback in diesel price and inclusion of a sub-quota for women were the two main issues that figured at the BJP's parliamentary party meeting today, minutes before Mr Ram Naik formally announced the rollback of Rs 10 and Re 1 in LPG and kerosene. The demand is unlikely to be accepted. Raising the sub-quota issue, Miss Uma Bharati made it clear that her being a Cabinet minister wouldn't deter her from raising issues concerning OBCs. — SNS

following the diesel price hike, subsidy cuts and import of agro-products.

All hell broke loose when the Congress tried to move the motion, seeking to censure the government. SP members, led by Mr Akhilesh Singh, insisted that the Speaker first take up an adjournment motion that they moved on the same issue. It was clear that SP members, with their leader Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav conspicuous by his absence, was bent on hijacking the "farmers' cause".

Though it is an accepted prac-

tice to let the main Opposition party move the motion and start discussions, SP members refused to relent and stormed the Well. In the ensuing din, the Speaker adjourned the House till noon.

Nothing much changed when the House reconvened, leading to another adjournment. After failing to sort out the matter in a Business Advisory Committee meeting, the Speaker adjourned the House for the day.

Before the adjournment, Mr GMC Balayogi said the Chair was ready for a discussion on

the matter in any form, including the adjournment motion. He criticised members for their unruly behaviour. The Speaker reportedly warned severe action against the unruly members.

Mrs Gandhi expressed sadness on being prevented by SP members from raising the issue. Senior Congress members said SP members violated even the well-accepted norm of allowing the two important members in the House — the Prime Minister and the Opposition leader — of speaking on issues.

The CPI-M leader, Mr Somnath Chatterjee, who recently held a meeting on Opposition floor-coordination, said he was very disappointed by the behaviour of SP members.

NDA constituents have been asked to issue whips on their MPs to attend the Lok Sabha tomorrow as the Congress motion may be discussed. The NDA has decided to discuss the issue, as per the Opposition's demand.

THE STATESMAN

22 NOV 2000

Rajya Sabha witnesses uproar over J&K

Sena distances itself from BJP on issues

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

AA-3/24/11
New Delhi, Nov. 23: The Shiv Sena is distancing itself from Bharatiya Janata Party, its oldest ally, on the key issues of disinvestment, Muslim minorities and the government's announcement of unilateral ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Shiv Sena on Thursday boycotted the Lok Sabha after staging a walkout in protest against the killing of five persons in Jammu and Kashmir at the instance of the Sena chief, Mr Bal Thackeray.

Mr Thackeray has been critical of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee ever since he undertook the Lahore bus yatra and allowed Pakistan's cricket team to play matches in India. And, now the Sena leaders claim that he (Thackeray) has been proved right in his perception with regard to Pakistan. "Atalaji had ridiculed our style of registering protest (digging cricket pitches), but the Kargil War had shown that we are right even after the Lahore yatra," the Sena leaders said. Mr Thackeray has been criticising BJP president Bangaru Laxman for appeasing Muslims contrary to the BJP's earlier stand that "justice to all, appeasement for none."

Meanwhile, the Sena MPs staged a walkout during Question Hour in the Lok Sabha in protest against the killing in Jammu and Kashmir by terrorists. As the House assembled, Sena parliamentary party leader Anant Geete raised the issue of the killings. His party colleagues also joined him and asked for a statement from the government. Mr Simranjit Singh Mann also supported the Sena on the

issue.

Speaker G.M.C. Balayogi's plea that they would be allowed to raise the matter during Zero Hour failed to satisfy the members, who walked out describing the incident as unfortunate. During Zero Hour, BJP's Aditya Nath, Madan Lal Khurana and Mr Mann raised the issue and asked the government to make its stand clear. In the Rajya Sabha, the BJP and the Shiv Sena members clashed over the government's announcement of a unilateral ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir. Sena member Sanjay Nirupam objected to BJP member S.S. Ahluwalia's comment that the entire country had supported the government decision. Mr Nirupam said it was a wrong claim as his party had not supported the government initiative. "Aap ko chhor kar sab ne support kiya hai," Mr Ahluwalia replied. "Kisi ne nahi kiya hai," Mr Nirupam said. "Aap chup baith jaiye," Mr Ahluwalia ordered. "Kaise chup baith jayen; log mar rahen hain aap ki galat niti ke karan," Mr Nirupam argued. "There is no question of withdrawing the ceasefire. The entire country, except your party, is with us," Mr Ahluwalia announced. Earlier Sena member Adik Shirodhkar asked Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was present in the House to explain as to why the government announced the ceasefire "in the name of religion when members of minority communities were being massacred by the militants." He said the killing of five truckdrivers immediately after the announcement of the ceasefire by the government "was a slap on the face of India," and asked, "Did we achieve independence to be slapped."

THE ASIAN AGE

24 NOV 2000

Ceasefire to continue: PM

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 23

HT 24/11
PRIME MINISTER A.B. Vajpayee told the Rajya Sabha today that there was no question of withdrawing the Ramzan ceasefire against militants in Jammu and Kashmir, but the Government would keep security forces on extra alert to fight terrorist activity.

Sharing concern over yesterday's brutal killings of truck drivers on the Jammu-Srinagar Highway, the Prime Minister said the ceasefire was a "well-thought" step, taken after the required "preparations." The Government was aware that there could be "mischief," he said.

The PM said that the ceasefire was announced because the Government wanted to encourage peace in the State. "We did take a risk in announcing the decision," he admitted. The Valley's reaction to the decision showed people thought differently on the issue.

The Prime Minister said the Government's initiative on the Lahore bus was another step towards peace and it was hailed all over the world. Mr Vajpayee's observations came after all parties spoke against Shiv Sena member Adhik Shirodkar's suggestion that the unilateral ceasefire should be withdrawn as the terror-

WORLD VIEW

- British minister of state for foreign affairs Peter Hain said his country would use its influence with Pakistan to see how best the latest chance for peace could be used.
- The United States State Department spokesperson said: "We certainly urge the government of Pakistan to respond to Mr Vajpayee's announcement in a positive fashion."
- The Russian foreign ministry said: "Yet another chance has been created for creating a conducive atmosphere and this chance should not be missed. The ceasefire should be utilised by the two neighbours for rejection of violence and easing tension".
- France has been silent so far.

ists had "rejected" the Government's peace offer. The Shiv Sena member, who was isolated on the issue, felt that the terrorists had no religion and cared little for peace offers.

In the Lok Sabha, the Shiv Sena staged a walkout on the issue. As soon as the House assembled, Sena members wanted to speak on the killings but the Speaker requested them to

wait till the question hour was over. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan also tried to pacify the Sena members but they raised slogans and left the House.

Before the Prime Minister spoke in the RS, Leader of the House Jaswant Singh said the Government's aim was to bring back into the mainstream the people who had strayed from the path of sanity. Nearly three-fourths of the militants didn't belong to Kashmir.

The Government, he said, had merely announced that it would not "initiate" armed action against militants during the holy month of Ramzan. There was no question of weakening the country's fight against those who sought to threaten its integrity.

Jaswant Singh said the Government accepted responsibility for the innocents' killings but the Opposition must realise the challenge was unprecedented. Persons serving prison terms in Pakistan for heinous crimes had been sent to the State and told they could earn freedom if they indulged in killings.

The Leader of the House said the Government wanted to enlarge "the constituency of peace" through its initiatives and the caravan of peace could not stop just because some noises were made to disturb it.

Related report on Page 11

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 NOV 2000

WINTER SESSION / WTO ISSUE TO BE RAISED

Cong. to focus on farmers' plight

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, NOV. 16. The Congress party appears all set to haul the Government over the coals in the Winter Session of Parliament beginning on Monday. According to the Deputy Leader of the party in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, the party has shortlisted a host of issues on which it plans to put the Government on the mat.

Elaborating on his party's strategy for the coming session, Mr. Scindia told *The Hindu* that the Congress would demand a white paper from the Government on why anti-dumping measures were not in place when the Quantitative Restriction (QR) on 714 items was lifted in April, and on the Disinvestment policy of the Government. He said his party would also demand that necessary tariff barriers should be in place before all QR's were lifted in April next year.

Mr. Scindia said his party was determined to focus on the sorry plight of the farmers, particularly "the anti-farmer policy of the Government and the terrible impact that it is having on both the sales as well as the production side." The party would discuss the hike in the prices of petroleum products and their impact on farm-related products like fertilisers."

He said due to the QR being lifted before time, there was a flood of agricultural imports which had caused immeasurable losses to the farmers in coconut oil, arecanut, coffee and rice and in the prices of dairy products.

Mr. Scindia said his party also planned to take the Government to task for its failure to negotiate hard on the WTO issue. He refuted the BJP's charge that it was the Congress Governments of the past that had agreed to the WTO and the present Government was merely honouring that commitment. Mr. Scindia clarified that WTO was only an umbrella agreement and there was enough scope within it for Governments to bargain hard bilaterally. He cited the example of how China had negotiated with the United States before agreeing to join the WTO.

It is not the economic issues alone that will be the focus of the Congress' ire in the Winter session. The Government will also come under attack for the absence of a coherent foreign policy, the confusion with regard to the handling of the situation in J&K, and the BJP's relationship with the RSS. The Congress, according to Mr. Scindia is particularly incensed over the fact that the Government had deliberately avoided a discussion on foreign policy, particularly issues relating to national securi-

ty. "The nuclear policy is still in its draft stage, we would like a detailed discussion on the command and control structure so that we know that the nation is safe and secure from an accidental nuclear war" he said.

Referring to the situation in J&K, Mr. Scindia was of the view that the Government did not have a policy at all and it was only reacting to situations in a knee-jerk manner.

"They reached out to the Hurriyat behind the Chief Minister's back and later went back to him, then started a dialogue with the Hizbul-Mujahideen and when asked about the parameters of the dialogue the Prime Minister replied like a poet, his reply in Parliament was alright for a poet but not as PM."

On the issue of the RSS and its links with the Government, Mr. Scindia said the BJP leaders were trying to take the country for a ride. "The PM pledged his loyalty to the RSS at Staten Island and then tried to mislead people by saying he was the nation's sevak. He will have some answering to do in Parliament about the growing influence of the RSS on the Government," he added. The Congress also plans to focus on the drought in Orissa, Chattisgarh, Bihar and Gujarat and floods in West Bengal.

THE HINDU

17 NOV 2000

Winter session

Saroj Naig
New Delhi, November 19

IT MAY be the Winter Session of Parliament. But the temper-ature inside would be soaring high. The Opposition parties are gearing up to haul the Government for its economic and communal agenda, while the NDA, in a last minute tactical move, is trying to quell the gathering storm.

After an hour-long meeting at Chatterjee's residence, the Opposition parties, including the Congress, chalked out its game plan.

They would coordinate their strategies to demand a rollback of petroleum prices, oppose the Government's disinvestment policies and denationalisation of banks, focus on the farmer's concerns and seek resignations of the Home, Human Resources Development and Sports and Youth Affairs Ministers in the Ayodhya case.

A final view on identifying the issue on which an adjournment motion should be given is expected to be taken tomorrow.

The leading Opposition, the Congress is keener on the farmer's issue and the Left on the petrole-

um price hike.

The parliamentary instrument the Congress uses to focus on the problems faced by the farmers — which, it feels, is very much part of the petro-price hike — will be decided at the party's Political Affairs Committee meeting tomorrow.

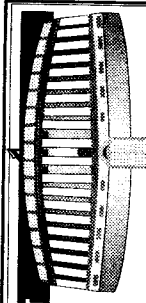
Clearly not satisfied with the "cosmetic reductions" meant to keep the NDA together, the Left is believed to have already given a notice for an adjournment motion demanding a total roll back of the hike.

Amid warnings of a tempestuous session, the NDA government decided to confront the Opposition by taking up contentious issues right from the word go.

Besides entrusting Home Minister L K Advani with the task of talking of evolving a consensus on the women's reservation bill, the treasury side has tried to take the sting out of the Opposition attack by deciding on a partial rollback of the petro-price hike and sponsoring a debate on the Karjil Committee Report.

At a meeting of the NDA Coordination Committee, the ruling combination also hammered out its strategy to deflect the

session set to generate heat



WINTER SESSION OF PARLIAMENT

DURATION

From today till December 22.

NO. OF NEW BILLS EXPECTED: 22

NO. OF PENDING BILLS: 26

MAIN BILLS AWAITING PASSAGE

- 33 per cent reservation for women in Lok Sabha and state Assemblies.
- Dilution of Govt equity in 19 banks from 51 to 33 %.
- Indian divorce (amendment)
- Freedom of information

POTENTIAL FLASHPOINTS

- Disinvestment of PSUs.
- Farmers' problems
- Falling rupee.
- New textile policy
- RSS's call for Indianisation of the Church.
- Vajpayee's I-am-a-swayamsevak speech in the US
- Petroleum price hike

Graphic by SANJAY

under the NDA regime.

In fact, a broad agreement exists among Opposition parties on raising the issues of national security, the "deviations" in the government's foreign policy, notably the tilt away from the Palestinian cause, and the "saffronisation" of education.

They are also determined to put the government on the mat for its inept responses to natural disasters like floods and drought in different parts of the country.

Almost as a foretaste of things to come, the government got rapped on the knuckles by Speaker G M C Balayogi today at the customary session-eve meeting of floor leaders.

He reportedly pulled up the Government for not taking serious note of issues raised under Rule 377 (special mentions).

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan, on his part, promised to convey the Speaker's observation to the Prime Minister and his other cabinet colleagues.

Both Houses are likely to be adjourned tomorrow after obligatory references to Srilanka's Srimavo Bhandarnaika, former governor C Subramaniam and former Congress president and MP Sitaram Kesri.

ing costs caused by subsidy cuts on farm inputs.

Earlier in the day, Congress Deputy Leader in the Lok Sabha Madhavrao Scindia listed the farmers concerns as his party's "number one priority" in the House proceedings.

The other issue which seized their attention concerned the farmers' plight on account of the demand for a White Paper on falling agricultural prices and ris-

indiscriminate disinvestment

Opposition may demand resignation of 'tainted' troika

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 19. — The Opposition is likely to demand the resignations of Mr LK Advani, Mr Murl Manohar Joshi and Miss Uma Bharati, the three Cabinet ministers accused in the Babari Masjid demolition case.

If the Prime Minister could ask Mr Harin Pathak to resign after criminal cases were filed against him, why haven't these three ministers been dropped, the CPI-M leader, Mr Somnath Chatterjee, asked at an Opposition meeting on the eve of Parliament's winter session. The government should not adopt double standards, he said.

But the government doesn't appear to be in a mood to relent. To the NDA convener, the comparison is not apt. Personally, Mr George Fernandes wasn't in favour of Mr Pathak's resignation. And to top it, the BJP has declared its treatment of the "Ayodhya movement" as a separate case.

The government is rather keen to engage Opposition's attention to the Women's Reservation Bill and various other businesses. It has to get the supplementary demands for grants (general and the railways) for 2000-01 passed. Ruling party members appeared confident of tackling the Opposition and getting the major Bills passed.

The NDA has agreed to discuss agriculture prices, the Kargil report and the international situation. Now that the Centre has announced unilateral ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir, the Opposition is bound to seek a clarification from it.

A meeting to achieve better floor coordination among Opposition parties to prevent the ruling coalition from taking advantage of a divided Opposition, was held at Mr Chatterjee's home today. The former Prime Minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar, the Congress's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, Mr Madhavrao Scindia, RJD's Mr Raghuvansh Prasad Singh and

BJP NEEDS A SPOKESMAN IN PARLIAMENT

NEW DELHI, Nov. 19. — The issue of who should be the party spokesman during the winter session of Parliament beginning Monday has thrown up a problem for the BJP. Neither of the party's two official spokesmen, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy and Mr Narendra Modi, is an MP.

The person on the job used to be a member of either House — like Mr Venkaiah Naidu or the late KL Sharma. Mr Jaswant Singh, who briefed journalists for a while, was a Lok Sabha member. Some BJP leaders said they were not aware who would brief the Press. However, they privately agreed that the person doing the job should be an MP for better management.

One impression is that Mr Naidu could be asked to do the job, as he has already been addressing press conferences outside Delhi on party affairs. However, it might not be accepted by the party leadership as Mr Naidu's voice would invariably be interpreted as the government's opinion. — SNS

CPI's Mr Ajay Chakraborty were among those who attended the meeting. The Opposition has decided to take up the price rise issue too. The Left parties had decided to move an adjournment motion on petroleum price hike. The Opposition is likely to demand a total rollback of the price hike. Mr Chatterjee said the Opposition wouldn't accept a partial rollback.

The government has already tried to parry the Opposition's attacks by asking the petroleum minister to announce a motion on petroleum price hike. The the petroleum minister to announce a partial rollback of LPG and kerosene

prices on the floor of the House on Tuesday. The Opposition is highly uneasy over some other issues like the BJP-RSS relations, economic policies such as disinvestment of profit-making PSUs and CBI reports on cricketers' involvement in match-fixing.

During the 33-day session, there would be 25 sittings, including five devoted to private members' businesses. The government plans to take up 26 pending and 22 new Bills for discussion. The prominent ones are those on plant variety, banking companies and divorce among Christians.

The Congress is likely to be tested on the issue of economic reforms, whether or not it would continue to support the government on the second generation of economic reforms. In that case, the Left and socialist parties will certainly be isolated.

A BJP leader said it would be difficult for the Congress to take a 'U' turn on economic reforms.

The Congress president and Opposition leader, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, has already opposed disinvestment of profit-making PSUs. She has demanded that the government should bring out a white paper on disinvestment. She is likely to get the Left parties' support in this regard.

These parties would possibly raise issues like decline in the value of Rupee, economic slowdown, removal of restrictions on imports and the new textiles policy. The government's decision to reduce its holdings in nationalised banks is a major issue.

The controversy over the relationship between the RSS and the BJP, particularly after the RSS call for Indianisation of churches at its Agra meeting, would also be taken up in both the Houses.

The RSS had called upon the minorities not to forget their Hindu ancestors.

The Veerappan episode would be discussed too as several parties have demanded a thorough probe into the kidnap drama.

THE STATESMAN

20 NOV 2000



Zero Hour: Parliamentary Affairs and IT Minister Pramod Mahajan perhaps thinks the Zero Hour is the best time to catch up with news reports. As a litany of woes swirled around him, he was seen pouring over a bunch of press clippings, ticking each item on the check-list. But one write-up that continued to fascinate him for better part of the hour was an interview with Infosys chief Narayanamurthy. The Minister raised his head once in a while to assure a member that the issue raised by him would be conveyed to the Minister concerned.

Speaker's disadvantage: As presiding officer, Deputy Speaker PM Sayeed cannot raise matters concerning his constituency (Lakshadweep). During Zero Hour, when the Congress's Ramesh Chennithala spoke about the problems of coconut growers in Kerala, Mr Sayeed said: "It affects my constituency too." At which, Mr Mahajan helpfully said he would send a note on the islanders' problem to the ministries concerned.

