

BJP wins the battle, but loses the war

By Smita Gupta

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The BJP-led government won the vote in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, but at the end of a bitter and partisan debate on the Ayodhya issue, it seems to have lost the battle. Even the BJP's allies made it clear to the Prime Minister that while they did not wish to embarrass him, he, too, should not embarrass them.

Immediately after Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's intervention and Congress member S. Jaipal Reddy's reply to the debate (going by rule, the mover of the motion replies to the debate), members of the Trinamul Congress, the Telugu Desam Party, the Indian National Lok Dal and the Janata Dal-United trooped out to confer on which

way to vote. When they did not return soon, parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan and BJP MP Kirit Somaiyya hot-footed it to the chamber of Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee.

There, it was decided that the PM would be asked to clarify whether he would accept the verdict of the court. If a clear reply did not emerge, they would abstain from voting. Trinamul's Sudip Bandopadhyay was assigned the task. The PM was forced to reply in the affirmative and the NDA allies voted against the opposition-sponsored motion.

But the BJP's partners came out of the House looking unhappy. Trinamul MP Krishna Bose shrugged her shoulders and said, "We were extremely upset initially. Now we are reasonably satis-

fied. What more can we expect?"

But she indicated that the allies might meet again to review the matter. TDP's M. Jagannathan said, "The PM said he would not deviate from the NDA agenda and he said at the end that he would stand by the court's verdict. We'll have to wait and watch." Devendra Prasad Yadav of the JD (U) also refused to say anything beyond, "We did not have an option."

Mr Vajpayee's reply—delivered under the watchful eyes of VHP bosses Ashok Singhal, Vishnu Hari Dalmia and Giriraj Kishore—did not make clear whether he had really jettisoned the suggestion of finding a way to build the temple at the disputed site through talks between the two communities.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

15 DEC 2000

PM tries to pacify allies before RS debate

Mamata
to keep
BJP on
toes

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Bid to bury Babri row in business

Calcutta, Dec. 16: A day after the BJP announced that there was no going back on its stand on constructing a Ram temple in Ayodhya, ally Mamata Banerjee made it clear that her party will continue protesting against Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's statements if they deviate from the NDA's agenda for governance.

"We want Vajpayeeji to strictly follow the NDA agenda and not his party's hidden one," Mamata said after an iftar attended by 5,000 Muslims. "I will be the last person to tolerate any deviation from the NDA agenda."

Today's party, held at Park Circus maidan, was organised by Congress MLA-turned-Trinamul leader Sultan Ahmed.

Mamata said all NDA partners should be consulted before the government takes a final decision on the temple. "We should stick to the NDA agenda and any violation will cost the government," she warned.

Asked about Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi's threat to pull out of the NDA if the government continued to digress, Mamata said: "He (Karunanidhi) did not raise his voice at the NDA meeting when the Ayodhya issue came up for discussion. We are the only ones to have protested Vajpayeeji's remarks."

Mamata, however, skirted queries on whether the Trinamul would toe Karunanidhi's line. "We are keeping a watch on the developments. We will protest if attempts are made to destroy the secular fabric of the country," she said.

Mamata earned applause from the people at the gathering for promising to work for the minorities' welfare. Observers said Mamata's stand on safeguarding the interest of Muslims will help her consolidate the minority vote-bank in the state.

Earlier, the Trinamul leader charged chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee with playing a "dual role" by promising the ousted people of Midnapore a safe passage back home and at the same time provoking CPM workers to assault them immediately after their return.

Ruling out any meeting with Bhattacharjee in the near future, Mamata said: "We will rather go to the people to bring back peace in places where the CPM cadre have unleashed terror."

She visited the nursing home where a Trinamul worker, whose tongue was slashed allegedly by CPM activists, is undergoing treatment. "This is the state of affairs in Bengal where supporters of Opposition parties are being gagged this way," Mamata said. (See Page 7)

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 16: Atal Behari Vajpayee today tried to deflect attention from the Ram temple to economic development, but the euphoria triggered within the BJP by the Prime Minister's avowal of the Hindutva cause continued to soar.

"I hope the unnecessary political controversy of the week gone by is behind us. It is time now for all of us to re-focus our attention on the most important agenda before the nation, namely development," he said while inaugurating the 73rd annual session of the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Ficci).

"There is need for faster, more balanced and more equitable development," he added. The Prime Minister said as part of this effort, the Centre plans to introduce a new golden handshake package to reduce its bloated bureaucracy by at least 10 per cent over the next three years. (See Page 12)

The BJP argued that Vajpayee's recent statements should not be seen as a U-turn. "One should not read too much into it," a senior leader said.

The party has begun preparations for the Rajya Sabha debate next week and plans to field several stalwarts. Jaswant Singh is the BJP's leader in the House and the party has other options in Venkiah Naidu, Sushma Swaraj and Sikandar Bakht.

By focusing on the economic issues, Vajpayee is trying to send the signal to restive allies that he, too, has political compulsions and they should not read too much

into his statements on the temple.

Already, the DMK has threatened to walk out of the NDA if the Prime Minister continues to digress from the agenda for governance. A worried Mamata Banerjee is in the midst of chalking out a strategy to deal with the issue.

It will be embarrassing for the Centre if any of its allies, including the Trinamul Congress, Telugu Desam or the DMK, does not vote with the BJP in the Rajya Sabha.

The government has accepted a debate in the Upper House knowing full well that it lacks the numbers to carry through a motion. Mamata said yesterday that she did not want to speak too much on the subject now and will voice her opinion in the Rajya Sabha.

BJP sources, however, argued that a defeat in the Rajya Sabha will have little impact because the wording of the motion as agreed upon focuses on a mild censure.

Unlike the Lok Sabha debate, where the resignation of the three Babri chargesheeted ministers — L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and Uma Bharti — was the focus, the Rajya Sabha discussion will concentrate on whether or not to disapprove of the government standpoint on Ayodhya.

Addressing the corporate captains, the Prime Minister indicated while he is ready to concede ground on the Ram temple to the Hindutva hardliners, he is not willing to do so on the economic front.

The Prime Minister took pains to assert that his comments last week which have rejuvenated the BJP rank and file will not have any adverse impact on the Centre's economic policies.

THE TELEGRAPH

17 DEC 2000



The Information and Broadcasting Minister, Ms. Sushma Swaraj, hugs the newly sworn-in Youth Affairs and Sports Minister, Ms. Uma Bharati, as the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, and the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, look on after the swearing-in ceremony at the Rashtrapathi Bhavan in New Delhi on Tuesday.
— Photo: Shanker Chakravarty(Report on Page 13)

8/11 Munda raises banner of revolt

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, NOV. 7. Refusing to take the oath of office as Union Minister of State, Mr. Karia Munda has raised the banner of revolt in the Bharatiya Janata Party even while staking claim to the chief ministership of the new State of Jharkhand to be formed on November 15. "If I am not fit to be chief minister how can I be fit for the job of central minister," Mr. Munda told reporters, clearly seething with anger.

Apparently, soon after it became known last night that the Prime Minister had asked Mr. Babulal Marandi to resign from the Council of Ministers, in anticipation of his being sworn in as Jharkhand Chief Minister, Mr. Marandi contacted Mr. Kailashpati Mishra, senior leader in charge of Bihar affairs, and told him categorically that he was not interested in a job at the Centre. It seems insult was added to injury by the BJP top leadership by making it known that Mr. Munda was to be given Minister of State status although he had been Cabinet Minister in the 13-day Vajpayee Government in 1996.

Mr. Mishra conveyed Mr. Munda's decision to Mr Vajpayee this morning, and this has certainly created a first class crisis in the party in relation to chief ministership of Jharkhand. Mr. Mishra

today stated on record that the "issue is open" and "both the names, Mr. Marandi and Mr. Munda, are being considered for chief ministership."