Cong headache: The Congress decision to sponsor an adjournment motion on the farmers' problems was intended to put the Vajpayee Government in the dock. Instead, the party leadership has ended up with a headache. Its three-line whip to its members to be present during the discussion and voting was ignored by several members, including senior leaders.

PM's ceasefire: The two-minute appeal is clearly not restricted to instant noodles. Prime Minister Vajpayee, who came to the Rajya Sabha for the first time this session, had got up to leave after Question Hour when Shiv Sena member Adik Shirodkar urged him to go back for a 'couple of minutes'. Although Shirodkar kept his word, his demand that the ceasefire offer be withdrawn led to a hour-long discussion. The PM sat through it and even responded to the mini-debate.

Witty PM: Mr Vajpayee's wit was evident during the impromptu discussion on the 'ceasefire' issue. He appreciated the support he received from all sections in the Upper House except one. "But one voice, one vote..." he intoned, in his own inimitable style, as laughter engulfed the House. He was referring to the time when his government collapsed because of one vote.

Today in Parliament

Lok Sabha: Multi-Modal (Transportation of Goods Amendment) Bill; Workmen's Compensation (Amend) Bill; Pvt members' Bill.

Rajya Sabha: Immigration (Carriers' Liability) Bill; Chit Fund (Amendment) Bill; Calling attention on the havoc caused by floods in various parts of the country; Private members' Bill.

Mahajan denies any move to privatise nationalised banks

HT Correspondent

New Delhi, November 23

THE OPPOSITION today sought to raise a number of issues during the zero hour in the Lok Sabha, ranging from dilution of government equity in banks to the disinvestment policy and the impasse in Maruti factory.

The Government's standard response for all the issues was that it was ready for a discussion with the Opposition.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan denied that the Government was proposing to privatise the public sector banks. Mahajan also assured the members that the newly created department of disinvestment, which is looked after by Arun Shourie, would be brought under the purview of one of the parliamentary standing committees.

Opposition members hit out at the Government on the proposed reduction of its equity in nationalised banks to 33 per cent, saying the intention was to 'privatise' the banking sector.

Pramod Mahajan said, "The Government wants to tell the House that

it has no plans to privatise any nationalised bank." To a query whether the Government was not planning to reduce its equity to 35 per cent in banks, he said, "We will have a discussion when the bill comes."

When agitated Basudeb Acharia (CPI-M) and P R Dasrainsi (Congress) accused Mahajan of "misleading" the House on the privatisation move, Lok Sabha Deputy Speaker P M Sayeed said they were at liberty to move a privilege motion against the Minister if they felt that he was misleading the house.

The Opposition members also attacked the Government for inaction to resolve the impasse in the Maruti Udyog Limited, saying its management was resorting to "unfair labour practices."

Raising the issue during zero hour, RJD leader Raghuvansh Prasad Singh said 83 employees were dismissed and accused the Government of hatching a "conspiracy" to sell its 50 per cent stakes to Suzuki of Japan.

Termining the situation in Maruti as "neither a strike nor a lock-out," Congress member S Jaipal Reddy said the employ-

ees were being forced to sign a good conduct declaration.

He charged the government with maintaining a "deafening silence" on the agitation. Naval Kishore Rai (JD-U) said the management was also not allowing hundreds of workers from entering the factory premises.

Congress chief whip P R Dasrainsi charged the Government with "deliberately attempting to undervalue" international flag carrier Air India by disinvesting its stakes and demanded a white paper on it. "The house is being kept in the dark," he said, adding no disinvestment in Air India should take place without prior consent of parliament.

Clash: The AIADMK and the DMK members clashed in the Lok Sabha. The former accused the Karunanidhi Government of having a "deep nexus" with forest brigand Veerappan.

Raising the issue during zero hour, an AIADMK member, K. Malaiswamy, demanded that the CBI, RAW and IB should probe these links. Heated exchanges followed as DMK members protested against his remarks.

France to liberalise immigration policy for IT professionals

New Delhi, November 23

FRANCE HAS liberalised its immigration policy for IT professionals on the lines of Germany and UK, although the country has not yet announced a figure for the number of IT workers to be accepted, Information Technology Minister Pramod Mahajan told the house.

MOUs for bilateral cooperation in IT were signed with 13 countries, including China, Australia, France, Hong Kong and Singapore, he added.

Bonus Act: The government is looking into the demand of trade unions for a raise of payment in the Bonus Act, Rajya Sabha was informed today. "Trade unions have been demanding from time to time that

Questions in Rajya Sabha

eligibility limit and calculation ceiling under the payment of Bonus Act 1965 be removed," Minister of State for Labour and Employment Muni Lal said in a written reply.

Sugar: Government has allowed the export of 10 lakh tonnes of sugar by sugar mills either directly or through exporters in view of high level of production during the last three seasons, Minister of State for Consumer Affairs V Sreenivasa Prasad said.

Dialogue With Nepal: External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh informed the house that the Government was engaged in a dialogue with Nepal, particularly in regard to implementation of effective border management.

(Agencies)

Questions in Lok Sabha

IA plans to acquire 39 new aircraft

New Delhi, November 23

ACQUISITION OF at least 39 aircraft has been estimated by the Indian Airlines over the next five years, which would cost about Rs 9,000 crore, Lok Sabha was told today.

A techno-economic evaluation study for purchase of these new aircraft is now underway, civil aviation minister Sharad Yadav said in a written reply. The airline is also in the process of acquiring on dry-lease five Boeing 737-200s and two A-320 planes to tide over the current shortage of aircraft, he said.

Spying: There is no input indicating Pakistani ISI's reported plan to establish a factory in Pak-occupied Kashmir (PoK) with the help of China to manufacture arms and explosives, defence minister Fernandes said.

Kargil: The group of ministers which reviewed the national security system in its entirety will submit its report to the government shortly after considering reports of four task forces set up by it on intelligence, internal security, border and defence management, he said.

Barrels: As many as 559 barrels for T-72 tanks have been kept segregated for detailed investigation following 45 incidents of barrel failures reported by the Army, he said.

Food for oil exchange: India has approached the United Nations for permission to exchange foodgrains for oil with Iraq which is facing sanctions from international community, petroleum and natural gas minister Ram Naik informed Lok Sabha today.

(PTI)

Cong aims at Advani's scalp again

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 24

THE LIBERHAN Commission's decision to summon Mr L. K. Advani has prompted the Congress to revive the old controversy over his continuation as Home Minister despite being an accused in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

"We will question the propriety of Mr Advani continuing as a Minister when he has been asked to appear before a Commission set up by his own Ministry," Congress chief whip in the Lok Sabha Priyaranjan Dasgupta said here today. He said the manner in which the issue is to be raised will be decided by the Congress Parliamentary Affairs Committee after a study of the House rules. However, relatively higher on the Congress' Parliamentary agenda

would be economic issues such as disinvestment and dilution of Government equity in nationalised banks.

While taking up these subjects in the House, the party would seek to distinguish its approach of liberalisation from that of the Vaipayee Government.

"We want to dispel the popular impression that the Congress' approach to liberalisation was the same as the BJP's," said a senior party MP. He maintained that by the end of the Winter Session, a clear change will be evident in the Congress economic outlook from the time it had supported the Insurance Regulatory Authority Bill in the

inaugural session of the 13th Lok Sabha.

To register firmly this distinction in public mind, the Congress would oppose the Government bid to "denationalise" banks.

"On the Insurance Bill, it was easy landing and take-off for the Government. But in the case of Banks we wouldn't, at any cost, accept Government equity as against the existing share of over 51 per cent," a Congress leader maintained.

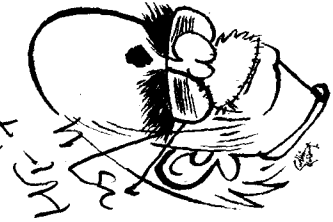
In fact, the party's quest for an image transformation has been necessitated by the feedback received from MPs and other elected representatives on the

growing resentment against the Government's policies among the farmers, the workers and to some extent the urban middle class.

All this is not to suggest that the party is completely giving up on Manmohanomics.

But the anxiety to impart a greater pro-poor tilt and a discernible social sensitivity to its economic policy is now evident in its approach.

While supporting the moves to distance the party from the Bharatiya Janata Party's unfolding economic agenda, Congress leaders hasten to clarify that they weren't completely washing their hands off the reforms initiated by Rajiv Gandhi and carried forward by P V Narasimha Rao, but only a deliberate course correction -- to enable the party identify more closely with popular concerns -- was taking place.



Mulaymspeak interrupted by Cong members

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 24

SAMAJWA, PARTY chief Mulayam Singh Yadav today found himself prevented from speaking in the Lok Sabha by Congress members, who sought to remind him of the behaviour of his party members, who obstructed Mrs Sonia Ghandi two days ago.

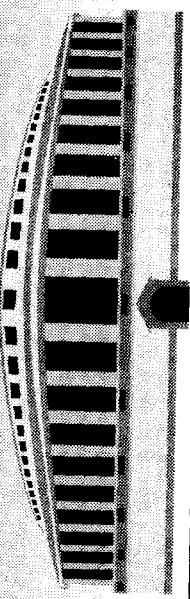
As the House assembled this morning, Mulayam sought suspension of question hour to discuss the communal tension in Uttar Pradesh, saying that his party had given a notice for an adjournment motion.

Led by Mityrat Chaturvedi, the Congress members said they too be allowed to raise issues. Mrs Gandhi was present in the House. Lokha Speaker G M C Bakayogi directed the Samajwadi Party members from raising the matter. He said they could raise the issue only after zero hour.

The Samajwadi Party chief was again on his feet after the question hour but speaker said zero hour would commence after the call attention on the industrial crisis that was taken up.

Later, at discussion on the call attention motion, the House witnessed scenes with the Samajwadi members storming the Wehe House after Mr Yadav narrated the situation in Jaunpur.

PARLIAMENT DIARY



Chandrashekhar flays Khurana: FORMER PM Chandrashekhar normally maintains a quiet demeanour even in the midst of chaos. But when he speaks he can be vitriolic. BJP's Madan Lal Khurana this a little too late in the discussion on polluting units.

Chandrashekhar lashed out at Khurana for demanding a modification in the Master Plan and quoting the BJP manifesto to substantiate it. "Neither the Prime Minister nor the Minister are dictators who can arbitrarily change the Master Plan which was adopted after Parliamentary approval," he thundered.

Khurana, he suggested, could chuck the manifesto into the "dustbin". As Khurana stuttered with suppressed fury, SP leader Mulayam Singh Yadav went on to propose that the manifesto should be burned. However Khurana managed to have the last word. "You are setting the country on fire," he said, pouring his ire on the UP leader.

Jagmohan unfazed: The call attention notice for a discussion on polluting units seemed to be spurred by the BJP members' attempts to extract some assurance from Mr Jagmohan on behalf of the owners.

Now everyone is waiting to see whether Thackeray will blow his top. But perhaps as a taste of things to come, the Sena's unit here flexed its Hindurva muscles by burning the Prime Minister's effigy.

Right through the debate, the Delhi MPs pleaded that the Minister at least assure that he would discuss the matter with the agitating owners. Khurana even threatened to lead the owners' agitation unless the Government came out with something concrete. But Jagmohan remained unmoved. When he finally spoke, he chose his words with care. "I will talk to everybody," he said, pointing out that the residents too had a view on the matter. But he made it clear that he would first await the Supreme Court verdict on the subject before holding any talks.

Sena on ceasefire: The Prime Minister's ceasefire offer saw several Shiv Sena Members of Parliament breathing fire. Immediately after the debate on the issue in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday, angry Shiv Sena members despatched a transcript of Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's speech to their chief Balasaheb Thackeray.

Now everyone is waiting to see whether Thackeray will blow his top. But perhaps as a taste of things to come, the Sena's unit here flexed its Hindurva muscles by burning the Prime Minister's effigy.

Opposition takes the honours

CL MANOJ
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

WEEK IN LOK SABHA

20/11
THE first week certainly went to the Opposition, despite the government's rejection of the Congress-sponsored adjournment motion with a convincing margin. If the mood of the House was any indication, it looks the government is heading for a winter of troubles, with the future of its top priority reforms drive facing serious obstacles.

The allies in the government did stand by it at the time of voting on the motion. But the growing concern about the "perceived unpopularity" of the government's economic policies among the common man were clearly reflected in the speeches of the Trinamul Congress, TDP, and the Shiv Sena members, fresh from their constituencies.

The Sena's vocal protest against the Ramzan ceasefire offer is yet another signal for the Prime Minister about the rumblings in the ruling front.

The most conspicuous factor

was the changing direction and tone of the Congress. Once Mrs Sonia Gandhi took over, the party was visible as an Opposition. Out of conviction or compulsion, the Congress, for the first time since the launching of the much-vaunted liberalisation policies, appeared to be sceptical about its beaten path and seemed trying to retrace its Left-bound posture.

This new stance, if not a temporary aberration, has the potential to be the basis for a realignment of equations in the Opposition, spelling trouble for NDA government. The opposition from the Congress has already left a big question mark on the fate of the Bill to cut the government stake in nationalised banks.

The adjournment motion moved by Mrs Gandhi against the alleged anti-farmer policies of the government was defeated. The significant factor is that Congress used the adjournment motion to censure

the government for "the plight of farmers under insensitive policies", a charge often levelled by the Left and regularly rejected by the Congress itself as the "hangover of the Socialist past, or, as blind opposition to economic policies".

The content of the speeches of the Congress members in debate were more leftist than the the Left. None could miss the twinkles in the eyes of Mr Somnath Chatterjee, sitting at the head of the Left brigade, when Mrs Gandhi, moving the motion, said: "This government, Sir, has proved hopelessly inadequate to the challenge. By selling off public units, this government has neglected the foundations of our economy. This government has grossly let down the kisan and the khet mazdoor".

Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav showed his determination, still, to spoil the party. He once again demonstrated his refusal to accept the Congress, or more

Mrs Gandhi, as the symbol of Opposition by marshalling his brigade to heckle her. And worst his party walked out when the motion was put to vote. The Congress along with the Left questioned the wisdom of the privatisation of the Air India and Indian Airlines. It demanded a white-paper on disinvestment process, and questioned the move to sell off Maruti.

The week also exposed weakness of the Congress benches. When Mr Nitish Kumar said the crises in the agro-sector was a creation of the previous Congress governments "surrender to the WTO", no Congress MP countered it.

Mr Jagmohan stood out in the crowd of politicians with his "politically incorrect defence" of the eviction of polluting industries. The gimmicks by Congress MP, Mrs Renuka Chowdhary and the unrefined attacks on Mrs Gandhi by the BJP member Mr Sahib Singh Verma and Samata Party member, Mr Prabhu Nath Singh, were the low points of the week.

THE STATESMAN

27 NOV 2000

Government has it cool *Parliament*

KEITH FLORY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

RAJYA SABHA REVIEW

TRADITIONALLY, the Opposition calls the shots in the opening days of a Parliament session. However, this did not happen in the Rajya Sabha last week. The Congress's bid to make a fuss of small industrial units' closure in the capital did not click. Some not-so-friendly fire from within the National Democratic Alliance actually worked to the government's advantage. As it goes in common parlance, the government "had it cool."

The Shiv Sena threatened an assault over the Ramzan ceasefire offer in Jammu and Kashmir but found itself out of tune with the rest of the House. The government capitalised on the CPI-M and other Opposition parties insisting on having their say. The Prime Minister and the external affairs minister combined well to project the offer as a sincere peace initiative.

Mr Vajpayee's first appe-

arance in the crimson-carpeted chamber after his surgery was an occasion for members to wish him well. Though it was no purple patch that he struck when speaking on Kashmir, he showed few signs of wear and tear. It was as though he was merely icing the cake Mr Jaswant Singh had baked.

After several years the Elders had an exhaustive debate on foreign affairs. Despite the Congress's claim that departures had been made from a consensus-based policy, there was no real attack on the government. Acceptance of realities marked the discussion even on the nuclear issue.

While there was no specific focus to the deliberations, Mr Jaswant Singh's reply was both competent and comprehensive. None could possibly deny his claim of a current diplomatic upswing in contrast to the post-Pokharan low. However, many found it hard to accept his

contention that the policy on West Asia had not shifted a bit. Though he did charge Israel with use of "disproportionate" force.

Petty politics dominated when the House dealt with relocation of industrial units in the capital. Charges were hurled about which party in power at the local level had been more tardy in dealing with the impending problem. Yet few members chose to look within and accept the fact that had politicians and officials acted in accordance with the law, there would have been no cause for judicial intervention.

Opposition members tried to make out a case for the poor who would be hit the hardest but could not quite counter the urban development minister's argument that regularisation of unauthorised industry would mean rewarding law-breakers and punishing law-abiders. Whether Mr Jagmohan will be able to stand firm on the issue

remains to be seen. He will be under pressure from all "political" quarters.

The discussion on the recent floods caused few ripples. Mr Nitish Kumar smartly averted from falling into a trap the CPI-M tried to set. Mr Nilotpal Basu asked whether the floods in West Bengal were caused by unprecedented rainfall or were man-made as Miss Mamata Banerjee contended. The query should be put to the water resources minister, he only handled relief measures, Mr Kumar quipped. His grin said it all.

A common scene in the House was witnessed that day — ministers chatting without paying attention to what was being said. Irked by this was Mr Nabam Rebia who represents Arunachal. The fact that he seldom spoke did not mean that what he said was irrelevant. He interpreted the ministers' behaviour as another indication of the "distance" between the North East and what calls itself the political mainstream.

THE STATESMAN

71-01-200

Satish, Ajit, Bhajan & Moly get benefit of doubt ■ Punishment ranges from 6-month to 7-year jail

Rao, Buta convicted in JMM case

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, Sept 29. — The former Prime Minister, Mr PV Narasimha Rao, and his Cabinet colleague, Mr Buta Singh, have been convicted in the JMM MPs' bribery case.

They have been found guilty under Section 120-B (criminal conspiracy) of the Indian Penal Code, Sections 7, 12, 13 (ii) read with Section 13 (1) (d) of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Pronouncing his verdict here this afternoon, the Special CBI Judge, Mr Ajit Bharihoke, gave the benefit of doubt to the other accused. Thus acquitted were the former Union ministers, Capt Satish Sharma and Mr Ajit Singh, former Haryana chief minister, Mr Bhajan Lal, former Karnataka chief minister, Mr M Veerapa Moly, former Karnataka ministers, Mr H M Revena and Mr Ramalinga Reddy, former Rajya Sabha M P, Mr V Rajeshwar Rao, and Karnataka liquor dealers, D K Adikesavulu and M Thimmegowda.

Mr Bharihoke will take up pleas pertaining to sentencing the convicted on 11 October. The Special Court held that the prosecution charges were proved by the evidence provided by the CBI and the statement of Mr Shalendra Mahato, a former JMM MP who had turned approver.

The sections under which Mr Rao and Mr Buta Singh have been convicted provide a maximum of seven years' imprisonment and a minimum of six months' jail, the public prosecutor, Mr RM Tewari, said after the verdict was declared. The next phase of the case — appeals to a higher court and bail — will depend on the sentence. Mr Rao's lawyers indicated to appeal against the verdict.

The details of the judgment, reportedly running into hundreds of pages, were not released. Mr Bharihoke said only one version was prepared today. Certified copies are expected to be made available to the parties in the case in a day or so.

The story began with a no-confidence motion in the Lok



Mr PV Narasimha Rao (left) and Mr Buta Singh outside the Special CBI Judge's court after their conviction. — AP/PTI



sitting on front rows relayed his order did it become clear that Mr Rao and Mr Buta Singh had been held guilty.

The court announced revocation of bail bonds of those acquitted, and passed residual orders.

There was no immediate reaction from the convicted. Mr Narasimha Rao chose not to offer any comment. Mr Buta Singh did mumble something about legal processes but opted for reticence. Those acquitted did speak of the majesty of the law.

After the court rose, Mr Rao walked out slowly. He was advised by his security staff and lawyers to relax on a sofa while clarifications were sought in the judges' chamber. While a couple of Mr Rao's close political allies were present in the court, they slipped away after the verdict was pronounced.

Mr Rao was left virtually alone. Just his SPG squad, his counsel and one personal friend. Mr Buta Singh was more fortunate. Family and friends had been at his side. There was no gloating in "victory" by the prosecution team and no striking signs of gloom in the other camp.

The Room D began to fill some 40 minutes before the scheduled start of the hearing, and towards the end there was some jostling for space. The lawyers occupied front rows, senior counsel took their places at the table below the Bench.

Two seats in the front row were reserved for Mr Narasimha Rao and his escort. Mr Buta Singh and the others sat in an enclosure to the rear. Mr Bharihoke came after 2 p.m.

Outside the court there was a fair amount of activity, generated by a battery of photographers, television teams and reporters.

Vigyam Bhavan has been witness to major events in national life. That it should have been, for reasons of security and administrative convenience, selected as the venue of a critical legal action of potentially political import was only in fitness of things.

■ More reports on page 6

Sabha in July 1993 when Mr Rao's minority Congress survived, courtesy the JMM and Mr Ajit Singh's party. Allegations of corruption led to a PIL and eventually the Supreme Court ordered an investigation. Cases against some of

the other accused were dropped after the Supreme Court ruled on voting in Parliament, and differentiated between giving and taking of bribes.

Mr Rao was convicted for indulging in corrupt practices — using money power to mani-

polate a majority in the Lok Sabha.

Court proceedings were over within 15 minutes. The special judge could not be heard beyond the first couple of rows of the crowded room in Vigyan Bhavan. Only when lawyers

Terrorism can't settle issues: Annan

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, AUG. 31. The United Nations Secretary-General, Mr. Kofi Annan, has condemned terrorism as a means of settling issues and expressed the hope that the Indo-Pakistan situation would evolve positively for the resumption of talks between the two countries. In a meeting with the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, in New York, Mr. Annan conveyed the U.N.'s perception of the situation in Jammu and Kashmir.

According to a statement issued by the Speaker's office from the U.N., Mr. Annan said during the course of his meeting that people did not have to be killed for making a point and that he was aware of the factors leading to terrorism and violence in Jammu and Kashmir. Mr. Annan viewed New Delhi's initiative for talks with militants in Jammu and Kashmir as an encouraging development and expressed concern over the way the Lahore initiative by India was undone by developments in the region. He reiterated that bilateral discussion was the best way to resolve issues.

Mr. Balayogi gave an account of the efforts made by the Central and State Governments on the empowerment of women and other sections of society, and in the strengthening of democracy. Mr. Balayogi said while India was

committed to good relations with neighbours, Pakistan has to demonstrate that it has given up the policy of sponsoring and supporting terrorism.

Reiterating India's commitment to the elimination of all nuclear weapons in a non-discriminatory manner, Mr. Balayogi welcomed Mr. Annan's proposal to convene an international conference to address the nuclear weapons issue.

A smaller world: Najma

Meanwhile, at the Millennium Summit of Speakers and Presiding Officers, Dr. Najma Heptullah, Deputy Chairperson of the Rajya Sabha and President of the Council of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), stressed that revolutionary trends and new thinking are bringing the world even closer adding to the desire of individuals and local communities to be a part of national and global affairs.

While the trends in democracy, economic growth, technology and the media were knitting the world together more intimately, these were also creating fresh challenges, she argued. "Many nations and sections of people within nations are being left behind. The gap between the rich and the poor, between those with access to new technologies and wealth

and those without it, is increasing dangerously," Dr. Heptullah observed.

"The great challenge at the dawn of the millennium therefore is to bridge this gap. The need is particularly acute with regard to the global financial architecture, trade and development. We need an approach that responds to the anxieties and aspirations of the marginalised, the minorities and the dispossessed."

She pointed out that terrorism in all its forms is a threat to the global community. "Terrorism does not respect national boundaries. Most people have lost their lives and property in terrorist attacks in recent years than in wars. We, as parliamentarians, cannot remain mere spectators. It is our responsibility as representatives of the people to address these issues."

AFP reports:

Speaking at the summit, Mr. Annan urged the world's Parliaments to reject the "fig-leaf democracy" of elections without free speech and a free press.

He told participants that "by ostracising those who would claim a place in the community of democracies on false pretences, you can help... To restore democratic government where it has been overturned and to strengthen it where it is in peril."

THE HINDU

SEP 2000

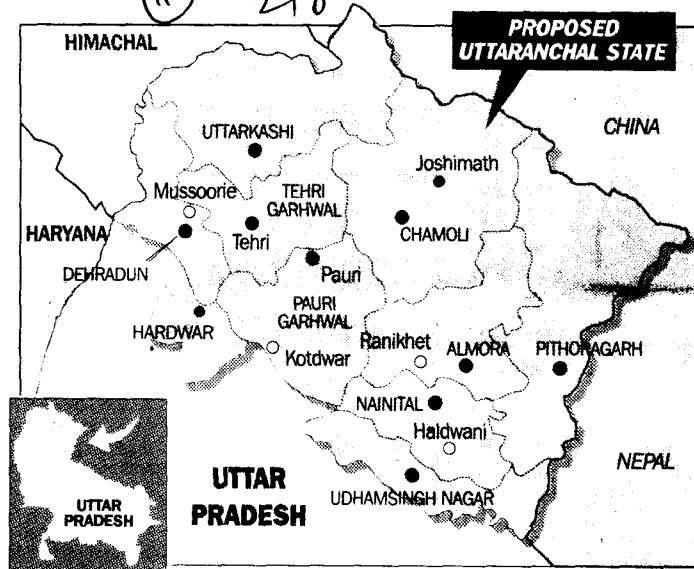
Lok Sabha passes Uttaranchal Bill

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 1

THE LOK Sabha today passed by voice vote a Bill for the creation of Uttaranchal State even as the Government agreed to increase the number of Assembly seats in the proposed State from 60 to 70.

The House adopted the Uttar Pradesh Reorganisation Bill, 2000, after Home Minister L.K. Advani assured the House that the Government will examine if one or two sugarcane growing tehsils around Udham Singh Nagar could be linked to the new State to ensure economic viability of sugar mills located in the area.

The Home Minister said the criteria for formation of new states would be based on the recommendations sent by the concerned state assemblies. Barring parties such as the SP, RJD, CPM, United Akali Dal and AIADMK, a majority of the parties supported the Bill. These parties were either opposed to the creation of smaller states or the "forcible inclusion" of Udham Singh Nagar and Hardwar in Uttaranchal. The House rejected



Map by VINEY

including those from SP, RJD, United Akali Dal and Congress MPs from Punjab, stormed the well of the House, saying that the Lok Sabha had a right know about the report before the Bill was taken into consideration. The Congress MPS from Punjab also staged a walkout.

This forced Defence Minister Mr Fernandes to inform the House that the "three member group" recommended the inclusion of Udham Singh Nagar in Uttaranchal. The "group" included Chief Ministers of Punjab and Haryana.

Initiating discussion on the Bill, N D Tiwari, Congress, said with the creation of the State a new chapter was being written in the history of the Himalayan region. Major General (Retd) B C Khandhuri, BJP, supported the Bill.

Mulayam Singh Yadav warned the Government against creation of new States since it would lead to demands from all parts of the country. Mayawati said special steps should be taken for the protection of minorities and backwards.

Akalis feel betrayed: Page 10

all the Opposition moved amendments to the Bill.

Replying to the debate on the Bill, Mr Advani said the credit for the creation of this new state does not go to any political party but to the people of the area who had been demanding a separate state

for a long time.

Earlier in the day, there was pandemonium in the House as Opposition members demanded that the report of "George Fernandes Committee" should be tabled in the Lok Sabha.

The Opposition members,

THE HINDUSTAN TIME.

- 2 AUG 2000

Missed opportunity for Opposition Reorgan

Saroj Nagl
New Delhi, August 13

THE WEEK should have belonged to the Opposition. But it didn't. Instead, the parties stood hopelessly divided, their fissures and distrust showing up clearly, even as the NDA Government managed to get away lightly.

Yet there were two issues on which the Government could have been hauled over the coals -- the series of tragedies in Jammu and Kashmir and its failure to pass the Women's Reservation Bill.

By the end of the week -- that spelt chaos, confusion and a low drama that tethered on the farcical -- it was the Opposition, which cut a sorry figure with the Government watching them go at each other's throats.

This was partly because of the lack of communication and coordination among the Opposition parties. The Congress, for instance, rushed into the week by pitching for a judicial probe into the massacre of the Amarnath yatis. Soon, it found itself isolated.

The Government rejected its demand outright. Even the Left and the Samajwadi did not favour it. Amidst charges and counter-charges of bailing out the Government, the Congress got support only from parties like the Muslim League and the AIADMK.

The Congress-Government deadlock on the

issue -- that led to five adjournments and two days of disruption -- was broken when the Congress gave notice for a discussion through a censure motion on the subject under Rule 184 that entails a vote. Since the party does not have the necessary numbers to carry it through, the motion, admitted by the Speaker, is headed for defeat.

But even before the judicial probe issue divided them, these parties had hit out at each other over the reported rescheduling of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement on the Amarnath killings. According to the CPI(M) and the SP, the statement was preponed at

Lok Sabha

the Congress' instance, bypassing the definite understanding reached with the Prime Minister that it would be made after the weekend. An incensed Leader of Opposition Sonia Gandhi intervened to point out that the Congress was not only unaware of any such understanding but was also not a part of it. By the time Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan cleared the air on the controversy, the Opposition had shown itself to be a divided lot.

Even on the Women's Reservation Bill it was the Opposition, which chose to highlight its differences. Though there are enough opponents

to the bill on the treasury benches, they lay low watching the Opposition slug it out. The Congress, the Left and the AIADMK demanded its immediate adoption. The SP, RJD, BSP and the Muslim League threatened to block it unless there was a sub-quota for SCs, STs and minorities. And the Government, pointing to the differences, maintained it would try to evolve a consensus.

But it was the developments midway through the week, which caused concern since they took a heavy toll of norms and decorum. On Wednesday, the Speaker's directives were repeatedly ignored. The Prime Minister was rudely interrupted and prevented from speaking. An attempt was made to heckle Sonia Gandhi. There was a slinging match between the treasury benches and the RJD members and between the BJP and the Congress. Then BJP member Vinay Katiyar, who was rapped by Pramod Mahajan for his unwanted comment on Sonia Gandhi, sat on a dharna to protest against a Congress member's allegedly threatening gesture. The turmoil subsided only after the Speaker said he would go through the video recording and take necessary action.

If there was a note of sobriety, even if it was short-lived, it was towards the end of the week. This was when Congress Deputy Leader Madhavrao Scindia spoke of the explosion that killed, among others, *The Hindustan Times* photojournalist Pradip Bhatia.

The Prime Minister explained that his Government had never shied from any inquiry. It had even ordered an inquiry into the Kargil war because it believed in transparency and accountability.

Deepak Razdan
New Delhi, August 13

THE RAJYA Sabha's last almost lost when the Congress, losing its strength stalled all over the first two days. The Government, pointing to the historical passage established by the Uttarakhand, thanks to the support of the Government by the main Opposition party. The Congress was adamant for a judicial inquiry into the killing of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's Amarnath Yatra pilgrims. In Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's reassuring reply to the members, the Congress remained unflinching.

Mr Vajpayee's reply was no more of Government policy in official language. He trusted to bring out truth about the judicial inquiry. They embarrassed the Government stating Defence Minister George Fernandes had "contradicted" the official view. The rest of Monday was lost when the Congress shouted only a judicial probe could bring out facts impartially.

The Congress was "victorious" the next day also. The House discussed nearly the whole day whether the Government should order a judicial inquiry or not. The Congress argued the voice of the members could not be throttled in a democracy.

reminded the Elders.

Reservation Bill the only solace,

The Government made the report public even when it criticised the Government at several places, he said.

He said politics was one thing but what the Government was faced with in Jammu and Kashmir was "war-like situation". There was obvious need for the Opposition to lend cooperation on policies and their implementation. To clear any doubts about Government plans, the Prime Minister made it quite clear that another Lahore "bus-ride" was unlikely. "We have burnt our fingers and we will be careful in future," he said.

The Congress was not impressed. Its mem-

Rajya Sabha

bers argued the executive inquiry could not be trusted to bring out truth about official matters. They embarrassed the Government stating Defence Minister George Fernandes had "contradicted" the official view. The rest of Monday was lost when the Congress shouted only a judicial probe could bring out facts impartially.

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The Congress argued the voice of the members could not be throttled in a democracy.

There were interesting speeches. For example, the former Chief of the Army Staff Shankar Roy Chowdhury (IInd) said inquiries "inhibited" the responses of soldiers.

Mr V. Virumbi (DMK) said the State Government had already ordered an inquiry and if there was another inquiry ordered by the Centre, it would go against the "federal" spirit. Noted jurist L. M. Singhvi (BJP) said the Opposition had made its point and it should be patient.

The need for the second inquiry could be examined when the first one was over. Mr Minister Arun Jaitley stressed that speed was the essence of inquiry and the officials' Eye could ensure that.

The Congress stuck to its demand, arguing that judicial inquiries could only clear doubts. Leader of the House Jaswant Singh rejected the demand. The Congress prevented the House from taking up the Madhya Pradesh Reorganisation Bill on Tuesday.

The next three days were remarkable. The House took up and approved the three Bills passed by the Lok Sabha in the previous week for the creation of the new States. The Government faced no difficulty as the Congress support negated the reservations of smaller Opposition parties. The House had made history. Home Minister L. K. Advani reminded the Elders.

Comic relief amid statehood debate

MOHAN SAHAY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

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WEEK IN LOK SABHA

But for some comic relief provided by Mr Raghuvans Prasad Singh (RJD) and Mr SK Bwismurtiary, an Independent member from Kokrajhar, the long discussions — ranging from four hours in the case of the Chhattisgarh Bill to eight hours in the case of Jharkhand — proved a testing week for Lok Sabha members and the press corps assigned to cover the proceedings. They had to sit longer on three consecutive days when the Bills were passed.

The focus shifted to autonomy for Kashmir on Thursday when the House resumed discussion on the issue.

Mr Bwismurtiary, despite being the lone voice of Bodoland in the House of 545 members,

was the centre of attraction because of his colourful attire and slogans for a separate state that he raised every now and then, interrupting the proceedings. But nobody seemed to mind. Even the Speaker, Mr GMC Balayogi, ignored his misdemeanours.

The day the Jharkhand Bill was passed, Mr Bwismurtiary came to the House with his head shaved. "All my hair is gone, so is my patience. Please consider Bodoland," he said, sending the House into peals of laughter.

If any record of sorts was made in the Lok Sabha, it was by the irrepressible Raghuvans Singh who moved more than 40 amendments to the three statehood Bills, knowing well that his

amendments would fall through.

When patience was running out on both sides, the Speaker kept asking Mr Raghuvans Singh "are you moving your amendment", hoping that the member would say "no" after seeing his amendments falling like pins. But, on each occasion, Mr Singh disappointed him.

However, in amendment no. 41 to the Bihar Reorganisation Bill, Raghuvans Prasad — supported by some CPI-M, SP and Congress members, including Mrs Sonia Gandhi — succeeded in laying a trap for the government by insisting on division of the House on special packages for Bihar and Jharkhand. Accepting the amendment would have meant the Centre

committing itself to coughing up the gigantic sum whereas its rejection through division would have exposed the members on treasury benches, belonging to Bihar and the proposed Jharkhand state, to the charge of denying their respective states special packages. It was a "heads you win, tails I lose" situation. But the House evaded the trap by settling for a headcount to reject the amendment.

During the special discussion on Kashmir autonomy, some members, including Mr Indrajit Gupta (CPI), said corruption under the National Conference government was one of the factors responsible for the growing disenchantment of the J&K people. Mr Rashid Ali (BSP) chided the Farooq government for not allowing Hindu temples to come up in the valley.

THE STATESMAN

57 AUG 2001

Elders excel in paperwork

KEITH FLORY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

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A lot of activity on paper, little that was genuinely effective. That was the scene in the Rajya Sabha last week.

Somehow the members create the impression that they feel that their job is done if they have spoken forcefully, created an uproar, caused a minister to trip up, staged a walk out and so on. No sustained effort is made at trying to see that government policy is influenced by their offerings in the House.

An overloaded agenda paper, and poor time-management also had their impact. Debates were fractured, spread over more than one day resulting in a loss of continuity, and a dilution of interest. Things simply

did not click. And the new format of special mentions being restricted to reading out a pre-approved 250 word statement robbed them of their "spice".

The Opposition appeared to be trying to clutch at every possible straw with which to beat the government but failed to come up with the proverbial one that broke the camel's back. On several issues there was some confusion reflected in the thinking of the Opposition, which meant that real pressure was never brought to bear.

The debate on the disinvestment process exemplified that. Though Mr Pranab Mukherjee spoke at length the line he took was decidedly blurred. The Left

parties, as was only to be expected, advocated the case of the public sector and wanted taxpayers' money to be continuously pumped into keeping sick units artificially alive.

While Mr Arun Jaitley more than adequately presented the government's position, his successor, Mr Arun Shourie, was much too wayward to impress. He tried to cover the entire history of the public sector and spoke little about disinvestment. A bit of good "subbing" would have helped the former editor's presentation to retain some focus.

The noisy trio of CPI-M appeared determined to make things hot for Mr Shourie, and when that is the tactic it is Mr

Jibon Roy who is drafted to take the lead. But this time around he overdid it, for it is downright unfair not to let a minister have even a few sentences of uninterrupted say. The CPI-M was thrilled, but to what positive gain?