It seems the occasion of the Bihar Assembly session on November 8, 9 and 10, where a farewell function is to be organised for the 80 Jharkhand MLAs and MLCs, is to be used to further explore the wishes of legislators on this crucial decision.

It has become clear that Mr. Mishra has virtually thrown in his lot with Mr. Munda, perhaps angered that when the information was leaked on Mr. Marandi resigning from the Council of Ministers to make way for Mr. Munda and to clear the way for Mr. Marandi's installation as Chief Minister, he (Mr. Mishra) was not informed or consulted.

The argument being extended in favour of Mr. Munda is that he is 20 years senior to Mr Marandi in the party, that he has relentlessly fought for tribals, and that he had been left out of government office in the 1998 and 1999 Vajpayee Governments. Now that the time came for deciding the chief ministership, the big prize was being taken away from him and he was being consoled with a junior berth at the Centre.

Nityanad for Uttranchal: Page 13

THE HINDU

8 NOV 2000

Sudershan deadline puts BJP in a spot

52-6
19/10
SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 18. — The BJP is in a dilemma over the RSS chief's statement that the organisation would come out with a Gandhian model of economic development after two years.

The model, to be based on interaction with economists, will be an alternative to the present one.

While the BJP can't oppose an alternative model of development, especially from the RSS, it can't welcome it for fear of admitting that the present model is not good enough. Some BJP leaders say the NDA is already trying to implement the Gandhian model.

The BJP vice-president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, said all parties would welcome the

alternative model. He, however, clarified the RSS, or any other group preparing such a model, mustn't forget the economy's link with the world, and that a government is a continuing phenomenon.

Those preparing the model must accept that the government can't wipe out the past and begin everything on a clean slate, he said. If the model was more environment friendly, less capital intensive and could provide more employment, it would deserve careful consideration.

Mr Jagdish Shettigar, member of the Prime Minister's economic advisory council and BJP economic cell convener, said the government was following the Gandhian model of development. The NDA was trying to delink itself from the

previous model which failed to reach the fruits of economic development to most of the people.

The Prime Minister's Gramodaya Yojana, with an allocation of Rs 5,000 crore, is intended to provide every village with basic infrastructure like roads, health facilities and primary education, he said. The Centre had taken steps to strengthen the small and cottage industries.

He said any suggestion from any section to improve the economic model would be welcome. The NDA is trying to achieve a balance between the capitalist and socialist models. Rejection of regulatory mechanism didn't mean acceptance of capitalism, he said. He disagreed with the perception that capital intensive industry should not be promoted.

THE STATESMAN

19 OCT 1980

Need to Indianise the RSS

By Shamsul Islam

THIS DUSSEHRA the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh turned 75. The occasion was marked by a number of statements directed against minorities, especially Christians, by the RSS top brass, many of whom are as old as the Sangh itself. Considering its interest in Hindu philosophy, the RSS leadership must be aware that according to the theory of asramas, the 75th year in one's life is the end of vanaprastha and beginning of sanyasa which means complete detachment from the affairs of the world. According to the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, even in the vanaprastha phase which begins at 50 one should give up 'all desire for possession, and desire for the world.' If the RSS follows this scriptural advice, our country can hope to be released from the trauma of communal tension which got a boost since the days of the Babri mosque demolition.

The RSS is turning into a super-cop, not only defining patriotism and nationalism but also determining who the patriots of the country are. With the Home Minister, other Union Ministers and some Chief Ministers participating in sectarian gatherings, where the minorities are targeted, the RSS' nefarious designs are gaining open legitimacy. It can be argued that one should not be alarmed at its latest pronouncements; the RSS has indulged in minority-bashing since its very inception. Guru Golwalkar, explaining the fate of Indian Muslims and Christians wrote as early as 1938 (in "We or Our Nationhood Defined") that "the foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence Hindu religion, must entertain no idea but those of the glorification of the Hindu race and culture, i.e., of the Hindu nation and must lose their separate existence to merge in the Hindu race, or may stay in the country, wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment, not even citizen's rights. There is, at least should be, no other course for them to adopt. We are an old nation: let us deal, as old nations ought to and do deal, with

the foreign races who have chosen to live in our country."

In the "Bunch of Thoughts", Bible of the RSS, he describes the Muslims as the first and the Christians as the second threat to India in a chapter, 'Internal Threats.' The recent call for Indianising the Christians can be compared to the one given by Sarsanghchalak Deoras with respect to the Muslims in the past. But the problem is that the RSS today is no longer a Junatic fringe. The Prime Minister, the Home Minister and many other Ministers openly declare their subservience to it. They are part of the political breed that the RSS has created and gained strength and support from.

In the words of Golwalkar himself: "We

the Constitution and therefore its ideals.

When the tricolour was declared the national flag, it was the RSS which refused to accept it as such. Golwalkar, discussing the issue in the essay, 'Drifting and Drifting', in the "Bunch of Thoughts," remarks: "Our leaders have set up a new flag for our country. Why did they do so? It is just a case of drifting and imitating. Ours is an ancient and great nation with a glorious past. Then, had we no flag of our own? Had we no national emblem at all these thousands of years? Undoubtedly we had. Then why this utter void, this utter vacuum in our minds?"

Similarly, both the prayer and the oath of the RSS are in direct contravention of the ideal of the secular state, a 'basic fea-

the need of always remaining involved in routine work. There is some unrest in the mind due to the situation developing in the country from time to time. There was such unrest in 1942. Before that there was the movement in 1930-31. At that time many other people had gone to Doctorji. This 'delegation' requested Doctorji that this movement will give independence and the Sangh should not lag behind. At that time, when a gentleman told Doctorji that he was ready to go to jail, Doctorji said, 'Definitely go. But who will take care of your family then? That gentleman told he has sufficiently arranged resources not only to run the family expenses for two years but also to pay fines according to the requirements. Then Doctorji said to him, 'if you have fully arranged for the resources then come out to work for the Sangh for two years'. After returning home that gentleman neither went to jail nor came out to work for the Sangh." This incident clearly shows that the RSS leadership was bent upon demoralising honest patriotic persons and making him run away from the cause of the freedom movement.

After the Quit India Movement, Golwalkar accepted that in "1942 also there was a strong sentiment in the hearts of many. At that time too the routine work of Sangh continued. Sangh decided not to do anything directly". However, there is not a single publication or document of the Sangh which could throw some light on the great work the RSS did indirectly for the Quit India Movement.

It is really sad that an organisation which openly decries the Constitution, the national flag and betrayed the national movement against the imperialist rulers of Britain is not being checked from terrorising the minorities in the name of patriotism and loyalty. It is high time the RSS stopped wasting time on false enemies and did some soul-searching to go in for 'Indianisation' in tune with the country's secular, democratic, tolerant and liberal constitutional ethos. It is time for the RSS to stop presenting its agenda in a fallacious cultural garb and justify it on just political and factual grounds.

It is really sad that an organisation which openly decries the Constitution and the national flag and betrayed the national movement is not being checked.

ture' of the Constitution. The RSS prayer does not refer to India in the light of this ideal but addresses it as the 'Land of Hindus' and 'Hindu Rashtra'. The oath is as ominous as the prayer: "I most solemnly take this oath, that I become a member of the RSS in order to achieve all-round greatness of Bharatvarsha by fostering the growth of my sacred Hindu religion, Hindu society and Hindu culture."