If those CPI-M members from West Bengal were looking for a good example, it came from their leader, Mr S Ramachandran Pillai. Admittedly the issue on which he "scored" was rather trivial — a Bill to regulate the functioning of private security agencies — but the dignified and convincing manner in which he pointed to its shortcomings succeeded. The government agreed to take another look at its provisions.

That the Bill had been poorly drafted was also emphasised by Mr Swaraj Kaushal.

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Both Houses witness uproar

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 7

BOTH HOUSES of Parliament were today adjourned ahead of schedule amidst uproarious scenes when the Congress strongly demanded a judicial probe into the recent massacre of Amarnath Yatra pilgrims.

Rejecting the Congress demand in the Lok Sabha, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan maintained that a judicial inquiry could not be ordered. The reason being that it was a matter of public order and under the Commission of Inquiry Act, the Government could not order such an inquiry into matters relating to Jammu and Kashmir.

In the Rajya Sabha, leader of the House Jaswant Singh rejected it saying, "We are not going to order a judicial inquiry, no matter what case laws, real or imaginary, false or true are cited here. The Elders wanted Defence Minister George Fernandes to clarify his reported statement that the massacre was avoidable.

Mr Mahajan told the Lok Sabha that a

judicial inquiry at this time would only demoralise the security forces who were fighting a proxy war and added that an executive inquiry was already on to find out if there were any lapses.

However, Congress deputy leader Madhav Rao Scindia, who had raised the issue during the zero hour, argued that it was not a question of public order but of the destabilisation of the Union and therefore the need to set up a judicial inquiry.

Judicial probe into killings

Mr Scindia said that the Government should have expected that the Amarnath yatis, as a soft target, were in danger and should have provided adequate security for them.

A divide in the Opposition ranks on the issue of a judicial inquiry was clearly evident when Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mr Somnath Chatterjee argued against a judicial probe claiming that it would give an opportunity to the Government to brush the issue under the carpet. Instead

both leaders called for an immediate and detailed discussion on the issue.

However, the Congress found support from CPI leader Indrajit Gupta who demanded that a judicial inquiry should be set up on the ground that Home Minister L K Advani himself had admitted to security lapses. Members such as E Ahmed and G M Banatwala also backed the party on the issue.

As soon as the Rajya Sabha reassembled after lunch, Mr Pranab Mukherjee (Cong) said reports had appeared in *The Hindustan Times* headlined "Security for Amarnath pilgrims inadequate" and *Indian Express* headlined "Massacre was avoidable".

The Government must come out with a clarification on the whole issue because the reports suggest that the Defence Minister had made comments suggesting that the massacre could have been avoided. The issue could not be treated as "closed" just because the Prime Minister had given his reply. Mr Suresh Pachauri (Cong) demanded the Defence Minister should clarify his comments in the House.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 8 AUG 7 am

Opp divided over probe into Kashmir killings

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 7. — The Opposition was sharply divided in the Lok Sabha today when the Congress raised the demand for a judicial inquiry into the Kashmir killings last week to fix responsibility for the lapses in providing security cover to the Amarnath pilgrims and the innocent labourers who were gunned down by terrorists.

After raising the matter during Zero Hour, the Congress members led by Mr Buta Singh, Mrs Renuka Chowdhary and a few others forced the House to adjourn for two hours after the lunch recess. The demand was raised again by the Congress members when the House resumed leading to an impromptu debate. Mr Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M) and Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav (SP) opposed the Congress' demand for a judicial probe into the killings. Mr Yadav said no purpose would be served by asking for a judicial inquiry since it would only help the government put the matter under wraps. "I know what judicial inquiries are. Seldom are the reports and recommendations of judicial probes implemented. Besides, it is time consuming," Mr Yadav said. On the contrary, the Samajwadi Party leader demanded a special discussion in the House again claiming that he would prove on the floor of the House that it was not only the home minister and

the Prime Minister who were responsible for the massacre but the whole government would be exposed.

Mr Indrajit Gupta (CPI) also demanded further clarifications from the government since the Union home minister, Mr LK Advani, had admitted on the

SC DISMISSES PIL

NEW DELHI, Aug. 7. — The Supreme Court today dismissed a PIL seeking a direction to be issued to the Centre and the J&K government to restore the criminal justice system in the state.

The petitioner stated before a Division Bench comprising Mr Justice SP Bharucha and Ms Justice Ruma Pal that out of 10,000 arrested militants only one has been convicted after the conviction of Maqbool Butt. He alleged that fear of militants had crippled the judiciary.

"This is beyond the powers of this court," the Bench observed before dismissing the PIL. — SNS

floor of the House last week that there were serious security lapses in the Kashmir valley. This was further supported by the defence minister, Mr George Fernandes, who had been quoted as saying that the "massacre was avoidable", he said.

Mr Somnath Chatterjee pointed to the Speaker the absence of Mr Advani from the House when the serious issue was

under discussion. To this the Union parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Pramod Mahajan, said it was not possible for all ministers to be present at all times in the House. If the members wanted a discussion on the subject, the government was ready for it and the home minister would be present in the House tomorrow.

Congress members, including Mr Madhavrao Scindia, quoted Mr Fernandes' statement in Jammu yesterday to buttress the party's demand for a judicial inquiry.

Intervening in the debate, Mr Pramod Mahajan expressed doubts over ordering a judicial inquiry into the Kashmir massacre quoting the Commission of Inquiries Act 1952, which could not be applicable in this case since Jammu & Kashmir enjoys special status under Article 370 of the Constitution. Mr Mahajan also referred to certain provisions in Schedule VI and VII of the Constitution. This was strongly contested by the Congress members who said there was nothing in the Constitution to prevent the government from ordering a judicial inquiry into the Kashmir massacre.

Protesting against the minister's statement, the Congress members walked into the well of the House raising slogans. The Speaker adjourned the House for the day after the Congress members refused to listen to his repeated appeals for calm and order.

Both Houses rocked over probe demand

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, Aug 8

THE CONGRESS today fiercely pursued its demand for a judicial probe into the Amarnath Yatra killings, forcing the Lok Sabha to adjourn early. The party also staged a walkout in the Rajya Sabha to express its anger.

The Lok Sabha was adjourned twice - the second time for the day -- when the Congress demand for inquiry led to uproarious scenes. The Rajya Sabha debated the issue almost for the entire day, with the Congress staging a walkout when the Government rejected its demand for a judicial inquiry.

The Government stuck to its view that a judicial probe at this juncture would demoralise the security forces. The State Government had ordered a high-level executive probe and this was sufficient to bring out all relevant facts, the Rajya Sabha was told. Though it received virtually no support from other Opposition parties, the Congress members argued there were precedents for judicial probes, which were the fairest method of ascertaining the truth.

Leader of the House Jaswant Singh told the Rajya Sabha that the members were intermingling cause and effect. There was no doubt that terrorist activity in Jammu and Kashmir was inspired, abetted, financed and supported by Pakistan. No judicial inquiry was needed to establish that. What needed to be probed was "the effect." The best way to find out what happened was the inquiry that had been already ordered by the State Government, he said.

Mr Jaswant Singh urged the House to consider and accept the

advise given by Gen. Shankar Roy Chowdhury (retd) that inquiries did have an impact on the morale of the forces. He said India had never treated Jammu and Kashmir as disputed territory and he had himself made this clear at the UN forum.

Leader of the Opposition Manmohan Singh said newspaper reports indicated that the CRPF men had fired at the pilgrims' centre. They might have done it inadvertently, but the best way to stop all such "nonsense" was to have the judicial inquiry.

While agreeing that Pakistan's hand in the terrorist activity was known, Dr Singh argued that the people wanted to know how were the terrorists able to strike despite elaborate arrangements.

Law Minister Arun Jaitley said the Opposition had raised doubts even when the Government ordered the Kargil inquiry. Though a judicial inquiry had been sought, the high-level probe set up by the Government had proved highly productive, he said. All inquiries, he said, need not be judicial inquiries.

Mr Kapil Sibal (Cong) said what was important was the "mode" of the inquiry. There was need for an inquiry which should have public confidence and explain how everything happened. The Congress, he explained, did not want the security forces to be discredited through the judicial probe.

Congress deputy leader Madhavrao Scindia wanted to know "Why is the Government running away from a judicial inquiry into the killings?" Several Congress members stormed into the well and the Speaker adjourned the House. The scene was no different after the lunch recess.

THE HINDUSTAN

9 AUG 2000

Kashmir and some trivial matters ✓

MOHAN SAHAY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

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14/8

WEEK IN LOK SABHA

ORCHESTRATED protests over the Kashmir massacre dominated the scene in the Lok Sabha last week with successive adjournments of the House on Monday and Tuesday.

Surprisingly, the government not only appeared defensive but also a bit demoralised as senior ministers and even the leader of the House, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, were absent for the major part of the week.

Zero Hour in the parlance of legislative business is at 12 noon after the question hour between 11 a.m. and 12 noon. During zero hour members can raise any matter under the sun without giving advance notice to the Speaker. They can ask questions on subjects which are not listed in the business scheduled for the day.

Sometimes members raise sundry matters ranging from drinking water crisis in their constituencies or lack of electricity supply and even law and order in their district or state.

Some members of the Business Advisory Committee took umbrage at their fellow members raising matters, which according to them, were trivial or purely local in nature. At the BAC meeting held in the

Speaker's chamber this week, the issue cropped up as some members of the committee felt that by raising "petty" matters, the honourable members of the House were in fact wasting precious hours. Only matters of national importance should be raised in Parliament.

Watching some members perform, one is inclined to believe that all is not lost and there are elected representatives of the people who are indeed concerned about the people and the nation.

During the impromptu debate on the Kashmir issue, one BJP member, Mr Ram Nagina Mishra from Uttar Pradesh, appealed to the members not to play politics over the bodies of those slain in the Kashmir valley.

Mr Mishra was the only member on the Treasury Benches to support the demand for a judicial inquiry into the killings not because the demand came from the Congress but as he told the House: "How one can trust and believe the administration when the police were reported to be picking up gold chains and earrings from the dead pilgrims of Amarnath?"

It was time for Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav

to remind the House of Feroze Gandhi of the Congress who had set a precedent in the 1950s by raising the issue of the Mundhra scandal involving the government headed by his father-in-law, Jawaharlal Nehru. Mr Yadav complimented Mr Mishra, much to his embarrassment.

As the week was coming to an end on Friday, the presiding officer conducting the business during the post-lunch session suggested an extended sitting of the House so that the Private Members Bills could be taken up and also to complete the discussion and pass the Cable Television Networks (Regulations) Amendment Bill. Mr Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, who normally does not miss even dull and drab proceedings of the House, was angry and irritated.

"What is the justification of extending the business hours every day when you know that the members are going to their respective constituencies availing of the four-day break?" he asked. The attendance was indeed thin on Friday when at around 5.45 p.m. there were only 25 members though the quorum demands the presence of at least 10 per cent of the total strength of the House. In the case of Lok Sabha it is 45.

THE STATESMAN

14 AUG 2000

Paswan splurge irks PMO

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 17. — The Prime Minister's Office, which has been trying to teach all ministries some financial discipline, is not happy with Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's profligacy.

The Union communications minister, on the other hand, finds the PMO making his independent decisions difficult.

The latest stand-off was sparked by Mr Paswan's desire to regularise the services of 3.09 lakh extra-departmental employees. The PMO reportedly does not favour the move, pointing to the additional burden of Rs 1,300 crore per year.

According to ministry sources, the telecom department already has a deficit of Rs 1,700 crore. Regularisation would mean a pay hike of Rs 3,000-4,000 per month for every employee.

The Union finance minister, already irked by Mr Paswan's populist measures, is unlikely to agree to the proposal.

But, as a compromise, Mr Paswan may be asked to increase the ED staff strength rather than regularise existing employees, a source said. By generating additional employment, this could be an interesting move.

The category of ED employees was created to bring postal services within the reach of common man, particularly in rural areas. These employees open outlets for short periods to sell postal items like stamps and

envelopes.

The PMO's decision to privatise STD services without imposing stringent conditions on private operators also has Mr Paswan frowning.

The minister was reportedly in favour of restrictions, as it would have given the department of telecommunications some control over the operators. The Telecom Commission, too, had suggested restrictions like forcing them to provide services in non-economic areas.

The minister of state for communications, Mr Tapan Sikdar, however, felt otherwise. In a letter to the Prime Minister, he argued that stringent restrictions might deter private operators from entering the fray.

Some ministry officials in favour of telecom privatisation reportedly agreed with Mr Sikdar. The PMO agreed with Mr Sikdar's arguments. A source even claimed that the letter was drafted at the instance of the PMO.

The minister's decision to provide free telephones to all telecom employees was not liked by the PMO. When Mr Yashwant Sinha objected to the move, Mr Vajpayee worked out a compromise. By stopping free calls, he diluted Mr Paswan's scheme.

Mr Paswan is also seething over the commitment he was forced to give Mr Vajpayee on DoT corporatisation by 1 October.

THE STATESMAN

18 AUG 2000

LS to discuss Kargil report

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 17

THE LOK Sabha is slated to discuss next Thursday the Subrahmanyam Committee report on the events that led to the Kargil intrusions.

The discussion on the report, which was tabled during the Budget session, is expected to be completed the same day, according to the schedule worked out at the Business Advisory Committee meeting today.

With only five working days left before the ongoing Monsoon Session comes to a close, the schedule does not include any discussion on the Eleventh Finance Commission report, the agriculture policy or the Women's Reservation Bill.

Several leaders raised this point at the meeting.

Drawing the members' attention to the differences that continue to divide parties on the contentious Women's Reservation Bill, the Government reiterated the need to evolve a consensus on the constitutional amendment bill that calls for a two-thirds majority for adoption.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan assured members that the Government would call a meeting of party leaders before the Winter Session of Parliament to try and construct a consensus on the matter.

Similarly, he rejected the proposal to convene a week-long special session to discuss the Eleventh Finance Commission report and

the agriculture policy.

The matter was raised by the Telugu Desam, the Congress and some other parties.

Although no firm decision was taken, there was a suggestion that the month-long Winter Session of Parliament be extended by a week.

The suggestion was that the extended period be devoted exclusively to a discussion on the Finance Commission report and agriculture policy.

According to the schedule decided at the meeting, the House would take up on Monday afternoon, the supplementary demand for grants for the General Budget.

Later in the evening, it would discuss and vote on the Congress-sponsored censure motion that demands a judicial probe into the security lapses that led to the massacre of the Amarnath yatis.

Since the demand, framed under Rule 184, does not have the support of other opposition parties except the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam and the IUML, it is expected to be defeated.

The two Constitutional amendment bills approved by the Rajya Sabha today will be taken up by the House on Tuesday.

These deal with restoring relaxation in qualifying marks for promotions in government jobs for SCs and STs and to exempt tribal Arunachal Pradesh from making reservation of seats for SCs.

There will be no sitting of either House on Wednesday because of Janmashtami.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 AUG 2000

Reorganisation Bills introduced in LS

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 25

IN THE face of stiff resistance by the non-Congress Opposition, the government today managed to introduce in the Lok Sabha three State Reorganisation Bills that would pave the way for the creation of the new States of Uttaranchal, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh. The Bills are likely to come up for discussion and passage next week.

The ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) faced some embarrassing moments when some of its allies -- the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) and senior members owing allegiance to the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (U) -- opposed the Bihar Reorganisation Bill-2000 in its present form, for the creation of Jharkhand State.

The protesting Opposition parties, minus the Congress, later staged a noisy walkout. To the Treasury side's utter discomfiture, they were joined by the BJD members. The Bill's opponents in the House received a shot in the arm when Samata's Prabhunath Singh challenged Home Minister L. K. Advani's claim that the Bills were drafted after arriving at a consensus among the NDA partners. "No meeting of the NDA partners was convened on this issue. Only the consent of some individual leaders was sought," charged Mr Singh. Former Union Minister and his JDU (U) colleague, D. P. Yadav echoed similar views, alleging a conspiracy against the nine crore people of north Bihar. "The Bill only partly covers the resolution passed by the State Assembly which had demanded a financial package for the remaining part of the State after carving out Jharkhand," he said.

On its part, the BJD strongly demanded that the Bill be modified before introduction in the House.

Supported by the Congress' K. P. Singhdeo, the Biju Dal's Prasanna Acharya and Trilochan Kanungo insisted that Orissa's long standing dispute with Bihar over Sarai Killa and Kharsun Districts -- which were originally part of their State -- should be resolved through a specific provision in the Bill for restoration of status quo ante. Mr Advani rejected some Opposition members' charge that the government adopted a "pick and choose" policy for the creation of the three states in disregard of similar demands in other parts of the country. The Home Minister maintained that the Government has acted in accordance with popular wishes in the three regions. Moreover, the Statehood Bills were a fulfilment of the NDA's agenda of governance. Allaying members' fears over Bihar's financial state following the proposed reorganisation, he said the Centre has already created a special unit in the Planning Commission under its Deputy Chairman for the state's development.

Earlier, the Left parties, joined by the RJD and the Samajwadi Party, stoutly opposed the introduction of the Bills. They said the move was "dangerous" and could lead to the country's disintegration.

However, BSP leader Mayawati fully supported the move while asking the government to resolve all disputes -- including the one over Hardwar and Udham Singh Nagar with regard to the proposed Uttaranchal -- before getting the Bills passed in the House.

Holding centrestage for the better part of the nearly three-hour-long debate, Dr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh (RJD) ridiculed Mr Advani's claim that three States were being carved out on the basis of resolutions passed by the Assemblies concerned. "Why don't you apply the same yardstick to J&K and accept the resolution for grant of greater autonomy to the State," he queried.

Govt gets shot in the arm as major parties concur

THE GOVERNMENT got a pleasant surprise on Tuesday when major political parties concurred with its suggestion that the three statehood bills should not be referred to the Standing Committee but be taken up immediately by the House for consideration and passage.

However, Rashtriya Janata Dal's Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, who has been resisting the Bihar State Reorganisation Bill in its present form, was not there when the Business Advisory Committee met this evening to draw up the Lok Sabha's schedule next week.

Although it is Speaker G. M. C. Balayogi's prerogative to refer any bill to the Standing Committee, the agreement at the meeting would seem to clear the decks for the early adoption of the bills.

The bills will require a simple majority for their passage.

On Wednesday, the House will discuss the issue of Centre-State relations, with reference to the demand for greater autonomy.

HTC, New Delhi

RS uproar over "attacks on Christians" ⁵⁷⁸ ₂₇₄

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 26. — The BJP's contention that it would be "a sweeping statement" to conclude that the attacks on Christians in different parts of the country pointed to a concerted campaign, and its accusing the Opposition of remaining silent when Hindus were attacked, plunged the Rajya Sabha into uproar today.