The problem is further aggravated by the RSS viewpoint on the Constitution of India. It "too is just a cumbersome and heterogeneous piecing together of various articles from various Constitutions of Western countries. It has absolutely nothing that can be called our own. Is there a single word of reference in its guiding principles as to what our national mission is and what our keynote in life is? No!" (Golwalkar in the "Bunch of Thoughts")

The RSS is very fond of talking of our glorious past heritage. It is a different story that the RSS showed no enthusiasm for the anti-British struggle. In the words of Golwalkar, "There is another reason for

BJP confident of new stand on Kashmir

21/11 By Neena Vyas 10/1

NEW DELHI, NOV. 23. The new face of the Bharatiya Janata Party as a peace messiah in Kashmir is difficult for its cadre to swallow, but party leaders are confident they will be able to explain the "reality on the ground." Till very recently, the party's slogan in relation to Kashmir was "*khoon ka badla khoon se denge* (blood for blood)" and later it was modified to "*eenth ka jawab pathar se denge* (we will respond to bricks with stones)". From that to the offer of a unilateral ceasefire is a far cry.

Senior leaders admit that when the BJP was in the Opposition, it called numerous 'bandhs' in Delhi and Jammu, almost regularly for years after every massacre, and now that after a ceasefire offer five truckers have been killed in cold blood by militants, it has had to preach restraint.

"It is a gamble that Vajpayeeji (the Prime Minister) has taken. And although it seems that it may fail, like the Lahore bus diplomacy did, the fact is that it does give peace a chance, and we have to take that chance," a party leader said. Yes, the slogans had changed, the direction had changed, but the

feeling was that though the cadre might be angry (after all, who is not angry about the daily massacres of innocents?), they would understand.

As for the differences within the alliance getting exposed — the Shiv Sena has attacked the unilateral ceasefire — a Minister in the Vajpayee Government pointed out that when the ruling coalition includes the National Conference and the Shiv Sena, there can be no uniform view on this sensitive question.

Senior party leaders said that even if the current peace initiative failed, there were three gains made — the Government had let its good intentions be known to the people in the State who wanted peace and the bloodletting stopped; two, Pakistan had been using the religious card by describing terrorist activities as 'jihad' and now India had successfully built on religious sentiments by offering peace during Ramzan; and three, internationally the new move would do India as much good as the failed Lahore bus diplomacy, which had signalled that India was interested in offering the olive branch to Pakistan.

THE HINDU

24 NOV 2000

BJP's verdict: Let Rajnath Singh take over U.P.

Gupta claims he is waiting for nod from Centre

The Times of India News Service and Agencies

LUCKNOW: Uttar Pradesh chief minister Ram Prakash Gupta has been directed by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) to step down from his post, paving the way for Union surface transport minister Rajnath Singh to take over the reins of the state.

Soon after returning from Delhi, UP BJP president Kalraj Mishra said the high command had decided on the change after Mr Gupta expressed his desire to step down due to health reasons.

He said the BJP legislature party would meet here on Wednesday to elect Rajnath Singh formally as its new leader.

The proposal for the UP leadership change was finalised at a meeting of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, home minister L.K. Advani and Mr Mishra in New Delhi on Tuesday. BJP general secretary Narendra Modi was asked by the PM to leave for Lucknow as his emissary to ensure a smooth change. Mr Modi will be the central observer at the party meeting in Lucknow on Wednesday.

The move was earlier discussed between Mr Vajpayee and state BJP leaders at Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai where the PM was convalescing

CHANGE OF GUARD



Rajnath Singh

R.P. Gupta

after his knee surgery.

Reacting to the news, Mr Gupta said that he would accept any decision taken by the party high command. Talking to reporters in his office in Lucknow, he denied that the central leadership had hinted at his removal. "There was speculation, but it always exists in politics," Mr Gupta said.

Mr Gupta added that he had no attachment to any post or chair. "I am a disciplined soldier of the party and will remain so," he pointed out.

When asked about the reports of his removal in the wake of the party's poor performance in the last panchayat elections and its evident desire to boost its prospects in the coming local bodies elections, Mr Gupta said the party was right to think ahead of its performance in the next assembly elections. However, he hastened to add that he had not been told to step down.

Mr Gupta also refused to admit that a particular group in the party was gunning for him. "Neither has any group been working against me nor do I belong to any group," he said.

When asked if he would like to be made governor of any state, he said the question did not arise as he was still the chief minister.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

22 25 OCT 2000

2 5 OCT 2000

Sloppy Gupta out, Rajnath in

Advani persuades PM to check decline in UP **Parrikar is new Goa CM**

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, October 24

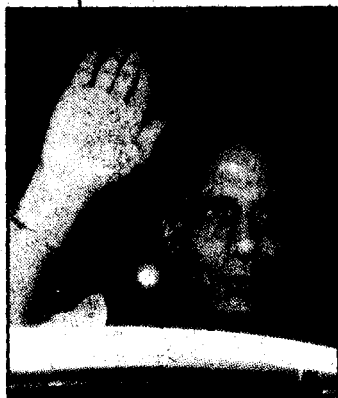
IN A pre-Diwali package to bolster the BJP's sagging political fortunes, Union Transport Minister Rajnath Singh is replacing Mr Ram Prakash Gupta as Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister.

Mr Singh will take over from him when the Uttar Pradesh BJP Legislature Party meets in Lucknow tomorrow to elect a new leader.

Mr Singh, a Rajput leader, emerged as the natural choice after the BJP realised that 11 months of Mr Gupta's rein, which was in any case meant to be a stop-gap arrangement, was a near-disaster in political terms.

Although Prime Minister A B Vajpayee backed him solidly, Mr Gupta, who took over from Mr Kalyan Singh before he rebelled last November, failed to win over friends, disappointed the allies and the BJP cadre alike. He could not improve the performance of the State Government either.

The PM finally concurred with the assessment of Home Minister L K Advani, who took the initiative



Rajnath Singh

to settle the leadership issue in favour of Mr Singh.

Mr Advani has been pressing for the change to end the state of despondency in the BJP before the creation of Uttaranchal poses any fresh political crisis because of a slashed majority in the State Assembly.

Mr Gupta was saved by Mr Vajpayee from exit on two occasions, once in May and in July. The PM is now no longer wanting to appear to support him if there is widespread discontentment under

his leadership.

As an architect of the present coalition of recalcitrant allies, Mr Singh's immediate task is to prevent the "ultra-slender" majority of one in favour of the BJP (in the post-Uttaranchal period) to remain and to stave off any toppling game. Mr Singh, who met the PM tonight along with LCP leader Naresh Aggarwal, said his top priority was law and order.

Mr Advani held two rounds of discussions with the PM on the issue, once in Mumbai when the latter was recovering from his knee surgery, and in the Capital yesterday, when the matter was finally clinched in Mr Singh's favour.

The swiftness of today's decision was underscored by the near absence of involvement of other central or State BJP leaders in the consultation, which took place at the PM's residence this afternoon.

Even BJP chief Bangaru Laxman and his deputy K Jana Krishnamurti were unaware of the development, which was conveyed to the Press in Lucknow by UP BJP chief Kalraj Mishra, who was asked to meet Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani today.

GOA GOT a new Chief Minister in BJP leader Manohar Parrikar on Tuesday following the resignation of the Francisco Sardinha Government ahead of the trust vote.

Mr Parrikar took the oath of office and secrecy after he met Governor Mohammad Fazal at Raj Bhawan and formally staked his claim to form the government. Mr Parrikar was the leader of the BJP Legislature Party in the outgoing Sardinha government.

Earlier, Mr Sardinha submitted his resignation to the Governor shortly before the Assembly was scheduled to meet.

Mr Parrikar said the Governor had not asked him to prove his majority in the Assembly.

Mr Sardinha's decision was prompted by the desertion of four Ministers belonging to his Goan People's Congress Party late on Monday night. They had quit the Cabinet and declared their support for Mr Parrikar. Mr Sardinha is now left with seven MLAs, including himself.

Detailed report on Page 11

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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25 OCT 2000

BJP turns to 'Nagpur Message' to woo minorities

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, October 30

BEGINNING FROM November 1 for two months, hundreds of BJP leaders and workers are to go out to Muslim localities and Dalit-inhabited areas in the country for enrolling new members to BJP.

Knocking at the doorsteps of Muslim and Dalit homes, BJP leaders are to urge these sections to consider the party as their own party of "preferred governance".

The BJP wishes to put behind the controversy caused by RSS chief K S Sudarshan's call to Muslims and Christians and Home Minister L K Advani's assertion of "historical bond" with the Sangh by salvaging its president Bangaru Laxman's 'Nagpur Message'.

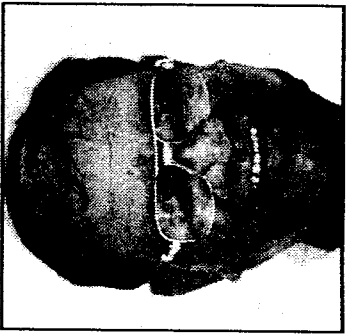
A meeting of the BJP central office-bearers will be held on November 6 to prepare a grand-

scale programme for this purpose, which will involve central BJP ministers and office-bearers, who will address meetings in pre-dominantly rural areas.

By this method, the BJP intends to focus on voters in four States which are scheduled to go to the polls next year, namely West Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Assam, besides politically volatile Uttar Pradesh, where appointment of Mr Rajnath Singh has forced the party to work out ways to win over the OBCs and Dalits.

At a conclave held in Nagpur last August, Mr Laxman had given a call to the BJP workers for reworking the relationship between the BJP and the Muslims and try to woo the OBCs and Dalits to join the party. The BJP chief's call was billed as the 'Nagpur Message' to underscore the party's deep concern over the erosion of its tradi-

tional support base and only marginal gains in the 1999 Lok Sabha polls, which were "totally out of sync with the calibre and prestige



of our leadership".

Mr Laxman's missive to the party cadres was a follow-up to the 'Chennai Declaration' of the BJP in December 1999 for a fresh dia-

logue with the minorities to end the atmosphere of distrust and suspicion. He had laced his call to win over the Muslims by recalling that Jana Sangh founder Deendayal Upadhyaya had himself stated in 1967 that "every section of Indian society is the flesh of our flesh and the blood of our blood".

The BJP chief rested his call on several "favourable factors", which included the Muslims' disillusionment with the politics of 'minority-ism' of other political parties and their failure to improve their lot.

Mr Laxman's pro-Muslim appeal, however, caused unease among some sections of the BJP and its ally, the Shiv Sena, and was soon drowned by the RSS chief's call for Indianisation of Islam and Christianity.

The issue got further complicated when Home Minister L K Advani defended his presence at a

RSS camp at Agra by asserting that the BJP's ties with the Sangh were "unbreakable and historical".

Later, Mr Laxman, who is seen as Prime Minister A B Vajpayee's appointee, declared that the BJP's views were "significantly different from that of the RSS and the party did not wish to join the debate on 'swadeshi church' or Indianisation of Islam. Mr Laxman stated categorically that what the RSS chief had said about Christians and Muslims did not represent the views of the BJP even though Mr Sudarshan was entitled to his views and "it is up to different sections of our diverse society to react".

According to Mr Laxman, his call for a dialogue with Muslims and other weaker sections of the society had resulted in overall appreciation of support for the BJP and "complexion and composition of the crowd for the BJP is changing".

Major players let Govt down on FM

Anju Sharma
New Delhi, October 30

EVEN AS the deadline for depositing bank guarantees for FM radio stations lapsed today, major players such as the Zee-owned New Media Broadcasting and Reliance-owned Observer Network Private Limited and Nimbus Communications let the Government down by failing to firm up the agreements.

At the end of the day, the Government decided to immediately forfeit the Rs 8 crore deposited as advance license fee by a dozen defaulting companies out of a total of 28 original bidders. But a legal battle seemed to be on the cards with S u b h a s h Chandra's New Media Broadcasting moving the Delhi High Court to claim the Rs 7 crore advance amount it had furnished after the March auction.

The Court hearing on New Media's plea was adjourned today till Nov. 1. The company had made the highest bids to acquire 29 FM radio stations with bank guarantees aggregating Rs 90 crores. Sources indicated that the defaulting companies might not be allowed to participate in the re-auctioning of FM stations that have been left with no takers. "We can add a clause in the eligibility criteria that defaulting companies cannot participate in the auction," a senior I&B Ministry official said. In his view, this would be a better option than blacklisting companies at the risk of inviting procedural wrangles.

In fact, various proposals and

options were deliberated at a high-level meeting I&B Minister Shushma Swaraj convened here today. Compared to the projected Rs 425 crore collection by way of bank guarantees, the Government's collections under the head stood at Rs 158.75 crore. Among the companies which failed to pay up are: The Observer Network Limited (Rs 39 crore guarantee for eight stations), Shiv Jatia owned Hind Broadcasting (Rs 24 crore, five channels) and its sister concern B o l l y w o o d Broadcasting (Rs 3.25 crore, one channel), Nimbus communications (Rs 20.17 crore, three channels), M o d i Entertainment (Rs 5.3 crore for Pune), Dream Radio (Rs 16.87 crore for Delhi and Mumbai) and its subsidiary concern, Kismat Radio (Rs 6.8 crore for Bangalore), Magic Radio (Rs one crore for Calcutta) and Dhun Radio (5.3 crore for Pune).

Interestingly, the Dabur-owned Vertex Broadcasting signed agreements today for only three of the five radio stations it had got. It has not signed deals for the more expensive Chennai and Hyderabad stations.

The advance license fee of these companies which the Government has forfeited is: New Media (Rs 7 crore), Nimbus (1.75 crore), Observer Network (Rs 3.35 crore), Hind Broadcasting (Rs 2.12 crore), Dream Radio (Rs 1.25 crore), Kismat Radio (Rs 50 lakh), Modi Entertainment (Rs 25 lakh), Dhun Radio (Rs 25 lakh), Indigo Radio (Rs 75 lakh), Magic Radio (Rs 50 lakh) and Bollywood Broadcasting (Rs 25 lakh).

Out of tune

- 12 companies back out of FM deal.
- Advance license fee of Rs 18 lakh of defaulting companies forfeited.
- Zee's New Media Broadcasting moves court to get advance fee back.
- Rs 158.75 crore recovered as bank guarantees instead of targeted Rs 425 crore.
- Remaining FM channels to be re-auctioned.

and its subsidiary concern, Kismat Radio (Rs 6.8 crore for Bangalore), Magic Radio (Rs one crore for Calcutta) and Dhun Radio (5.3 crore for Pune).

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PM stresses party-Govt. relations

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 1. The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, today emphasised the need to strengthen the relationship between the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Government even as he sought to dispel the growing notion that he alone had recently been taking all important decisions related to purely party matters. At the same time, he asked party-persons not to raise issues which become points of public debate, but feel free to discuss problems at appropriate party forums.

It was left to the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, to compare the Nagpur call to all good persons to support the BJP, to the call given by Jayaprakash Narain in 1977 asking all parties to sink their differences and join the movement to save democracy, even as the party president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, reported that his Nagpur message has been received very well, especially by the Dalits, Adivasis and Muslims.

Speaking briefly at the party's one-day national executive committee meeting — the first to be held under Mr. Laxman's presidency — Mr. Vajpayee contradicted the view that has gained



The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, with (from left) BJP leader, Mr. Khushabau Thakre, the party president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, and the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, at the BJP national executive meeting in New Delhi on Sunday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

ground that Mr. Laxman was his personal choice for presidency. He asserted that consultations and discussions had taken place and then a collective decision arrived at.