Taking exception to comments from Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, Opposition members rushed to the well, leading to a 75-minute adjournment. The Chairman then called a meeting of MPs for less-confrontationist activity.

The government said: "There have been some incidents of violence aimed at Christians and their institutions in the recent past in some parts of the country but most of the incidents, however, relate to law and order/crime." It said it shared its Intelligence inputs with the states, sent out advisories, alerts and revised guidelines for the promotion of communal harmony were issued in 1997. ✓

THE STATESMAN

Jethmalani vents his spleen in public

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 27

PARLIAMENT PLUNGED into turmoil today as the Opposition in both Houses, led by the Congress, demanded a statement by Prime Minister A B Vajpayee on the charges former Law Minister Ram Jethmalani had levelled against the Chief Justice of India and the Attorney-General.

Waving copies of *The Hindustan Times*, which had detailed the former Minister's allegations, senior Congress leaders demanded from an embarrassed Government that it act against Jethmalani. They said Jethmalani had annexed copies of secret official documents to support his allegations in a statement he had wished to make in the Rajya Sabha, explaining his exit from the Cabinet.

Pressure mounted on the government in the two Houses after Rajya Sabha Chairman Krishan Kant, in a ruling, asked Jethmalani to modify his statement. He had earlier been told by the Law Ministry that some of the 87 annexures to the purported explanation were marked "secret and confidential and cannot be used by a former minister."

As the Congress demanded action against Jethmalani for violating his oath of office and secrecy, Minister of State for Law and Justice Arun Jaitley said the Government would investigate the "leakage" of documents submitted by Jethmalani to the Rajya Sabha Chairman.

Sorabjee rubbishes allegations

ATTORNEY-GENERAL Soli Sorabjee has vehemently refuted the allegations made by sacked Law Minister Ram Jethmalani. In a statement issue in New Delhi on Thursday, Sorabjee said the allegations made against him by Jethmalani are "baseless and without foundation".

Detailed report on Page 10

In the Lok Sabha, which witnessed pandemonium twice and was adjourned for the day after it reassembled at 4 pm, Congress party's deputy leader Madhavrao Scindia said newspapers were full of reports about the allegations against the Chief Justice and the Attorney-

General, made by Jethmalani.

"A confrontation is brewing between the Judiciary and the Executive. We had not raised the matter till today but now it is out in the Press," Scindia said.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan, who sought to dismiss as "absolutely not true" reports about such a confrontation, was harangued by the angry Opposition. Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi and Congress members, some of whom agitatedly walked into the Well of the House, said they were not prepared to listen to Mahajan and nothing short of an explanation by the PM would do. Vajpayee said he had chosen not to speak as he thought this was a matter between the Chairman and Jethmalani. "All these documents, whether they are secret or not, will have to be looked into. The Law Ministry will do it within an hour," Vajpayee assured.

The RS was in the midst of a discussion on disinvestment when Jaitley entered to announce that his ministry had given its response to the Secretariat and it was for the Chairman to rule on Jethmalani's explanatory statement.

See also Pages 8 and 12

Parliament say on autonomy to be final: Advani

State Govt sends report to
Centre for follow-up action

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 27

UNION HOME Minister L. K. Advani has said that a final decision on the resolution passed by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, demanding greater autonomy for the State, would be taken by Parliament.

Virtually endorsing his party's point of view on the autonomy issue, Mr Advani said: "Whatever needs to be done (on the resolution) has to be done by Parliament. Everyone knows its composition and the views of those who constitute it."

He further said that the Centre would take a "considered view" after receiving the report from the State Government. "I presume the report (on the resolution) will be sent to the Union Government.

We will then take a considered view," he commented.

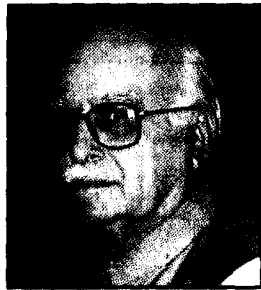
Mr Advani said that a Cabinet meeting to discuss the developments relating to the autonomy issue would be held immediately after Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee returned from abroad. Mr Vajpayee is at present in Lisbon to attend the first Indo-European Union summit.

He refused to comment Dr Abdullah's reported remarks that the Prime Minister had welcomed the autonomy move during his recent meeting with him here. "I will not comment on it. If at all anything has to be said on it, the Prime Minister will say it."

While denying that the passage of the resolution by the J and K Assembly has caused any embarrassment to the Centre, he said that the National Conference (NC) is still a part of the ruling

National Democratic Alliance (NDA). "Nowhere has the Chief Minister talked about severing links with the alliance", Mr Advani responded to a question regarding likelihood of NC parting ways with the NDA.

The Home Minister further said that the Centre favoured more devolution of power to the States. In any case, Jammu and Kashmir already enjoys more powers, he added when asked if the autonomy resolution would give rise to similar demands from other States as well.



In Srinagar, Farooq Abdullah ruled out the possibility of any confrontation with the Centre, saying that "we believe in dialogue and discussions".

Meanwhile, the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Council today adopted the motion on autonomy

seeking approval of the report of the State Autonomy Committee and its recommendations.

The motion was passed by voice vote. The lone BJP member voted against it. The State Assembly adopted the motion yesterday.

The resolution on autonomy adopted by Jammu and Kashmir Assembly has been sent to the Centre for follow up action, Speaker Abdul Ahad Vakil said today.

Copies of the resolution for restoration of autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir have been sent to Secretaries General of Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha, he said. It is now up to the Centre to initiate action, Vakil said.

Dismissing apprehensions on the autonomy report, he said the report would rebuild trust and confidence between the State and the Centre.

See also Page 12

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 JUN 2000

Govt agrees to discuss Sankhya Vahini again

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 3

THE GOVERNMENT today agreed to discuss the controversial Sankhya Vahini project in Parliament even as the Opposition parties sharpened their attack on the government for entering into a "shady deal" that compromised the nation's security. They demanded that the project should be stopped forthwith and an inquiry instituted into it.

The issue led to angry exchanges between the Treasury and Opposition benches in the Lok Sabha during zero hour. Outside the House, CPI-M's Rajya Sabha MP Nilotpal Basu released certain classified documents to substantiate the Opposition's charge that the project, which was pushed through in haste, violated rules.

In a letter to Prime Minister Vajpayee on May 1 and released to the media today, Mr Basu called for an inquiry since the documents go beyond the confines of the project and raise questions about "governance per se and transparency and probity in public life."

The annexures to the letter include, among other documents, the Standing Committee report severely criticising the project and its implications and the official communication between related departments. These, Mr Basu

No need for probe, says BJP

THE BJP on Wednesday said there was no need for any probe into the government entering into an MoU with a US company for setting up a high speed data network called the Sankhya Vahini. Rejecting the Opposition's demand for a probe by a parliamentary committee, BJP spokesperson M Venkaiah Naidu refuted Press reports that Prime Minister A B Vajpayee had ruled out a review of the project.

HTC, New Delhi

pointed out, raise serious questions about the entire gamut of the project—from legality to funding and propriety to national interest.

More specifically, both Mr Basu's letter and the members who raised the issue in the Lok Sabha, questioned the selection of the proposed joint venture partner without going through the competitive bidding routes and the bonafides and antecedents of IU Net, the US partner.

Queries were raised whether the National Task Force on IT, which reportedly decided on the project on September 5, 1998, was mandated to do so since locating specific projects, specifying joint ven-

ture partner or evolving financial parameters were not part of the terms of reference.

Even as the Department of Telecommunications and Department of Telecom Services were just asked to implement the project and not involved in deciding on it.

It was pointed out that there was no material available to show that any government department had actually processed the Task Force proposals and taken any appropriate decision. Even the MoU signed was legally invalid since the signatory, Dr Raj Reddy, was not the chairman of IU-Net on the date of the incorporation, Mr Basu said in his letter.

Earlier, during zero hour, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Rajesh Pilot (Congress), Suresh Kurup and Basudeb Acharia (CPI-M) demanded a CBI inquiry or a probe by an independent authority into the controversial deal.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan rejected the demand, pointing out that the House had discussed and voted on it when the demand for grants for the Communications Ministry were taken up.

Dismissing the Opposition's charge of a "shady deal" as "absurd", he said that the government was ready to discuss the matter again "under any rule" since it had "nothing to hide".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5.4 MAY 2000

Oppn demands JPC probe into Sankhya Vahini

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 3 MAY

A DAY after Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee showed his determination to go ahead with the Sankhya Vahini project, the Opposition launched a fresh attack by demanding a Joint Parliamentary Committee to probe the deal.

Harping on the transparency aspect, Congress and Left members maintained that nothing short of a parliamentary probe will lift the shroud of secrecy over the way the joint venture was signed with a US company for high-speed data network nationwide.

Information technology minister Pramod Mahajan, however, ruled out any probe while

asserting that the government was open to a discussion on the issue.

CPI(M) member Nilotpal Basu, who has given notice for a call attention motion in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday, also addressed a news conference and released copies of "classified government documents" which showed that the telecom commission had expressed reservations over the deal. Mr Basu released copies of his letter to the Prime Minister seeking a JPC probe.

Brushing aside criticism from his party and the Opposition, Mr Vajpayee had on Tuesday, asserted that the project was aimed at strengthening the technological capability of the country. Defending the MoU



Mahajan: Undeterred

route against the established tender procedure adopted for signing on IUNet — a 100 per cent subsidiary of the Carnegie Mellon University and awarding

it 49 per cent equity without cash — it was indicated that the project was undertaken after detailed deliberations.

Mr Basu, however, raised basic queries pertaining to transparency in the deal and its impact on the security apparatus of the nation.

He maintained that clarity still eluded one who decided on the project, since the government stand that it was the National Task Force on IT did not hold good because it had just made a recommendation.

He added that the real promoters of IUNet were still not known with the government admitting IUNet was not a subsidiary of Carnegie Mellon but of GUNet, another subsidiary owned by CMU.

Moreover, the business report commissioned by the Indian embassy in Washington had also pointed out that IUNet did not have proper rating for credit worthiness, he pointed.

Letters written by information technology secretary P.V. Jayakrishnan to DTS secretary P.S. Saran, raising his ministry's apprehensions on the project, were also released to the media by Mr Basu.

Mr Jayakrishnan had questioned the basis for selecting IUNet for such a sensitive project.

"In the face of serious allegations over the project, a closer scrutiny is required and all activities related to the project be put on hold till the probe is over," Mr Basu said.

Lok Sabha approves Finance Bill

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 4. — The Lok Sabha today approved the Finance Bill 2000-2001 moved by Mr Yashwant Sinha amidst a walkout by the Opposition as its demand for slashing prices of foodgrains distributed through government network, kerosene and LPG went unheeded.

Soon after the Bill was passed, NDA allies stepped up efforts to persuade the government, particularly Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, to announce a roll-back. The Union Finance Minister, Mr Yashwant Sinha, did not relent to the demands of the Opposition or the allies.

Dismissing Congress's charge that the government has been ignoring the plight of the poor, Mr Sinha said the Congress had often raised prices of foodgrains and fertilisers while in power. He also tried to allay fears regarding paucity of relief material for the drought-hit regions.

Subsidy-related issues are being weighed by the expenditure commission which is also studying the paper on subsidy prepared by the United Front government, Mr Sinha said.

Mr Sinha ruled out any amnesty to tax evaders and those who have been accumulating black money, saying this could dishearten the govern-

ment's revenue staff and enforcement agencies as well as honest tax payers.

The finance minister expressed satisfaction over the current growth rate of the GDP at 6.4 per cent. During the Congress regime that ended in 1996 the growth rate was 6.5 per cent and in the UF rule that followed it was 6.3 per cent. He, however, expressed concern over rising fiscal deficit, seeking the cooperation of all to curb this.

The external debt situation is well within control, Mr Sinha said, but internal debts are mounting and their proportion is getting grim. States have often not been able to service their debt and their expenditure has been on the rise, particularly after the implementation of the fifth pay panel report that almost doubled the salary bills of several states. He urged the states to find ways to correct this.

Dubbing the volatile Bombay Stock Exchange as "silly", Mr Sinha said that instead of being guided by the companies' performance or worth or the fundamentals of the economy, the stock exchange is often taken over by rumours.

Mr Sinha denied that his government has been unduly kind to multi-national companies, saying that in 1998-99, Rs 600 crore were collected from leading MNCs as tax.

MAY 2000

Sankhya Vahini under RS fire

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 5. — The government's handling of the Sankhya Vahini project came under attack in the Rajya Sabha today with several Opposition members demanding that its implications be scrutinised by a parliamentary committee before the joint-venture agreement is formally concluded.

The Left parties walked out in protest against Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's reply to the calling attention motion, claiming he had not answered the specific points raised by them. The BJP and TDP members defended the project and accused the Opposition of creating needless obstacles. The Shiv Sena, however, threw in its lot with the Opposition.

Leading the Opposition charge, Mr Nilotpal Basu of the CPI-M objected to the Task Force on IT recommending that the project be implemented by the Department of Telecom Services (DoT) and IUNet. He also objected to an MoU being signed before the latter was officially incorporated in the USA.

There was no valid document to establish that IUNet was a wholly-owned subsidiary of Carnegie Mellon University, Mr Basu said. He asked why other service providers had not been approached by the government to set up the information super-highway. Even the tender process had been bypassed, he said.

The project was fraught security risks as the systems operated by Carnegie Mellon were linked to the US defence network. A parliamentary committee, thus, was a must, Mr Basu said. Mrs Saroj Dubey of the RJD endorsed the demand. Mr J Chitharanjan of the CPI said the entire process lacked transparency while Mr Kapil Sibal of the Congress urged the government to come clean on the ownership of IUNet. Both supported Mr Basu's demand for a parliamentary committee.

6 MAY 2000

Lok Sabha passes ¹⁰⁹ 89th Statute Amendment Bill

States to now get 29 per cent of Central taxes

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 9

HT-12
THE LOK Sabha today unanimously passed the 89th Constitutional Amendment Bill to allow devolution of 29 per cent of Central taxes to the States.

The Bill approved by all the MPs present in the House is based on the recommendations of the 10th Finance Commission. It will enable the Centre to pursue its tax reforms and provide added revenues to the States for its pool.

Replying to the debate, Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha said the NDA Government was committed to "co-operative federalism" and prepared to help the States to tide over their financial difficulties.

Allaying the apprehensions of the members over the finer points of distinction between the net proceeds and gross proceeds, Mr Sinha maintained that the Government had preferred to go along devolution of "net proceeds" in order to avoid any kind of confusion.

"We have already assured the States that any shortfall if caused by the choice of net proceeds from the Central taxes will be made good," he said.

The Finance Minister said the new scheme of tax devolution would be effective from April 1, 1996.

"The percentage of net proceeds during 1996-97 to 1999-2000 will be such that the State's share is 29 per cent of the gross proceeds," he assured.

He told members that the recom-

mendations of the 11th Finance Commission, which will give its final report by June 30, would cover the five-year period with effect from April 1, 2000.

In his brief intervention, Deputy Leader of Opposition Madhavrao Scindia sought close Central scrutiny over the use of the allocated funds by the States. He demanded that Planning Commission be provided with more powers to ensure greater financial discipline even in States that were otherwise rich.

Reacting to Mr Scindia's remarks, the Finance Minister observed that the fiscal management of State economies had considerably worsened after Centre's unilateral acceptance of the 5th Pay Commission's recommendations and its subsequent fallout over State economies.

The Minister said the Centre would not like to duplicate the role of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) that kept a tab on the money spent by various State Governments.

Extending support to the amendment, the members strongly pleaded for devolution of more financial powers to the States, particularly in view of the unprecedented financial crisis faced by a several States.

Among others members who participated in the debate were Ramesh Chennithala of the Congress, Kirti Somaiya of the BJP, Raghuvansh Prasad Singh of the RJD, Trilochan Kanungo of the BJD and Moinul Hassan of the CPI(M).

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 MAY 2000

Walkout in RS over Advani's 'remark'

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 10

TAKING UMBRAGE at Union Home Minister L.K. Advani's attempt to compare Kargil with the 1971 Bangladesh victory, Opposition members, led by the Congress, staged a walkout in the Rajya Sabha today.

Mr Advani, during his reply to an attention calling motion, stated that the Kargil victory was different from all the other previous victories, being a victory both on the battlefield and on the diplomatic front.

Mr Karan Singh (Congress) immediately reacted by saying that it would not be correct to "devalue" India's victory in Bangladesh, which was not only a tremendous military victory but also led to the creation of a new nation.

Mr Pranab Mukherjee (Congress) demanded that Mr Advani withdraw his purported

remark that the 1971 war had been a "diplomatic failure". Mr Advani, however, was quick to point out that there was no question of a comparison. The Bangladesh liberation was a "spectacular victory" which even Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee as then Jan Sangh leader had extolled.

But even at that time Americans had sent the Seventh Fleet to our neighbourhood, Mr Advani pointed out. In contrast, Kargil was perhaps the first occasion when India could get the entire world opinion in its favour.

Leader of Opposition Manmohan Singh intervened to state that the Home Minister need not indulge in "polemics" while dealing with such a serious issue as Jammu and Kashmir as this would convey the impression as though "we are not speaking in one voice."

As Congress members protested that Mr Advani should not make such an 'odious' comparison and

withdraw the words, Mr Advani queried: "What's to withdraw?"

Mr Advani continued to point out that the government's two-pronged approach had been to create an environment against cross-border terrorism in the world and fight with the militants on the ground level.

He said even though many people sought to make fun of Mr Vajpayee's Lahore bus trip, the fact was that he went personally to Pakistan to offer his hand of friendship. That went a long way in turning the world opinion in India's favour.

Dr Manmohan Singh at this point again asked Mr Advani to withdraw his remarks. Mr Venkaiah Naidu (BJP) asked how the Home Minister could withdraw words he had not used.

However, the opposition members walked out.

About the Centre's Kashmir strategy, Mr Advani clarified that

the government was not against holding an all-party meeting on J&K. But talks with Kashmir-related groups, he said, should be held purely within the framework of the Constitution.

In his opening statement, Mr Advani had stated that the government would soon start a dialogue with militants.

The other features of the Kashmir strategy would be to proactively tackle cross-border terrorism and accelerate the economic development in the State.

Initiating the debate, Congress member Ghulam Nabi Azad cautioned that use of force would not help in bringing about normalcy in Jammu and Kashmir unless the government and security forces won the people's confidence.

While agreeing that hard-core militants had to be dealt with by guns, Mr Azad said the security forces should ensure that innocent people did not become a target.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

11 MAY 2000

Heavy agenda for Parliament

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 14. A crowded agenda awaits the last three days of the current Parliament session, with important legislation such as the Information Technology Bill, Right to Information Bill and the three Statehood Bills for Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal and Jharkhand scheduled for introduction.

The Congress(I), which is supporting the three Statehood Bills, today expressed doubts about the Government's seriousness. "We hope the Bills will not suffer the fate as the Women's Bill which was introduced on the last day of the last session and not brought up this time," Mr. Anil Shastri, AICC spokesman, said.