He said that a party person whether in Government or in the party organisation was essentially doing the same job. The party should feel free to bring to the notice of the Government any issue that it feels strongly about, and

the party should also carry effectively to the people the achievements of the Government.

He talked about the difficult economic situation and his successful visit to the United States, where he was welcomed as a representative of India. He said during his visit the attacks on Christians in the country were mentioned by some, but they clearly understood and had no fears about the Government's

secular intentions and policies.

Only indirectly he referred to Ms. Mamata Banerjee's resignation from the Cabinet, by saying that sometimes difficult decisions had to be taken in the national interest and it was not easy tackling a difficult situation.

In his address, Mr. Advani said the Nagpur decision to expand the party's support base was not a new strategy. In 1996, in Bhopal, the BJP had taken two decisions — to expand its base, and to reach out to other parties which it had done successfully, ending with the formation of the NDA Government at the Centre.

Briefing reporters, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi, said that executive had decided that in November and December the party would undertake mass contact programmes, especially in the states going to the polls next year. For one week from October 14 major public meetings would also be held to take the Nagpur message to the people and observe completion of one-year of the 1999 Vajpayee government.

A detailed strategy discussion for the five States going to the polls will also be held tomorrow.

Resolution on U.S. visit: Page 13

THE HINDU

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BJP sees hope in east, south

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 2 — The BJP today dwelt on its election campaign strategy on a positive note. Along with its alliances, it hoped to dislodge the Left Front government in West Bengal and return to power in Tamil Nadu.

It calculated that anti-incumbency factor would work against the Asom Gana Parishad in Assam and the Left Front government in Kerala. The party for the time avoided a discussion on Uttar Pradesh, where it faces a tough going in retaining power.

The four states discussed today would go to the assembly polls early next year whereas UP would witness polls towards the end of 2001, a BJP leader said, justifying the party strategy.

The party announced its week-long campaign from 13 to 20 October to inform the public about the achievements of the Vajpayee government during the last one year.

It would carry the Nagpur message about social, political and geographical expansion in November and December, the party leader, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, said. Posters, pamphlets, and meetings would be

ADIEU TO SCRIBES

NEW DELHI, Oct. 2. — Mr M Venkaiah Naidu was today at his best while saying goodbye to journalists covering the BJP. The newly inducted Cabinet minister took special permission from Mr Bangaru Laxman to convey his thanks to the journalists.

Mr Naidu said joining the government was just the beginning of his journey. This was for the first time he was going to hold responsibility in the government.

He said his rural background would help him render justice to the people. — SNS

the means to propagate the message, he added.

Focus will be on the poor, particularly the Dalits and the minorities. The BJP wanted to become a "replica of mini-Bharat," he said.

The West Bengal unit president, Mr Ashim Kumar Ghosh, claimed that BJP along with Trinamul Congress stood a good chance to dislodge the Left Front government.

He reportedly said that Miss Mamata Banerjee was unlikely to shift loyalty to the Congress and dump the BJP as the latter

commanded substantial following. The derecognition of the CPI-M as a national party has depressed the Leftist cadres, he added.

The Tamil Nadu unit argued that the relations between the BJP and the DMK were smooth and they were certain to go together for the assembly polls. The party projected a clear number two position for the BJP after the Assembly polls. It claimed that the workers in the Tamil Rajiv Congress led by V Ramamurthy were deserting the party for the BJP. The BJP could win at least 50 seats in the assembly elections, it was stated.

The PMK chief, Mr Ramadoss, did not share a good equation with the DMK but he was unlikely to leave the alliance. Mr Ramadoss had been in touch with the AIADMK chief, Miss J Jayalalitha, the Tamil Nadu leaders told Mr Laxman.

The Assam unit held that Mr PK Mahanta has lost popularity and was slated to lose due to anti-incumbency. The BJP stood to gain from the situation, it argued. In Kerala too, the party leaders projected that the bi-polar polity of Left and anti-Left was losing its grip giving advantage to the BJP.

THE STATESMAN

3 OCT 2001

Bangaru allays fears on CTBT

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 31. — The BJP president, Mr Bangaru Laxman, today allayed fears about the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, giving any commitment to USA on India signing the CTBT.

The national consensus has been that the treaty was discriminatory and hence should not be signed, he said at his maiden press conference after becoming party president. If there was a need to review this position, the government would take all into confidence, he said.

He told **The Statesman** later, that despite pressure from different countries the

government was not going to give any commitment to the US. The same kind of fears were expressed when the US President, Mr Bill Clinton, visited India, he pointed out.

Mr Laxman clarified at the press conference that party-government relations would be smooth and his effort during his three-year tenure would be to make the party an instrument for good governance.

Elaborating on the party's call to expand its base among the Muslims, he said party workers should go to the colonies of the minority community and tell them about the secular credentials of the Vajpayee government during the last two-and-

a-half years.

He clarified that his call for winning over the Muslims was not new. "I have merely elaborated on what the party has been saying about the Muslims," he pointed out. Mr Laxman asserted that his call was not motivated by electoral considerations.

The distance between the BJP and the largest minority group had not helped either the party or the community. The BJP's adversaries had reduced the members of this community into vote banks. It had prevented them from playing their due role in nation-building.

In this context, Mr Laxman pointed out that the BJP had

put on hold controversial issues from its agenda for five years. "Let us discuss these issues after five years," he said. The NDA's agenda was the party's agenda, he clarified. "We have given our word to the people on these issues in the NDA manifesto," he clarified.

Mr Laxman said the party had expanded its social and geographical base but emphasised the need to further expand in regions that did not have the presence of either the BJP or its alliance partners. The challenge was to expand further and consolidate the gains in what can be referred to as the "governance space", he added.

THE STATESMAN

SEP 2000

Hindutva shelved for now: Laxman

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 31. The Bharatiya Janata Party president, Mr. Bangaru Lakshman, has indicated that the party's core Hindutva issues had not been given up, only shelved for the time being. He explained their absence from the party's resolutions adopted at the Nagpur session saying "they are there in earlier party documents. Every policy, every issue cannot be repeated each time."

Asked whether the shelving of the three core issues — Ayodhya, abrogation of Article 370 and implementing a uniform civil code — was a compromise made to remain in power, Mr. Lakshman said that may be the perception of others. "We were signatories to the

NDA manifesto for 1999 Lok Sabha polls, we remain committed to that."

Addressing his first press conference after taking over as party president, Mr. Lakshman said he had resigned as Minister of State for Railways this morning.

While repeating the points made in his inaugural address to the party's National Council session in Nagpur — with an emphasis on expanding the party's appeal among the Dalits, the backward castes, Muslims and other religious minorities — he also sought to emphasise that he had not made any startling departure from the past. In fact, every party president in the past too had appealed to Muslims to back the BJP and

place trust in it, but perhaps had not stressed it in the same way.

Mr. Lakshman said that while several Muslims had joined the BJP, he would now ask his workers "to go into the Muslim *mohallas* (localities)" and explain to them, convince them, to put their trust in the BJP by looking at its record in maintaining communal harmony. Because of the "sustained campaign by other political parties against the BJP the Muslims stayed away from the party." It was a different atmosphere now, for many of those parties which had campaigned against the BJP were now its allies in the NDA.

As for the differences between the BJP and its mentor — the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh — and sibling organisations such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Mr. Lakshman repeated what is by now a familiar line: "They have their own point of view... if I agreed with the VHP then I would be in the VHP not the BJP."

To a question on Kashmir, Mr. Lakshman said the party still stood by its earlier motto: "*Ek pradhan, ek nishan, ek vidhan*" (one Prime Minister, one flag and one Constitution). That did not contradict the party stand welcoming the Government's peace initiatives in Kashmir.