The Statehood Bills will be circulated among MPs tomorrow and introduced on May 17, last day of the session. Until the Bills were passed, the Government's bona fides would not be established, Mr. Shastri said. The Bills are likely to be taken up for discussion only in the monsoon ses-

sion. In a statement, the Uttarakhand Sanyukt Sangharsh Samiti (USSS), the apex body for separate Statehood for the region, described the Cabinet decision to introduce the Uttaranchal Bill an "eyewash" and a belated step.

Within the National Democratic Alliance, the Akali Dal is opposed to including Uddhamsingh Nagar in the new State. Last time the party threatened to withdraw support on the issue but after its debacle in the 1999 polls it is no longer in a position to enforce its wishes.

The Telugu Desam Party is also not in favour of the Statehood Bills fearing they could give an impetus to other movements for separate States such as the Telen-gana movement in Andhra Pradesh. The Samata Party is supporting all the three Bills. But its spokesman, Prof. Shambhu Shrivastava, said his party would insist on the Rs 1.80-lakh crore package for both Jharkhand and Bihar.

THE HINDU

1 MAY 2000

Two key clauses dropped from IT Bill

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 15

THE LOK Sabha is expected to take up the Information Technology Bill for further consideration and passage tomorrow as the Opposition parties wanted more time to go through the legislation for it had wide-spread ramifications. Two key recommendations of the Standing Committee did not find favour with the Government: Websites or portals should be registered and persons using cyber cafes should be registered in order to trace out any crime that may have been committed.

Tempers ran high this evening as Information Technology Minister Pramod Mahajan pressed for the passage of the Bill, while the Opposition parties, particularly the Congress and the Left, insisted that the discussion on the legislation should be carried over. The Opposition parties at the time made it clear that they were not against the Bill.

Mr Mahajan and BJP's chief whip Major General (Retd) B C Khanduri reminded the Speaker and the Opposition that it had been decided in the Business Advisory Committee

meeting that the Bill would be discussed for four hours on Monday and then passed.

However, the Congress members, including party chief whip Priyaranjan Das Munshi, pleaded for more time to study the Bill as the report of the Standing Committee was only made available on last Friday. He said that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, earlier in the day, had assured the House that it could take as much time to discuss the legislation.

Moving the Bill for consideration, Mr

Debate To Continue

Mahajan told the House that the Standing Committee in its report had made several valuable suggestions. According to him, barring two, almost all suggestions of the committee had been accepted by the Government.

He explained that the Government cannot accept the committee's suggestion that all website or portals should be registered as it would unnecessarily create hurdles at large. He said the Government had also turned down the suggestion that users at cyber cafes should be reg-

istered for timely detection of cyber crimes.

Mr Mahajan said that this legislation would help India in becoming a superpower and stressed for urgency in passage of the Bill.

Initiating the debate, Mr Shivraj Patil of the Congress said the Bill was not comprehensive even as far as private transaction were concerned and could be applicable only to movable property.

Stating that some of its provisions were "redundant and confusing" due to "wrong drafting", Mr Patil said the law should simplify rather than complicate the issue. According to him, some of the provisions could involve double jeopardy against the accepted principles of jurisprudence.

Mr Rup Chand of the CPM criticised the Bill as he felt that clause 79 would give "draconian powers" to police officers in respect of conducting searches at public premises. However, Mr Mahajan clarified that provisions of the Criminal Procedure Code and the FERA had given similar powers to constables.

The Minister said: "We have raised the level of policemen who can search or arrest without warrants to officers of Dy SP rank."

India challenges US patent on basmati rice, grains

New Delhi, May 15

THE UNITED States has cancelled a patent granted for the use of turmeric in wound healing after India challenged the patent.

Minister of State for Commerce and Industry Raman Singh said today that India has also decided to challenge claims of the patents on basmati rice and grains granted in the U.S.

He said India has proposed to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) to exclude patents on all life forms. If this was not possible, the WTO was advised to exclude patents based on traditional or indigenous knowledge and essentially derived products and processes from such knowledge. Or at least insist on disclosing the parent country of the biological resource and associated knowledge, and obtain the country's consent.

Copyright: India's copyright law fully provides for adequate administrative, civil and criminal procedures to enforce copyright. It is fully compatible with multilateral obligations under the WTO agreement on trade related aspects of intellectual property rights, Commerce Minister Murasoli Maran said.

However, according to the National Trade Estimate 2000 report by the United States trade representative, audio-visual piracy continued to be a significant problem in India.

The annual losses to the US Motion Picture Industry because of piracy are estimated to be around \$66 million, he said.

Mr Murasoli Maran stated the government was considering a proposal to allow 74 per cent direct foreign investment in the tea industry.

The FDI might provide the industry with much required capital for replanting, new planting and technology for upgrading and modernising production and packaging processes.

The tea industry has been advised by the Assam Government to induct the Assam Tea Protection Force in the tea gardens of Barak valley in view of extortion demands from militants.

Disinvestment: The government would reconstitute the Disinvestment Commission, said Minister of State for Disinvestment Arun Jaitley.

Against the target of Rs 10,000 crore for 1999-2000, only Rs 1,585 crore could be mopped up through sale of government equity.

(PTI)

Questions in Rajya Sabha

Opposition blocks new States Bills

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 17

THE GOVERNMENT'S attempt to push in the Lok Sabha today the Bills for the creation of Uttaranchal, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh States was foiled by an angry Opposition, which vehemently protested against the proposed legislations.

The charged Opposition forced three adjournments of the House with Members from the Congress, Samajwadi Party, Rashtriya Janata Dal, Bahujan Samaj Party and the Akali Dal (Mann) repeatedly storming the well of the House and shouting slogans. Even Mr Prabhunath Singh of the Samata Party, an ally of the BJP-led coalition, and Mr Rajesh Ranjan (Independent) spoke against the introduction of the Bills.

While some political parties opposed the Bills, notably those for the creation of Uttaranchal and Jharkhand, in their present form, the

others objected to the manner in which the Government had sought to introduce these legislations.

The introduction of the States Reorganisation Bills was a last-minute inclusion through a supplementary list of business brought out by the Lok Sabha Secretariat this afternoon.

Till 3 pm, the Chair had no clue whether the Bills would be introduced even as the Members repeatedly asked the Government to clarify the position on their introduction.

However, the Government's decision to introduce the Bills was announced by Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Santosh Gangwar. The Minister said the Bills would be introduced as per the decision taken by the Business

Advisory Committee.

The announcement led to uproarious scenes as Members charged the Government with having an ulterior motive in coming out with a supplementary list on the last day of the session. This led to the adjournment of the House for 40 minutes.

When the House met again around 4 pm, Home Minister L K Advani got up to introduce the Uttar Pradesh State Reorganisation Bill, 2000. What followed was total pandemonium, bedlam and chaos. There was absolute confusion with the treasury benches thumping the desks, thinking that the Bill had been introduced and the Opposition Members trying to shout each other. Some of the Opposition

members angrily tore the Bill and the supplementary list of business. They were seen throwing the torn Bills at the treasury benches. Amidst this drama, the House was adjourned again till 5.30 pm.

IT Bill passed

INDIA joined the select league of nations having a legal framework for electronic commerce and governance with Parliament passing the novel Information Technology Bill after three days of controversies over certain provisions.

Detailed report on Page 8

As soon as the House reassembled after the third adjournment, Speaker G M C Balayogi observed that the Uttar Pradesh Reorganisation Bill, 2000, moved by Mr Advani, could not be introduced due to the prevailing pandemonium.

Amid thumping of desks by the Opposition benches, the Speaker ruled that sensing the mood of the House, it would not be possible to introduce the State Reorganisation Bills. He then asked the Government to move the Major Port Trusts (Amendment) Bill for passage. This Bill had fallen through yesterday evening due to lack of quorum. And before this legislation could be put to vote, the Congress Members trooped out.

Related report on Page 12

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

THE HINDUSTAN TIME

18 MAY 2000

Opposition walkout in LS over price hike

MP-1 1874
By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 17. The Opposition, with the tacit support of several National Democratic Alliance (NDA) partners, demanded in Parliament today a rollback of the recent price hike saying it had particularly hit the farmers and the very poor. In the Lok Sabha, members of the Trinamool Congress, Telugu Desam Party, Samata Party and JD(U) — all allies of the Government — nodded their heads when the Opposition claimed their support arguing that the issue cut across party lines.

The entire Opposition walked out after the Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, disallowed an adjournment motion sought to be moved by the Congress(I) and the Left parties on the issue. Amid shouts of "no, no", he ruled that members could raise it during the debate on the motion of the thanks to the President and the Finance Bill. The Congress(I) leader, Mr. Rajesh Pilot, was particularly upset that the Speaker did not allow the NDA allies to speak.

"They have a right to speak, you should listen to them," he told the Speaker who argued that he had given a chance only to those members who had given notices for adjournment.

In the Rajya Sabha, the Left

members sought to raise the issue but the Chairperson, Mr. Krishan Kant, disallowed it on the ground that he will give permission to raise the issue tomorrow. He said the issue was raised in his chambers by the leaders and he had informed them that it could be raised tomorrow.

But for this, it was a quiet start to the second half of the budget session in the Rajya Sabha. Members newly elected to the Upper House, including senior Congress (I) leader, Mr. Arjun Singh, took oath of office.

A *suo moto* statement in both Houses by the Minister of State for Petroleum, Mr. Ram Naik, justifying the hike in the prices of petroleum products in recent weeks did not convince the Opposition. The treasury benches in the Lok Sabha faced embarrassing moments when Mr. P.H. Pandian (AIADMK), who was in the chair when Mr. Naik made the statement, ruled that the Government should have consulted Parliament before going ahead with the price hike. Mr. Pandian stuck to his ruling despite a plea by Mr. Naik to reconsider his observations.

In the Lok Sabha, Mr. Prabhu Nath Singh (Samata Party), Mr. Yerran Naidu (TD), Mr. Sudip Bandopadhyaya (Trinamool) and Mr. D.P. Yadav (JD-U) were

among the NDA allies who, according to the Opposition, wanted to speak.

Sonia intervenes

Earlier, the Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, making an intervention, said the price hike reflected the Vajpayee Government's "anti-people" policies, and its "insensitivity." The price hike, she said, would have a "disastrous" effect, particularly on those below the poverty line and the small and marginal farmers.

Mr. P.H. Pandiyan (AIADMK) accused the Government of "bypassing" Parliament while the CPI(M)'s Mr. Basudeb Acharya said it was "out to dismantle" the public distribution system.

In his statement, Mr. Ram Naik said the price hike in petroleum products had been effected by the Government as a follow-up to the decision of the United Front Government under the prime ministership of Mr. Inder Kumar Gujral to dismantle the Administered Pricing Mechanism (APM).

Mr. Naik said the steep hike in international crude prices that had increased the differential between the import parity prices and the prices of the subsidised products had left the Government with no alternative but to suitably raise the price.

THE HINDU

18 APR 2000

Strong words replace finer argument

KEITH FLORY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

The infusion of new blood did little to transform the adversarial ambience prevailing in the Rajya Sabha. When they took their long week-end break, the Elders carried home little cause for satisfaction with their performances — unless inexpensive thrills at having irritated their opponents is the sole yardstick by which they judge their showing.

Argument is the essence of Parliament. Argument on the merits or demerits of the issue under focus. What the Elders now excel in is argument of the angry kind. Strong words, unseemly gestures, display of ill-temper. One member's misbehaviour is deemed valid grounds for reply in kind.

Last week witnessed adjournments during the normally peaceful hours devoted to private members, a clash between one side of the House and the presiding officer, and on no fewer than three occasions did

the Chairman have to pull up people for loose talk.

Unsubstantiated allegations, insinuation, innuendo — much of it of a personal nature — have become much too frequent of late. And long forgotten has been the elementary courtesy of asking a speaker to "yield", everyone feels free to stand up at any moment and interrupt the person who had been given the

firm that it was a non-issue to start with. Yet, more time is consumed on those acrimonious side-shows than what ought to be devoted to important ones.

Clearly unhappy at one of those outpourings of ill-temper was Mr Fali Nariman. He pleaded with a member to withdraw a remark that had sparked off a row. He had no political interest in the dispute, but was seeking

RAJYA SABHA REVIEW

the restoration of order in the larger interests of the institution's dignity. The appeal fell on deaf ears.

The Elders would take umbrage at any suggestion that they are irrelevant, but by the manner in which they have been conducting themselves they are slowly eroding their own relevance. It would be difficult to

recall a recent example of the House having really influenced the working of the government. At best, it has exerted some political

Time was when the government was frequently pressed into reacting to matters raised through special mentions — the system that has replaced the previous free-for-all at zero hour. Last week several serious issues were raised, just one attracted a ministerial response. And no complaints were made over the government's indifference to the rest.

Question hour apart, the activity was in low key, though the Left parties did stage a couple of walk-outs on economic matters. The main debate was on the motion of thanks, and though Dr Manmohan Singh was clinical when tearing the policies of the present government to shreds, the impact was marginal.

Nothing surprising about that lack of impact, the House was discussing an Address that had been delivered on 23 February and not everybody remembered precisely what it had mentioned, that long gap serving as yet another indication of how Parliament now conducts its affairs.

Lok Sabha heat over Agra Bible burning

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 24. — Friday night's attack on a Christian group and Bible-burning in Agra rocked the Lok Sabha today as the Opposition demanded the dismissal of the state government for failing to protect minorities.

Police have arrested five persons in connection with the attack and the Ram Prakash Gupta government ordered strict vigil to ensure the protection of minorities across the state. Those arrested were named in the FIR lodged by the Christian group.

Curiously, rather than the Agra attack, the Chief Minister ordered an inquiry into complaints by Ms Sneh Lata Arora, a teacher of St Paul's School in Agra, who had accused the school's Fathers of harassing her. The inquiry will also cover counter-allegations by the Fathers that they were being harassed by police in connivance with Ms Arora.

In the Lok Sabha, the matter was raised by Mr Sudip Bando-padhyay (Trinamul) who pointed out the role of Bajrang Dal in these attacks. Congress and Samajwadi Party members joined to lambast Bajrang, inviting the wrath of Shiv Sena and BJP MPs.

Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra said Opposition members remain silent when Hindus in Jammu and Kashmir are attacked. He even pointed to a recent

SISTER CRITICAL

NEW DELHI, April 24. — The condition of Sister Anandi, who was attacked in Rewari on Saturday night, is critical. She was today shifted from Holy Family Hospital's ICU to the cardiac care unit. She has sustained major head injuries. She and two other Sisters were on their way to Rewari Catholic Church for the Easter Mass when they were attacked. This was the fifth attack on missionaries in Haryana this year. — SNS

(Details on page 8)

speech by the Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid, Syed Abdullah Bukhari, where he dared the government to arrest him.

At this, the Samajwadi Party MP from Agra, Mr Raj Babbar, charged towards the Well and said his party was against communalism of all kinds, of both the Imam and the Bal Thackeray varieties. This provoked protests from Sena members who wanted the remark against their leader expunged.

Samajwadi leader Mr Mulam Singh Yadav held communalism of the majority posed a greater threat than that of minorities. Congress leader Mr Madhavrao Scindia lamented the growing communal and caste divide, saying this was "atomising" the polity. Mr Somnath Chatterjee of the CPI-M

said a *jehad* appeared to have been unleashed on minorities. MPs demanded that the Union Home Minister, Mr LK Advani, make a statement in the House.

Sharing the members' concern, Mr Pramod Mahajan made a strong plea for the safety of minorities, saying they would be fully protected. He said it was the task of the majority to protect the minorities and assured members that their concern and indignation would be conveyed to the home minister and that the government would spare no effort in protecting minorities.

Meanwhile, the Haryana Chief Minister, Mr OP Chautala, today cast doubts that the attack on nuns in Rewari was prompted by communal motives. The district administration is categorical that the incident merely pertains to negligent driving and claims the nuns' own fraternity now denies there was any communal angle to the episode, adds SNS Chandigarh.

The All-India Christian Council and the All-India Catholic Union have urged the Prime Minister to hold Chief Ministers responsible for any atrocity against Christians in their states, especially in UP, Haryana, Orissa and Gujarat. They also blamed the Sangh parivar's 'campaign of hatred' for such incidents, reports UNI.

The Tamil Maanila Congress and the CPI(ML) also condemned the Agra incident and the attack on nuns in Haryana.

RS adjourned after noisy scenes between BJP, Left

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 29

HT-10
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THE RAJYA Sabha was adjourned today following noisy scenes between the ruling BJP and members of the Left over the controversial issue of withdrawal of the volumes of "Towards Freedom" series by the Indian Council of Historical Research (ICHR).

What started off as a special mention by cine star-turned-MP Shabana Azmi a little after question hour, soon took an unsavoury turn with members of the ruling coalition and Left trading charges. The slanging match, as it were, continued for well over 10 minutes.

All pleas for restraint proved futile even while Chairman Krishan Kant tried to offer a solution by providing an opportunity to BJP leader T.N. Chaturvedi to speak as a "special case". Mr Krishan Kant said that since diverse views were being expressed Mr Chaturvedi could speak on behalf of his party provided the facts are stated in a "sophisticated language". Even when that failed to resolve matters, the Chairman adjourned the House till 4 pm.

It all started when Mr Biplab

Dasgupta (CPI-M) rose to join issue with Shabana Azmi on the withdrawal of the volumes. Stating that the BJP was trying to impose a "monolithic view" of "manufactured history", Mr Dasgupta charged the BJP of using its own historians to write "doctored history".

The present volumes, he said, expose the fact that RSS had no role in India's freedom struggle. All RSS leaders corroborated with the British, Mr Dasgupta said. At this the BJP members were up on their feet protesting against the

ICHR issue

remarks.

Mr Biplab Dasgupta, on his part said, that he would not yield to pressure tactics, even as he warned the ruling party that the opposition will not allow any Government business to be transacted if the ruling coalition prevented members from speaking.

Things took a turn for the worse, when members of the Left mentioned RSS leader M.S. Golwalkar as having corroborated with the British. References by members of the Left to "Baba Clinton" (President Bill Clinton) were also

heard amid the din. Interestingly, the Congress Party was a mute witness to the mayhem.

Earlier Ms Azmi (Nominated) said that the withdrawal of volumes was "utter disregard and contempt" for independent research. The move, she said, should be seen as a part of a "larger scenario" of the Sangh Parivar to impose its ideology:

"The writ of the RSS is at play" Ms Azmi said while demanding "severe action" against the ICHR chairman for violating academic freedom. The ICHR authorities, she said, had violated the independence and autonomy of the institute.

Ms Azmi appealed to the NDA allies to put pressure on the Government against the bid of educational institutions to "adulterate history".