Asked to clarify the party's stand on the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty and whether India should sign it, Mr. Lakshman dodged the questions saying "the BJP stand is the same as that of the Government." And further, he spelt out that so far the "consensus" within India was that there were "discriminations" in the CTBT document which New Delhi was opposed to.

Muslims see rhetoric: Page 13

Govindacharya threatened to quit RSS

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Sept. 8. — Mr KN Govindacharya threatened to take "sanyas" from politics and the RSS if he was not given an honourable way out of the present crisis facing his long-standing reputation as an RSS pracharak.

He had reportedly told RSS chief Mr KS Sudershan in Nagpur on Wednesday that he would renounce the life of pracharak if forced to accept the stigma that he was being forced to return to the RSS as he was unfit for the Bharatiya

Janata Party. The Prime Minister, Mr Arya Behari Vajpayee, had reportedly requested the RSS leadership to take Mr Govindacharya back.

The RSS joint general secretary, Mr Madan Das, was the first person to tell him re-tuesday about Mr Vajpayee's proposal.

When the party general secretary met Mr Sudershan in Nagpur the next day, he offered to quit not only from the BJP but also from the RSS. Mr Sudershan then pressed t SJM convenor, Mr

be allowed to continue as a party general secretary for three months after which he would resign and relegate himself to the background.

The BJP general secretary turned down Mr Vajpayee's proposal that he be made a vice-president and instead opted for a two-year leave and membership of the national executive.

RSS played a key role in restraining Mr Govindacharya. On Wednesday, Mr LK Advani, Mr Bangaru Laxman, Mr Kushabhau Thakre and Mr Madan Das huddled together to



Mr Kushabhau Thakre

Mr Govindacharya was isolated after Mr Vajpayee reportedly rejected the proposal that he



Mr LK Advani

Gurumurthy, into service to evolve a face-saving formula, an RSS leader said.

work out an "honourable" solution.

Mr Das met Mr Vajpayee on Wednesday to persuade him that Mr Govindacharya be allowed to remain in the BJP. Later, Mr Advani, Mr Thakre and Mr Laxman met Mr Vajpayee before he left for the USA.

Mr Govindacharya returned to Delhi from Nagpur on Wednesday night and met Mr Laxman and the former party president, Mr Kushabhau Thakre, to ensure that he was not accommodated as party vice-president.

THE STATESMAN

Eyebrows raised over PM's RSS affirmation

Vajpayee prepares for showdown with hawks

By Bhaskar Roy
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's harking back to his RSS roots from far-off Staten Island in New York has raised more questions than it answers. The remark, if made at a Sangh Parivar function back home, would probably have been viewed as a mere reiteration of a known position.

But the Prime Minister's assertion of his old links during the course of his state visit to the U.S. has prompted Vajpayee watchers to look for reasons and seek to decipher the implications.

One theory sparked by the "I will always be a *swayamsevak*" comment is that this is Mr Vajpayee's way of seeking support from the Sangh in view of the recent rumblings of dissent within the party.

Now that effective party functionaries like Sushma Swaraj, Govindacharya and Uma Bharti have displayed defiant postures, Mr Vajpayee has prepared the ground for any future showdown. The function at which he spoke, organised by the VHP and pro-BJP organisations in the U.S., had only provided the PM the opportunity.

While the Opposition has already cried foul, the BJP and its NDA allies have taken a different view. The BJP has sought to play down the fuss by saying that Mr Vajpayee had only stated the obvious. "He has never concealed his RSS affiliation, nor has he ever denied he is a *swayamsevak*," said senior BJP leader and RSS *pracharak* J.P. Mathur who claims that although Mr Vajpayee is both a moderate and a pragmatist, there have never been any misgivings about his RSS links.

The mood at the function, Mr Mathur said, could have influenced the Prime Minister. "Like any good speaker, perhaps he was influenced by the atmosphere," Mr Mathur said, explaining Mr Vajpayee's remark.

Samata Party president Jaya Jaitly, on the other hand, is of the view that the Prime Minister's comments at a private function had nothing to do with the coalition government's functioning or direction. "The RSS does not run this government, and even the BJP is only one of the partners. It is an NDA government which is run on the basis of a common manifesto," she claimed, adding that Mr Vajpayee's observations could not have any implications for the coalition.

However, BJP insiders said that the timing of Mr Vajpayee's remarks were significant as they had been made at a time when the rift in the party was becoming only too visible.

► See Edit: Non-resident Hindutva, Page 12

TDP concerned, others cautious

By Rajesh Ramachandran
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The ruling NDA partners, especially those from the south, have reacted cautiously to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's assertion that he remains an RSS *swayamsevak* and his statement that the BJP requires a two-thirds majority to fulfil its "dream"—a reference to the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya.

Telugu Desam parliamentary party leader Yerran Naidu expressed his concern, albeit in a guarded manner. Speaking to *The Times of India*, he said, "The government should confine itself to the NDA's agenda. The TDP has always tried to uphold the tenets of secularism as enshrined in the constitution. And the Prime Minister has maintained that the government should function within the limits of the NDA's agenda."

The TDP said it was the Prime Minister's prerogative to call himself an RSS *swayamsevak* and it was any party's business to try to get a two-thirds majority to pursue its dream. But then, TDP sources pointed out, the BJP's dreams had tended to become complicated, a case in point being its stand on issues like the Gujarat government allowing its employees to join the RSS.

Also, after the statement by Uttar Pradesh chief minister Ram Prakash Gupta on temple construction, the TDP had sought a clarification from the Prime Minister, who had told parliament that the government was bound by the NDA agenda, TDP sources pointed out.

Other NDA partners seemed to prefer to circumvent comment on Mr Vajpayee's statement. DMK chief and Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi, when contacted in Chennai, was not forthcoming despite repeated attempts. Nor was Punjab chief minister and Akali Dal leader Prakash Singh Badal.

TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2000

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TRUTH AND INCONGRUITY

10-12
12/19

FACTS MAY BE facts but there are occasions when it is impolitic to utter them. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, appears to have overlooked this during his speech at a function organised by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) sympathisers in the United States. This is not the first time Mr. Vajpayee, a founding-member of the erstwhile Jana Sangh, has characterised himself as a "swayamsevak". During his two years as Prime Minister, he has made no secret of his sympathy for the RSS, which he has both defended and praised on the floor of Parliament — particularly during the controversy over the Gujarat Government's order lifting the ban on public servants joining the organisation. During his speech in New York, there might be questions whether he was specifically flaunting the RSS badge or whether he used the expression "swayamsevak" in the broad and relatively innocuous sense of "volunteer" though the meaning appears to be clear enough from the content. But irrespective of what he intended to mean, the point really is whether he should have said what he did when he did. It is somewhat incongruous for a Prime Minister on an official tour abroad to claim that he had attended a meeting as a "swayamsevak".

In fact, the Prime Minister's very decision to attend the Staten Island function — which was dominated by Hindu religious leaders and those with 'saffronite' political views — was ill-advised. Mr. Vajpayee is in the U.S. as the Head of Government and not as the leader of a political party and it is important that the functions he attends are inclusive or have a representative character. From all accounts, the Staten Island function lacked the true character of an event for non-resident Indians (NRIs) and appeared — what with the unmistakable presence of the likes of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's Mr. Ashok Sing-

hal — more like a politico-religious jamboree.

Having decided to attend, Mr. Vajpayee, in keeping with his long experience as a politician and administrator, should have weighed his words more carefully and resisted the temptation to play to the gallery. Although there was nothing amiss in most of what he said, some of the Prime Minister's remarks bore the stamp of the Hindutva agenda. However couched or veiled these remarks were, they may well become the subject of political criticism at home by the BJP's detractors. His yearning for a two-thirds majority to pursue the BJP's exclusivist agenda is also likely to cause some discomfiture among the constituents of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government, many of which are distinctly uncomfortable with the party's position on Ayodhya and other such issues which have a direct bearing on the minority communities.

There is also the question what the international community will make of what he said. It was only a couple of days earlier, at the millennium summit of the United Nations, that Mr. Vajpayee had portrayed India as a plural and open society which was blighted by cross-border terrorism that was fuelled by a dangerous religious extremism. Meetings such as the one organised at Staten Island are not, to labour the obvious, the best illustration of plurality and openness. At a time when India is trying to convince the world that it is a victim of religion-backed terrorism sponsored by Pakistan from across the border, it is important that it does not allow itself to be accused of intolerance or bigotry. Participating in a function which the Vishwa Hindu Parishad uses to highlight its own political platform (which is based largely on the demand that a Ram temple be constructed at Ayodhya) is hardly a good advertisement for India.

Atal touch evident in Laxman's team

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, September 11

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee's decisive say in the new BJP set-up, the party's sudden move to give prominence to old entrants from the Congress and a sprinkling of Muslim names in the party's national executive for the first time are the hallmarks of the organisational changes announced today.

Party president Bangaru Laxman rehabilitated ex-Delhi CM and ex-Union Minister Madan Lal Khurana as one of the vice-presidents. This, despite strong opposition from Laxman's predecessor Kushabhau Thakre and some other senior leaders. Ex-Delhi CM Sahib Singh Verma, ex-Congressman Sunil Shastri and BJP women's wing chief Maya Singh have been made general secretaries.

Mr Shastri, a son of Jawaharlal Nehru's successor Lal Bahadur Shastri, is expected to play an important role in reviving the BJP's sagging fortunes in Uttar Pradesh, perhaps by enlisting some upper caste Congress leaders who are said to be unhappy with Mrs Sonia Gandhi's dispensation.

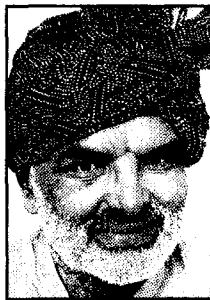
Ex-Maharashtra Deputy CM Gopinath Munde, Jharkhand MP Karia Munda and veteran RSS pracharak Pyarelal Khandelwal are the new vice-presidents. The outgoing VPs are J.P. Mathur (on grounds of poor health) and Ramdas Agarwal.

Mr Laxman has retained senior vice-presidents K. Jana Krishnamurthi and Kailashpati Mishra and general secretaries M. Venkaiah Naidu and K. Narendra Modi.

The new president is to allocate work and appoint



REHABILITATED:
Khurana (above)
and Sahib Singh



heads of the frontal organisations after the new national executive meets.

Significantly, Laxman did not elevate secretaries such as ex-Union Minister Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi and RSS pracharak Padmanabha Acharya, who has been handling the party's expansion in the North-East.

MP Karia Munda's induction as a vice president suggests that the BJP's chief ministerial candidate for Jharkhand could be Union minister of state Babu Lal Marandi.

Munde's exit from the Maharashtra scene could improve Shiv Sena-BJP ties. Sena chief Bal Thackeray has been suspicious of the BJP's plans to make Munde CM by splitting the NCP or the Congress.

The new secretaries are Chhatrapal Singh (UP), Dalpat Singh Paraste (MP) and Kanta Nalavade (Maharashtra).

Ex-Congressmen in the new national executive include ex-AICC general secretary Budh Priya Maurya, ex-Union Ministers M. Kamson and Sanjay Singh. Kamson was Narasimha Rao's MoS for Home in the post-Babri period.

While Govindacharya and Sushma Swaraj retained their positions in the party's national executive, Uma Bharti's wish to be only a primary member of the party has been respected.

Under its new Constitution, the BJP is required to change 25 per cent of its office-bearers and retain less than 30 per cent of the outgoing national executive in the new one. V P Goyal, Dr Ram Kripal Sinha and Ashwini Kumar were retained as the BJP treasurer, office secretary and parliamentary party office secretary, respectively.

Party opts for Dalit president

Bangaru Laxman set to be BJP chief

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 31. — The Minister of State for Railways, Mr Bangaru Laxman, is slated to be the next BJP president.

He hails from Andhra Pradesh and will be the party's first Dalit president.

Mr Laxman (61) will succeed Mr Kushabhau Thakre at the party's national council meeting in Nagpur in the last week of August. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, Mr LK Advani and Mr Thakre will sign nomination papers for his candidature, a senior party leader said. He will have a three-year term.

The nomination papers are to be filled in either tomorrow or the day after, depending on

Mr Laxman's choice.

Mr Thakre conveyed the decision to Mr Laxman when the latter met him this afternoon, a party source said.

The search for Mr Thakre's successor began after he opted out of the race for a second term on health grounds.

Mr Advani had announced that Mr Thakre was out of the race.

A consensus on Mr Laxman emerged after Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani spoke to Mr Thakre over the telephone today. Before this, Mr Advani had held informal discussions with party leaders.

Senior RSS leaders had given a free hand to the BJP to nominate a president of its choice. Mr Thakre has reportedly conveyed the decision to the RSS chief, Mr KS Sudershan.

The RSS had favoured Mr Laxman's elevation to the top post even during the last presidential election because of his Dalit background.

The RSS had calculated that it would help the party establish its base among deprived communities. Mr Thakre

became president because of his organisational strength and the BJP devoted his tenure to expansion of the party base.

The BJP has decided that Mr Laxman will take over on 27 August in Nagpur, the headquarters of the RSS. Mr Laxman had joined the RSS in 1952 when he was 12.

Mr Laxman scored over senior party vice-president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, because of the party leadership's calculation that a Dalit president would help the BJP shed its anti-Dalit image.

The party has to face elections next year in many states, including UP and West Bengal. The BJP is facing stiff competition from the BSP for Dalit votes. Mr Laxman's elevation is

a compliment to Mr Vajpayee's call for expansion among new social sections.

Mr Laxman is well-versed in Hindi, making him more acceptable than Mr Krishnamurthy. He has worked in UP while organising Dalit conventions.

There was stiff opposition

to Mr Krishnamurthy's candidature from party leaders from North India, particularly from UP. Mr Advani and Mr Vajpayee reportedly considered him a difficult candidate as he had refused to take over as the Governor of Karnataka.

The party general secretary, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, opposed to Mr Laxman's candidature in the earlier election, reportedly supported him this time.

Mr Laxman had resigned his government job to join the Jan Sangh in 1969.

He became its Andhra Pradesh secretary in 1973 and rose to the post of BJP vice-president in 1997.

He resigned as party vice-president after taking over as a minister in the Vajpayee government.



Mr Bangaru Laxman

THE STATESMAN

1 AUG 2000

I am nobody's man: Bangaru Laxman

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 1. — The BJP's president-designate, Mr Bangaru Laxman, today hinted that he was not going to be a rubber stamp president. He also indicated that nobody could take him for granted. "Nobody should have any illusions that there will be some body to influence my decisions," he told The Statesman.

"I am nobody's man. I am the party's man and I will be guided by the party's interests," he said when asked to comment on the impression that he was being nominated for the party's top post as he was considered pliable.

Mr Laxman clarified that what he meant by Vajpayee,

being the head of the government, would definitely have a point of view and a say. Mr Vajpayee always had a say whether it was the presidency of Mr LK Advani or Mr Murli Manohar Joshi, he said. His word has been always given proper weightage, he added.

Mr Laxman said he favoured a collective leadership. "The party is never run by an individual," he said. "My endeavour will be to involve more and more people in the party organisation." The BJP leader held that the Bangalore national executive resolution that talked about better coordination between the party and the government but delineated the areas of operation of the two would be his guiding principle.

However, it did not mean any serious confrontation".