Mr Eduardo Faleiro (Congress) charged the ICHR's action to be part of a "larger conspiracy" to glorify one community and denigrate others. Calling upon the Government to stop "hatred campaigns" in textbooks, he said that the Government wants to show Christians, Parsis and Muslims as foreigners. He demanded that these volumes should be sent back to the publishers.

RSS issue: LS proceedings disrupted for fourth day

Opposition adamant on discussing the issue under Rule 184

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 29

A DEFIANT Opposition forced the adjournment of Lok Sabha twice—second time till 2.00 pm—demanding a discussion on the RSS issue under a motion which provides for censuring the Government.

This is the fourth consecutive day when proceedings in Lok Sabha have been disrupted due to the RSS issue. An all-party meeting convened by the Speaker last evening had failed to resolve the deadlock.

As soon as the House assembled this morning the Opposition members said they would cooperate with the Chair if he gave a specific date for the discussion under Rule 184, which permits voting, instead of Rule 193, allowed earlier.

Congress and other Opposition parties have been vehemently protesting against Gujarat Government's decision to allow its

employees to join RSS and wanting to know the Centre's stand on it.

Congress leader Rajesh Pilot was heard saying: "We have a genuine feeling. Please listen to us. This government is speaking in two voices and, therefore, we want to keep the truth before the nation. The entire nation is interested in the issue."

Immediately, Mr K. Swain (BJP) retorted, "They (Congress) have been defeated in the election. What nation do they (Congress) represent? Who represents the nation? It is the NDA." A number of Congress members, including Mr Mani Shanker Aiyar, were on their legs shouting "Rule 184, Rule 184".

Speaker G.M.C. Balayogi repeatedly said the matter was not on the day's agenda, as the Government had to present the Union budget. Dissatisfied with the reply, the entire Opposition sought an assurance from him whether he was

considering allowing a discussion under Rule 184, which provided for voting.

Sensing that the Opposition was in no mood to relent, Speaker Balayogi adjourned the House till 1200 hrs.

Similar noisy scenes were witnessed when the House re-assembled at noon. Deputy Speaker P.M. Sayeed informed the Members that some discussions were underway in the Speaker's chamber with leaders of different parties and requested them to allow tabling of papers listed on the day's agenda.

"No, no," shouted the Opposition members in unison demanding, "we want (discussion under Rule) 184." Congress Member P.R. Dasmunshi was heard saying that the entire country was watching how this issue was being handled in the House.

With the Opposition members showing no signs of relenting, Mr Sayeed adjourned the House till 2 pm.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
- 1 MAR 2000

RS heat over Gandhi, Sangh

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 1. — Disputes over what was said, or what was believed to have been said, created volatile conditions in the Rajya Sabha today during its debate on the controversial order of the Gujarat government on its workers joining the RSS.

The House was adjourned twice, without the debate concluding.

First it was the Opposition who tried to make much of Mr Ram Jethmalani's observation on what actually "killed" Gandhi, then the BJP raised a storm over source material used by Mr Kapil Sibal, Congress, to lay a charge that RSS leaders had ridiculed Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhar Azad.

An experiment by the Deputy Chairman to "set the record straight immediately", since proceedings were now covered live on TV, backfired totally. The chaos resulted in little focus on the basic issue — would the neutrality of the civil service be compromised by association with organisations like the RSS?

After stoutly defending the RSS's credentials, the law minister sought to deal with the allegation that it had been responsible for the Mahatma's death. He contended that it were those who had accepted the partition of India who had killed Gandhi, his spirit.

The Opposition, led by Mr Vayalar Ravi, Congress, insisted that the minister had held leaders like Nehru, Sardar Patel and Maulana Azad responsible for the death. When Mr Jethmalani maintained that he had referred to the death of Gandhi's soul, they insisted he was trying to wriggle out of a situation.

There was anger all around as Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Congress, Mr Gurudas Dasgupta, CPI, accused him of propounding dangerous theories. Warning that Mr Jethmalani would never be allowed to get away with this, Mr Mukherjee called for immediate adjournment so that the record could be checked.

While other Opposition members supported that line, the home minister said a precedent was being set. The standard practice was for the record to be examined at the end of the day and deletions ordered. The Deputy Chairman said she was in favour of immediate action, wrong messages should not emanate from the House. With live telecasts, correcting the record overnight had become irrelevant. A 15-minute break was ordered.

A check of both the tape recording and the transcript established that Mr Jethmalani had not been speaking of Gandhi's physical death, but of his spirit, the Deputy Chairman subsequently ruled. She maintained that the procedure adopted could not become standard practice, the House would never function. Dr Heptulla appealed to members to speak with restraint and responsibility to avoid such situations.

But that was not to be. Mr Kapil Sibal quoted RSS leaders on subjects like martyrdom, imperialism, the national flag and minorities, leaving Treasury Benches rather embarrassed. There was a huge show of indignation, however, when Mr Sibal quoted RSS leaders as saying Bhagat Singh and Azad were "fools".

Lok Sabha: Lok Sabha was disrupted for the fifth day. Almost no business was transacted after an agitated Opposition pressed for a discussion on the RSS issue under Rule 184 which provides for voting.

THE STATESMAN

- 2 MAR 2000

Both Houses adjourned over Bihar

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 3. — The Parliament was brought to a standstill this afternoon as Opposition members in both Houses cried out against the Bihar Governor's decision to invite the NDA to form a government in Bihar with Mr Nitish Kumar at the helm.

The Governor had failed to discharge his constitutional duty and should be immediately dismissed, Opposition members shouted as some of them rushed towards the well of the House.

The BJP, predictably, defended Mr Vinod Pande's decision, waving the excuse of an "anti-RJD verdict" from the people of Bihar.

There was total chaos as listed private member's business were not allowed to be taken up, forcing the Presiding Officers to adjourn the day's proceedings.

For the sixth day in a row, the Lok Sabha hardly saw any business standing adjourned almost the entire day. If in the morning it was the RSS issue, the afternoon belonged entirely to Bihar.

After a long lunch break, when the Lok Sabha reassembled at 3.20 p.m., Opposition members rose to their feet demanding immediate removal of Mr Vinod Pande.

The CPI-M leader, Mr Somnath Chatterjee, demanded an explanation from the government on the Bihar Governor's action, which he termed as a "deliberate murder of Parliamentary democracy".

The Congress benches, however, appeared unusually calm. The party's only vocal member was its chief whip, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, who said the move was "yet another example of the Bharatiya Janata Party's hidden agenda".

With the storm showing no signs of letting up, the DMK leader, Mr MK Pandiyan, asked the Chair what action was being taken now that the Lok Sabha had failed to transact any business in six days.

Mrs Margaret Alva, who was in the Chair, asked members to cooperate and begin discussions on a Private Member's Bill. But the entire Opposition rose to say that they didn't want any discussions. Mrs Alva then adjourned the House till Monday.

When the Rajya Sabha assembled for its post-lunch sitting, after a stormy Question Hour on another controversial issue, the Opposition launched into a tirade against the developments in Bihar.

Former Union minister and Congress leader Mr Pranab Mukherjee said it was an "astounding failure" that Mr Vinod Pande had invited an alliance which did not have the adequate numbers.

The Governor had been told last night that the Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal were close to clinching a deal, Mr Mukherjee said. "He could easily have waited until the position crystallised."

Not only did the Governor act in haste, he also clearly violated all established norms,

the veteran Congressman said.

"We demand the immediate sacking of the Governor, he has no right to remain in office" Mr Mukherjee said.

He made it clear that the House would not be allowed to function until the government announced Mr Pande's dismissal.

"Undemocratic" is how Mr Gurudas Dasgupta (CPI) described Mr Pande's decision. This was a "butchery of democracy" he said. The Governor, Mr Dasgupta suspected, must have been influenced by the Centre. After such an "autocratic decision", how could the Opposition participate in parliamentary proceedings, he asked.

When the Bharatiya Janata Party spokesman, Mr Venkaiah Naidu, was called to speak on the subject, the Opposition clamoured for a government response to its dismissal demand — after all, both the Law Minister and Parliamentary Affairs Minister were present. Confronting agitated Opposition members, Mr Naidu defended the Governor's action. The people of Bihar had given an anti-RJD verdict, he claimed.

At this point, three Rashtriya Janata Dal members, Mrs Saroj Dubey, Mr Ramdeo Bhandary and Mr Naresh Yadav, moved to the well shouting slogans against the Governor. They were joined by some CPI-M members who insisted on a response from the government. As confusion rolled on, the Deputy Chairman ordered the weekend break.

BJP defends

Governor's move

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 3. — The BJP, not surprisingly, today defended Mr Vinod Pande's decision to invite NDA leader Mr Nitish Kumar to form the government in touch with at least 11 Congress MLAs, hoping to split the party.

Mr M Venkaiah Naidu said the Governor had two options. Since no party had a majority, he could've kept the Assembly under suspended animation or called the combination which had assured support.

"Since NDA had the assured support, he invited it. The RJD could not be called as the Centre Congress did not make up its mind till the last moment," Mr Naidu said.

"Being a bureaucrat, the Governor played by the rule book and adhered to the Constitution," he said. Mr Naidu felt there was no merit in the criticism of the Governor.

Meanwhile, rumours ran wild that the Governor had decided to invite Mr Kumar following instructions from the Principal secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr Brajesh Mishra.

It is learnt that of the 153 MLAs supporting Mr Kumar, 67 were of the BJP, 34 of the Samata Party, 21 from the JD-U, 12 from the JMM, 2 of the UGDP and 15 Independents.

Two BSP MLAs have reportedly handed their letters of support to Mr Kumar. Sources claimed that the NDA was also in touch with at least 11 Congress MLAs, hoping to split the party.

Mr M Venkaiah Naidu said the Governor had two options. Since no party had a majority, he could've kept the Assembly under suspended animation or called the combination which had assured support.

"Since NDA had the assured support, he invited it. The RJD could not be called as the Centre Congress did not make up its mind till the last moment," Mr Naidu said.

"Being a bureaucrat, the Governor played by the rule book and adhered to the Constitution," he said. Mr Naidu felt there was no merit in the criticism of the Governor.

RSS chief's stance likely to resolve Parliament logjam

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 6

IN A significant development that may pave way for resolution of the Gujarat RSS tangle, RSS chief Rajendra Singh today declared that his organisation was "unconcerned" about the State Government's circular lifting the ban on employees participating in its activities.

Mr Singh, in a statement coming after the Opposition's weeklong disruption of proceedings in the Lok Sabha over the Gujarat Government's action, said the RSS had not sought any withdrawal of the ban. "RSS work has never been dependent on any Government's attitude, positive or negative, towards it," he said.

The RSS chief's statement was quickly interpreted by political circles here as a possible run-up to the BJP Government in Gujarat

rescinding its controversial circular, thereby reimposing the ban on its employees participating in RSS activities.

Apart from the Opposition-triggered logjam, the BJP's own allies have not been forthcoming on the option of supporting the Vajpayee Government in case the Gujarat issue were to be debated in the Lok Sabha under Rule 184.

The lukewarm attitude of the allies manifested itself once again this morning when the Prime Minister held a second round of consultations with the NDA partners.

Most of these allies were emphatic once again that the discussion should be only under Rule 193, which does not involve voting. As such, the allies need not take any definitive position on the RSS controversy.

It was against this background that the BJP leadership, in tandem

with the RSS bosses, had begun to prevail upon the State Government to retrace its steps. The RSS chief's statement today was seen to be a part of this denouement.

Mr Singh, in his statement, also launched a scathing attack on "some" political parties for making the RSS a "scapegoat" to hide their own failures. "The frustration of these parties is understandable and irremediable," he remarked. "We at the RSS would like to be outside the vortex of the contentious politics," he added.

Today's statement by the RSS chief was the second of its kind in less than a month. On February 13, in response to an observation by the Prime Minister, Mr Singh had signalled a softening of stance by the RSS on the question of the Centre itself lifting the ban on employee's participation in RSS activities.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 7 MAR 2000

TDP, JD-U keen to avoid RSS vote in House

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 6. — The TDP and JD-U today said they cannot support the government on the RSS controversy; so the Centre should insist that the Lok Sabha discuss the subject under Rule 193 and not Rule 184, which provides for a vote.

At an NDA meeting, TDP leader Mr K Yerranna said the party's "political compulsions" rule out supporting the Centre on the issue.

Later, Janata Dal (United) leader Mr Devendra Prasad Yadav echoed this, telling reporters: "Our view on RSS is very clear. We cannot support the government.

"Therefore, it is for the Centre to persuade the Gujarat government (to withdraw the order allowing state government employees to take part in RSS activities).

But the BJP spokesman ruled this out. Mr Venkaiah Naidu said: "The Centre's view is clear. It has not given, nor can it give, any order to the state government. Even if it had given any, that would not have been valid."

This morning's NDA meeting had been called to chalk out a strategy to counter the Opposition, which has stalled Parliament on the RSS controversy, demanding a discussion under Rule 184. (Congress leaders today said they will now attack the government also over the installation of the Nitish Kumar ministry in Bihar.)

But some NDA partners could not attend the meeting, which led the coalition to put off formulating a strategy till tomorrow.

The meeting, though, decided to stick to the stand that since a motion under Rule 193 had been admitted in the Rajya Sabha, the government will insist on a similar motion in the Lok Sabha.

Besides the Prime Minister, the meeting was attended by Mr LK Advani, Mr Jaswant Singh, Mr George Fernandes, Mr Yerranna, Mr Sushil Indora (INLD) and Mr Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa (Shiromani Akali Dal).

With Lok Sabha stalemated over the dispute, the Speaker, Mr GMC Balayogi, has called an all-party meeting.

Gujarat stands firm: Mr Venkaiah Naidu's view was echoed by the Gujarat minister of state for home as he ruled out a rethink on the subject. Mr Haren Pandya invited a debate "in any Assembly or Parliament", adds SNS from Gandhinagar.

The decision was taken after much thought, the minister said. It concerns a state subject, and the Centre "has no jurisdiction on this".

A public interest litigation had been filed with the high court and "all matters relating to it will come up there".

RSS stand: The RSS, however, clarified that it had not sought withdrawal of the Gujarat government's earlier circular barring state employees from associating with the saffron organisation, adds PTI from New Delhi.

"The RSS is unconcerned whether the circular exists or not," said the organisation's chief, Mr Rajendra Singh. "RSS work has never been dependent on any government's attitude, positive or negative, towards it."

■ Another report on page 6

THE STATESMAN

- 7 MAR 2000

RS blow to govt on Bihar

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/PATNA, March 7. — The Chairman of the Rajya Sabha admitted today for discussion and vote a motion criticising the Governor's role in Bihar.

In Patna, the NDA and Mr Laloo Yadav remained eyeball-to-eyeball as events hurtled towards a sudden death at the Speaker's election on 9 March.

The Rajya Sabha Chairman, Mr Krishan Kant's decision came as a blow to the NDA. The government is in a minority in the House of Elders.

(Worse, Mr N Chandrababu Naidu, the BJP's most influential ally, today said the Bihar Governor ought to have invited the single largest party to form the government,

says SNS from Hyderabad. (In Calcutta, Mr Jyoti Basu said Mr Pande should not have invited Mr Kumar.)

But in Patna, the CPI broke ranks, so to say, with the anti-BJP camp by attending Mr Nitish Kumar's all-party meeting to build a consensus on the

Speaker. The CPI has five MLAs; Mr Kumar, as of now, 11 short of majority in the 322-member House.

The RJD, CPI-M, BSP, Congress and CPI-ML (Liberation) boycotted the meeting. "We don't recognise the Nitish Kumar-led govern-

ment," Mr Laloo Yadav said. "There was no question of participating in the all-party meet convened by an illegally installed chief minister."

The RJD-led alliance would field its candidate for Speaker, he announced.

Emerging from the meeting, CPI legislature party leader, Mr Bhubaneswar Mehta, said the party's state executive would take a final decision tomorrow on the issue of both the

Speaker and of supporting/opposing Mr Nitish Kumar.

Mr Mehta's statement appeared at variance with what his party has been saying all along: that it would vote against both the NDA and the

■ See BIHAR: page 6

BIHAR:

(Continued from page 1)

RJD.

There was speculation in the NDA camp today that Mr Kumar has persuaded the CPI to abstain from voting on the confidence motion.

If that happens, it will be tantamount to extending indirect support to the NDA government.

The election of Speaker is scheduled for Thursday, Mr Kumar's trust vote for Friday. Thursday's decision will for all practical purposes clinch it either way.

Mr Kumar continued to say today he was trying to build a consensus on the Speaker's issue. He announced he would speak to leaders of other parties, including the RJD, again.

The Bihar Congress president, Mr Sadanand Singh too appeared firm. His party was committed to opposing the NDA, Mr Singh said: "There is no question of supporting any NDA-sponsored nominee for the Speaker's post."

In case the Laloo camp refused to come round, the NDA would announce its candidate for Speaker tomorrow, parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Sushil Kumar Modi said.

"The chief minister has been authorised to select the person for the post in the event of our failure to get a common candidate."

in the Rajya Sabha, the Chairman's admitting a substantive motion "disapproving of" the conduct of the Governor in the format of a discussion followed by a vote, brought cheer to the Opposition but obviously dismayed the Treasury benches.

As the Opposition attempted to press home its majority advantage by insisting the matter be taken up immediately, the government adopted delaying tactics. The resultant furore led to the House being stalled after Question Hour.

The discomfort in the Treasury benches was evident when the Leader of the House chose to refer to some aspects of the motion that had been admitted. Rather sharply, the Chairman, Mr Krishan Kant, asked him: "Are you commenting on the motion I have admitted?"

No, replied Mr Jaswant Singh. But he said he was entitled to make some observations on it, as Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Congress, had done earlier.

The motion which the Chairman has admitted for a discussion-and-vote reads: "That this House disapproves the conduct of the Governor of Bihar in installing the NDA-led government rather than the RJD and its alliance partners."

Notice for the motion had been given by Dr Manmohan Singh and Mr Pranab Mukherjee (both Congress), Mr E Balanandan, Mr SR Pillai and Mr Nilotpal Basu (all CPI-M), Mr Ram Deo Bhandary and Mr Naresh Yadav (both RJD), Mr SR Bommai (JD-S) and Mr Jayant Kumar Malhoutra (Ind). **Lok Sabha notice:** The RJD today gave a notice for admission of an adjournment motion in the Lok Sabha to discuss the Governor, Mr VC Pande's "partisan" role in installing an NDA government in Bihar, adds PTI.

MLAs take oath: More than 290 newly elected members took oath on the opening day of the 12th Bihar Assembly session today, adds UNI. Pro-tem Speaker, Mr Bisheshwar Khan, administered the oath to the members.

THE STATESMAN

- 8 MAR 2000

Bihar, RSS issues continue to rock Parliament

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 9. — Both Houses of Parliament saw repeated spells of adjournments on the Bihar and RSS issues for yet another day, but the political parties came to an understanding to sit late next week to clear the pending business of the last 10 days.

A rapprochement between the Treasury Benches and the Opposition seems to have been reached and Parliament is expected to function normally after the Bihar trial of strength tomorrow.

At the meeting of the business advisory committee at the Speaker's chamber, leaders belonging to all parties agreed to resume normal business from Monday with the Telephone Regulatory Authority (Amendment) Bill, the Recovery of Debts (Amendment) Bill and the Finance Bill to be brought in.

The leaders decided to sit till midnight on Tuesday to discuss the Railway Budget, while the general Budget will be taken up on Wednesday. The motion of thanks on President's address would be taken up on Thursday, it was decided.

However, a decision on having a discussion on the RSS issue under Rule 193 is still pending with the Speaker. In the Rajya Sabha too, a similar schedule was being worked out to clear pending matters. However, the Bihar and RSS issues led to adjournments of both Houses, with the Lok Sabha witnessing a strange situation as the members of Treasury Benches forced adjournments by not allowing the Samajwadi Party leader, Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav, to make his submission.

Mr Yadav pointed out that his motion on RSS was still pending with the Speaker. The SP members rushed to the Well of the House demanding that Mr Yadav be allowed to speak on the subject. When Mr GMC Balayogi allowed him to speak, it was the NDA members' turn to block the proceedings. Mr Vijay Goel (BJP), supported by Mr Madan Lal Khurana, alleged that Mr Yadav had a habit of sending his MPs to the Well if he was not allowed to speak. Mr Khurana said they would allow Mr Yadav to speak only if he gave a commitment that his members wouldn't rush to the Well. The Speaker adjourned the House, but the situation remained the same in the second half. Mr K Yerrannaidu, who was in the chair, permitted Mr Yadav to speak but was again blocked by the NDA members. Mr Yerrannaidu said Mr Khurana would speak after Mr Yadav as, in a democracy, the Opposition gets the first chance. But this did not pacify the angry NDA members, leading to adjournment for the day.

Later, the Congress indicated that it would still press for its motions on the conduct of the Bihar Governor, which led to the installation of Mr Nitish Kumar as the Chief Minister of the state. However, with the Congress candidate elected as the Bihar Speaker, the sting is out of this issue too and the Opposition may press for a motion which does not call for voting.

On the RSS issue, the Congress does not seem too inclined to pursue with the motion under Rule 184 because of the Gujarat government reimposed the ban on government employees joining RSS activities yesterday.

THE STATESMAN
10 MAR 2000

HD-13

Parliament disrupted again

11/3

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 10. Parliament was disrupted again today as the Opposition blocked proceedings in both Houses, protesting the Bihar Governor, Mr. V.C. Pande's conduct in installing a minority Government, headed by Mr. Nitish Kumar, in the State. They also alleged "horse-trading" by the National Democratic Alliance in Patna. By the time Mr. Nitish Kumar announced his resignation without facing a vote of confidence, the two Houses had already adjourned for the day amid noisy scenes.

The Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, ruled that the discussion slated on the RSS issue under Rule 184 had become infructuous after the Gujarat Government's decision to withdraw the order. The Opposition had invoked Rule 184, which entails voting, to censure the Central Government on the issue.

However, the Opposition demand for a debate under a non-voting rule on the activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and

the Bajrang Dal was under the Speaker's consideration. After announcing the ruling, Mr. K. Yerran Naidu, who was in the chair, adjourned the House as the Opposition and treasury benches clashed over the Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav's demand for immediate discussion.

Earlier, the House adjourned minutes after it met in the morning. The Opposition charged that the NDA was offering huge sums to MLAs in Bihar in order to buy their support. Opposition members also demanded the recall of the Bihar Governor, even as the treasury benches insisted that question hour not be disrupted. As the turmoil continued, the Speaker adjourned the House until 2 p.m. When it reassembled with Mr. Yerran Naidu in the chair there was a replay, leading to an adjournment until Monday.

In the Rajya Sabha too, a determined Opposition stalled proceedings demanding an immediate discussion on the motion on the conduct of the Bihar Governor in installing the NDA

Government. Sensing the mood, the Chairman, Mr. Krishan Kant, adjourned the House till Monday even as the Minister for Human Resource Development, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, tried to reply to a question.

The Opposition in the Rajya Sabha was keen on an immediate discussion on the motion moved by the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Manmohan Singh, denouncing the "conduct" of the Mr. Pande in installing a NDA Government, rather than that of the RJD. The motion, under Rule 168, would entail voting at the end of the discussion. Though the Chairman has admitted the motion, the time and date for the debate has not been fixed yet.

Earlier as soon as the House met, the RJD member, Mr. Naresh Yadav, waved a newspaper, which he said had reported that the NDA was trying to resort to horse-trading before facing the trial of strength in the Bihar Assembly. Congress(I) members started raising slogans of "shame, shame" and the Chairman immediately adjourned the House.

THE HINDU
11 MAR 2000

Opp wants Pande out, plans to rock Houses

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 10. — Buoyed by Mr Nitish Kumar's resignation, the Opposition has demanded recall of the Bihar Governor and plans to rock Parliament over his conduct.

The strategy will be finalised on Monday morning before Parliament meets. Tonight, Opposition leaders were speaking of pressing for a motion that would call for a vote on the Bihar Governor's conduct.

A decision on a notice under Rule 184 is pending with the Lok Sabha Speaker; in the Rajya Sabha, the chairman has already adopted a motion under Rule 170, which calls for voting.

"If the Centre recalls the Bihar Governor, that would be another victory (after Gujarat) for the Opposition," Congress chief whip Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi said.

"If it doesn't, we should like to criticise the Governor in the Lok Sabha through a motion and put it to vote, which will leave the government with no choice but to recall him."

The CPI-M politburo today issued a statement demanding the Governor, Mr VC Pande, be recalled. This was echoed by CPI secretary Mr D Raja who said the Governor had lost credibility.

The Congress, mindful of the convention that an act by a constitutional head is not usually discussed in Parliament, was initially reluctant to take the subject up in the Houses. But the party finally decided to

go by a ruling made in 1967 by the then Rajya Sabha chairman, allowing a discussion on the conduct of the then West Bengal Governor.

CWC member Mr Oscar Fernandes said: "It is essential that the government come forward to discuss the Bihar issue, because what the Governor did was morally wrong and undemocratic."

Opposition members outnumber NDA MPs in the Rajya Sabha, so they shouldn't find it difficult to "censure" Mr Pande's conduct. The Lok Sabha Opposition hopes a few NDA members will back its motion.

TDP chief Mr Chandrababu Naidu has criticised Mr Pande's decision, saying he should have invited the single largest party to form the government.

Opposition members feel the Gujarat "victory" was achieved through their tenacity and the reluctance of some NDA partners to support the government. They are hoping for a repeat — a scenario in which the Centre is forced to withdraw the Governor before the motions are put to the vote.

The only hitch seems to be that the House is supposed to meet only for four days next week before going into the mid-budget session break. A few important Bills need to be passed and discussions on the railway budget, general budget and the motion of thanks on the President's address remain to be taken up.

'GOVERNOR TO STAY'

NEW DELHI, March 10. — The BJP today said there can be no question of recalling the Bihar Governor who had "acted constitutionally" in inviting Mr Nitish Kumar to form a government. "There have been precedents where the Governor had called a party which had failed to prove its strength," Mr Venkaiah Naidu said. — PTI

Opposition demands recall of Bihar Governor

NEW DELHI, MARCH 13. Opposition members in the Rajya Sabha today demanded recall of the Bihar Governor, Mr. V. C. Pande, for his "unconstitutional" act in inviting the NDA leader, Mr. Nitish Kumar, to form the government while the ruling alliance defended the Governor saying he acted within the Constitution.

Initiating a short duration discussion on the role of the governors in discharging their constitutional responsibilities in the light of recent events in Bihar, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee (Cong-I) said the Governor had acted in a partisan manner and deserved to be recalled.

Mr. Mukherjee said the Governor had "misused his constitutional position, failed to display his neutrality and acted in a partisan manner."

The Governor should be immediately recalled as he "has proved" that he was not worthy of the high post, he said.

Originally, the House was to discuss issue under Rule 168 which allowed for voting, but later it was decided to convert it into a short duration discussion which did not entail voting.

The CPI's , Mr. Gurudas Dasgupta, said the Governor's decision was not an act of error of judgment but a "deliberate" act on his part on the advise the Union Home Ministry to encourage defections and splits in parties backing RJD. "The Governor had acted on the implicit and explicit advice of the Home Ministry to carry on defections and horse trading" he said.

Defending the Governor, the BJP's Mr. Venkaiah Naidu said Mr. Pande had acted legally and constitutionally by inviting the NDA and not the RJD group which had the support of only 125 MLAs in the 324 member State Assembly.

Mr. Ramachandran Pillai (CPI-M) said the Governor had violated the Constitution, democratic precedents and conventions by inviting the minority NDA combination to form the government and wanted Mr. Pande to be dismissed or recalled.

Mr. Ram Deo Bhandary (RJD) said the Governor's intention was bad as he was acting at the direction from the Centre. He said the Governor should be recalled as he had "lost the confidence" of the

people of the State.

Mr. Solipeta Ramachandra Reddy (TDP) said though the Governor should have invited the largest party, the controversy could now be put to rest.

When the Union Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, started to make his observations on the issue, Mr. Mukherjee said a Minister could not speak on a short duration discussion and it was for the Home Minister to reply.

Mr. Viduthalai Virumbi (DMK) quoted rules to say that Mr. Jethmalani could speak in his capacity as a member.

Mr. Jethmalani said the Bihar Governor acted on the facts obtained at the given moment.

DMK embarrasses Govt.

A DMK member today gave a few moments of embarrassment to the treasury benches when he quoted the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, describing the Governor's action in inviting Mr. Kumar "a hasty-step".

Mr. C. P. Thirunavukkarasu (DMK) said on many occasions the Governors had been a 'tool' in the hands of the Central Government.

The twilight of Parliament

By Pran Chopra

SOME OF its most senior members have virtually told Parliament that the days of its usefulness may be numbered; that it may become redundant just when it is needed most; that its help may be the least available to those who need it most. These may not be the words they use, but this is the plain meaning of what they do. Some may now claim their words have been misquoted, their actions misunderstood. But so frequent are their implied warnings to Parliament in word and deed that their gravity cannot be underestimated nor their consequences averted if the deeds persist.

The principal function of Parliament is to ponder upon issues, inform and educate public opinion about them, sift facts from prejudice, reconcile differences, and, if that is not possible, ensure that the majority prevails and the minority is ensured the chance to win another day in fair debate. Parliament works at two levels: through public debate between policies and points of view; and in the privacy of committees in which it is agreed by consensus what is to be debated, when, for how long, and under what rules.

The only sanction Parliament has for this function is a tripod of assumptions: first, that Parliament reflects the people's will; second, that it enjoys their trust, confidence, respect; and third, that its opinion is well-considered, clear, and therefore difficult for anyone to ignore. But all these assumptions are being undermined at present.

The way we elect Parliament and the latter elects the Government; a party or coalition can get a majority in Parliament with a minority share of the vote and a Government can be formed which is in minority in the House. That means the Government may be formed by a minority of a minority and without endorsement by a majority of the people. What it faces in Parliament is as often bedlam as it is debate, a babble of noises, not clear opinions, street-level brawls which show that Parliament's rules of work have broken down, both for public debate and for reaching conclusions in committees. Parliament itself will decline into demise in this way, and any presidency that may follow will not remain democratic for long.

Faith in the parliamentary system is getting drowned in "the well" of the House where MPs try their muscle and lung power instead of the merits of their arguments.

The daily scenes explain why instead of continuing to earn the "trust, confidence, respect" of the people, Parliament has started to earn their scorn as they count the crores the country loses while their MPs go berserk. Faith in the parliamentary system is getting drowned in "the well" of the House where MPs try their muscle and lung power instead of the merits of their arguments. The Government is thus left free of any obligation to carry out any directive of Parliament since none emerges which is "considered, clear".

The presiding officers of all Legislatures are placed in a difficult dilemma. Their powers to discipline rowdy members are not inconsiderable; if a member is "named" by the chair for persistently disruptive behaviour he can be expelled for the day, for the week, or even for much longer. But the scene then becomes only more unruly. On the other hand if the chair persists in a lenient view he is seen to be weak, the citizen complains louder about wastage of public funds, and the whole system falls into disrepute. The MPs are accused of lying when they promise good behaviour in taking oath of membership; the long Lok Sabha sitting on the 50th anniversary which took a pledge of good conduct is now recalled with sneers; each time a House is adjourned for the day to seek refuge from bedlam the question arises why not shut it down for much longer? And "why not for good?" could be the next question.

Until a few years ago, it was possible to believe some respected members who still argue, with more goodness in their hearts than wisdom in the head, that disorder on the floor of Parliament allows members to let off steam which would otherwise explode in the street. But that argument is wearing thin, because a vicious circle now holds sway over the interaction between the street and Parliament. Rowdy behaviour in Parliament, frequently witnessed in full flow over television, is seen by the street urchin as a licence for him to follow

worse: senior members are also preaching to them that there may be virtue in blocking proceedings. About a year ago, one of the most cerebral and senior MPs, Mr. Pranab Mukherji, said in full view of TV and on the floor of the House that no proceedings would be allowed unless their demand was conceded. An equally senior member, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, said on March 13 that it was legitimate to stall proceedings relating to certain Bihar and Gujarat matters because they had a bearing "on basic constitutional issues", never mind that such are the very matters on which Parliament should have the opportunity to give its full and most considered opinion. On the same day, an even more senior member of one party defended obstruction of proceedings on the ground that other parties had done so too. Just a week earlier, the Rajya Sabha had to be adjourned because of a demand for an immediate discussion on Bihar, contrary to the agreed agenda, and the discussion was delayed till the following week.

In the process, Parliament loses its educational role, as recent examples show. In the slanging match over the Gujarat order about the ban on Government servants' association with the RSS, Parliament forgot to educate the public about the Union's jurisdiction in this matter, about whether the ban — or its withdrawal — was in keeping with facts, the law, the Constitution, and whether it could have been better challenged — or upheld — by that route without crippling Parliament. Or, if the name of the game, as indicated by the Congress(I)'s most vocal member, Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar, was finding chinks in the NDA by forcing a vote on Gujarat, could it have been played by the rules in the Business Advisory Committee, or by moving an adjournment motion, or suitable cut motions when the Budget came up, instead of laying siege to Parliament? Or should the battle of Bihar have been fought — and lost! — by interrupting the healthy, and growing, conventions about who should receive the first invitation for forming a Government? But no, our first aim now appears to be to draw Parliament's blood, whatever the issue, and the right word may soon be not the twilight but the dark night of Parliament.

In the meantime, another hope is also falling by the wayside. Since each new House now has a large number of first-timers, it used to be thought their behaviour would improve as they imbibed proprieties which are proper to Parliament. But the reverse has happened, for two reasons. The proportion of newcomers is rising. This should be seen as a warning given by voters that they are dissatisfied with those elected by them. But the warning remains unheeded by the newcomers themselves. They are now numerous enough to set the stage for using it more effectively, and yet what they too do much of the time is to join others in throwing the furniture around. The second reason is

Sushma,

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 29

TODAY'S ELECTIONS to 29 Rajya Sabha seats in eight States saw Union Minister Rajnath Singh, BJP leader Sushma Swaraj, industrialist R P Goenka, former Union Minister Janeshwar Mishra and scribe Rajiv Shukla emerge victorious.

Liquor baron Vijay Malviya failed to make it to the Upper House from Karnataka. All three Congress candidates and a BJP nominee won comfortably. For Malviya, the support of JD(U) and JD(S) was of little avail in the final analysis.

Of the 29 seats in the reckoning today, the BJP picked up eight, while the Congress bagged six seats. The Congress also had a hand in the victory of RJD candidate Vendhama Viriyo, for the lone seat in Bihar for which a by-election was held.

Clearly, the most stunning upset of the day was the shock defeat of Congress nominee D P Roy in West Bengal.

For the Congress, another

Goenka among winners

If Roy's defeat was the upset of the day, the surprise of the day was sprung by TV journalist Rajiv Shukla. Fielded by the LCP, he had the unique distinction of garnering the highest number of votes (50). His own party has only 20 MLAs in the Assembly.

Apart from Rajnath Singh and Sushma Swaraj, the other BJP winners from UP include another Delhi-based journalist, Balbir Punj, Rammath Kovind and Ram Baksh Verma.

The SP won three seats. Besides former Union Minister Janeshwar Mishra, it ensured the victory of Sakshi Maharaj, the backward class leader who joined SP last year after the BJP expelled him.

In all, 16 candidates were in the fray for 11 UP seats. Among those who fell by the wayside was Jayant Malhoutra, who had been fielded by the Rashtriya Lok Dal.

In Rajasthan, the Congress won all three seats. Party candidates to emerge victorious were R P Goenka, Mool Chand Meena and Jamuna Barupal.

Detailed reports on Page 12

WINNERS	
UTTAR PRADESH	SEATS : 11
1. Sushma Swaraj	BJP
2. Rajnath Singh	BJP
3. Balbir Singh Punj	BJP
4. Rammath Govind	BJP
5. Ram Baksh Verma	BJP
6. Rajiv Shukla	LCP
7. Janewar Miara	SP
8. Sakshi Maharaj	SP
9. Dera Singh Chauhan	SP
10. Ghanshyam Khawaha	BSP
11. M M Aggarwal	JBSP
WEST BENGAL	SEATS : 5
1. Nilotpal Basu	CPM
2. Dipankar Mukherjee	CPM
3. Biplob Dasgupta	CPM
4. Manoj Bhattacharya	RSP
5. Joyanta Bhattacharya	Independent
KARNATAKA	SEATS : 4
1. K Rehman Khan	Congress
2. Bindu Raiher	Congress
3. K R Krishnamurthy	Congress
4. Rajeshwar Murthy	BJP
ORISSA	SEATS : 3
1. Bijayenta Panda	BJP
2. Bishwara Singh	BJP
3. Manmohan Samal	BJP
RAJASTHAN	SEATS : 3
1. R P Goenka	Congress
2. Jamuna Barupal	Congress
3. Mool Chand Meena	Congress
BIHAR	SEAT : 1
1. Vendhama Viriyo	RJD
HIMACHAL	SEAT : 1
1. Kripal Parmar	BJP-HVC
J & K	SEAT : 1
1. Mirza Abdul Rashid	NC

embarrassment of sorts was in store in UP, where its candidate Inder Khosla lost badly, while rebel candidate MM Aggarwal, contesting as an Independent with the backing of the Jantantrik BSP, romped home.

All eyes were on UP, where 11 seats were up for the grabs. While the BJP won five seats, the Samajwadi Party bagged three. The Loktantrik Congress Party (LCP) and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) bagged one each, while the Jantantrik BSP had its hand in the victory of Aggarwal.