Referring to the Swadeshi Jagran Manch's criticism of the government's economic policy, he said the organisation had been holding this view for quite some time. It was for the government to take the steps that were possible.

"We go to the FICCI conferences. They give suggestions. We don't take all the suggestions." Similarly, the SJM had its own views and so had the RSS. These were the reasons that made the RSS, SJM and BJP different entities, he said.

Mr Laxman said his nomination as the BJP's first Dalit president had sent a positive message among the deprived sections of society. Even those

people who were unwilling to join the party were now expressing a desire to be with the party, he said, based on the congratulatory calls he received after the party's decision to nominate him as president. Expanding the party geographically and socially has been the biggest challenge till now, Mr Laxman said. "We are yet to win over, to a large extent, the Dalits' favour." He advocated Dalit conferences in reserved constituencies to attract them.

Similarly, though the minorities had joined the party in good number in recent times, they too have some lurking suspicions which need to be dispelled to make them an integral part of the party, he said.

NOMINATION

NEW DELHI, Aug. 1. — Mr AB Vajpayee, Mr LK Advani, Mr Kushabhau Thakre and Mr Murl Manohar Joshi will sign the nomination papers for Mr Bangaru Laxman's candidature for the top party post. — SNS

The BJP would try to strengthen the present arrangement of understanding and coordination between the party and the government, he said. About the relationship between the RSS and the BJP, Mr Laxman said the two shared a family relationship. Differences of opinion within a parivar were bound to occur.

THE STATESMAN

- 2 AUG 2000

THURSDAY, AUGUST 3, 2000

THE BJP'S NEW PRESIDENT

THE ANOINTMENT OF Mr. Bangaru Laxman as president of the BJP may be of little significance given the party's status now as head of the ruling coalition at the Centre and that it is Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee (in his capacity as Prime Minister) who is calling the shots. That Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. L. K. Advani had been guiding the party's affairs rather than Mr. Kushabhau Thakre during the past couple of years is a fact. This change in the BJP's affairs, as it had been with the Congress(I) too for long, despite occasions where Mr. Thakre as party president was seen attempting to carve out an independent role for himself, was far too conspicuous to be ignored. Whether it was the business of replacing the Chief Minister in Uttar Pradesh or on the issue of formulating the party's approach to economic policy and other related aspects, Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani were seen deciding on them; Mr. Thakre was only associated in those instances by virtue of his formal position of being the party president. And the very fact that Mr. Laxman's filing of nomination (only a formality) for the "election" to the party post was done in the presence of Mr. Vajpayee clearly signals the equations in the party. But then, insofar as the BJP continues to ensure that the party president's post is held by a person other than the Prime Minister himself, there is still some difference from the Congress(I)'s culture.

Be that as it may, the choice of Mr. Laxman does suggest a conscious effort on the part of the BJP's top brass towards "social engineering" an idea that sections in the party have been advocating over the past few years. It is for the first time in the two decades of its existence — ever since the BJP was founded in 1980 — and even earlier during the period of the Bharathiya Jana Sangh that someone from among the Dalits is even thought of as the party president. And this, certainly, reflects the dynamics of social changes, triggered particularly by the implementation of the Mandal Commission's recom-

mendations in August 1990. Indeed, Mr. Laxman too had his basic lessons in politics in the RSS and in this sense cannot be expected to represent the interests of the Dalits and other social groups who have suffered discrimination over the years in the social and economic sense. And in this sense, it remains to be seen as to whether his elevation as party president will lead to any significant groundswell of support from among the Dalits for the BJP in the northern States. In the same sense, it remains to be seen if the BJP's decision to have a Dalit as its president will have any adverse impact on its prospects in terms of retaining its support base — by and large the upper castes — in these States. This aspect will be of some importance particularly in Uttar Pradesh, where elections to the State Assembly are due before October 2001.

The choice of Mr. Laxman is significant in another sense too. It will be for the first time that the BJP will have a president from one of the four southern States. After having managed to mark its presence from all over the region (barring Kerala) by way of striking electoral alliances with one or the other of the regional platforms in these States, the BJP as a party cannot be oblivious to the sentiments there. Whether Mr. Laxman being the party president will at all help the party to achieve this in Andhra Pradesh may not be crucial. The moot point here is whether Mr. Laxman will succeed in removing the impression about the BJP being a party wedded to the culture of the Hindi-speaking region. And this assumes a lot more importance in the larger context where the role of the party president has been reduced considerably, partly due to the presence of such charismatic leaders as Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani in the arena and furthermore with the institution of the party president being rendered subordinate to that of the Prime Minister's Office.

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3 AUG 2000

Laxman elected, to quit ministerial berth

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 8

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Bandaru Dattatreya and Minister of State for Home Vidyasagar Rao were also present on the occasion.

party's two-day national council meeting in Nagpur, beginning on August 27.

He is the first Dalit chief of the BJP and the first from the South to occupy the post in the 20-year-old party.

MINISTER OF State for Railways Bangaru Laxman was today elected unopposed as the fifth president of the Bharatiya Janta Party. He will resign from the minister's post when he formally takes charge as the new BJP chief on August 27.

The election of Mr Laxman, for a three-year term, was declared today by returning officer O.P. Kohli.

Later, Mr Laxman went to BJP president Khushabhau Thakre's room to meet him. Mr Thakre escorted Mr Laxman to his table and offered his seat to Mr Laxman, saying, "My duty is over now."

Senior BJP leaders and two Union Ministers from Andhra Pradesh, Minister of State for Urban Development

Mr Laxman will formally take charge at the



Bangaru Laxman at the BJP head office after he was officially nominated as BJP's president for three years on Tuesday. Photo: Manish Swarup

Soon after his election, Mr Laxman stated that he was thankful to his party colleagues and was sure that "we would work together as a team and take the party from strength to strength."

Mr Laxman reached the BJP central office amid bursting of crackers and drums and was garlanded by slogan-shouting party workers.

According to returning officer O. P. Kohli, all the 16 sets of nomination papers filed in favour of Mr Laxman by senior leaders, including Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, were found valid.

Mr Laxman being the lone official candidate, the announcement of his unanimous election at the end of the deadline for withdrawal of candidature had been a mere formality.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 9 AUG 2000

Vajpayee to pay Sangh homage

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Aug. 16: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee will drop in at the RSS headquarters at Resham Bagh in Nagpur during the two-day BJP national council session on August 27 and 28.

Confirming the visit, well-placed BJP sources said the main objective of Vajpayee's stop-over was to pay homage to the Sangh's founder, Keshav Baliram Hegdewar and his successor M.S. Golwalkar at their memorials.

Though K.S. Sudarshan, the Sangh's new *sarsanghchalak*, will not be around during Vajpayee's visit, general secretary Mohanrao Bhagwat and joint-general secretary Madan Das Devi — number two and three in the Sangh hierarchy — will be there

to receive the Prime Minister.

Sudarshan, the sources said, will be away in the US at that time to attend a meeting of the Hindu Swayamsevak Sangh. Though party insiders downplayed Sudarshan's absence saying it was "mere coincidence", the RSS chief's differences with Vajpayee are well known.

Sudarshan had publicly opposed the Centre's pro-liberalisation policy as also the appointment of certain bureaucrats allegedly pursuing the Manmohan Singh line of economics.

He had also disapproved of the move to hold talks with the Hizbul Mujahideen and had demanded that the Farooq Abdullah government be sacked after the recent spurt in killings in the state.

In a recent interview to the BBC, Sudarshan had even gone to

the extent of saying that the BJP had ceased to be a "party with a difference".

With the Vajpayee-Sudarshan feud becoming an embarrassment, Sangh strategists decided to appoint Devi as the pointman between the RSS and the government and also the RSS and the BJP.

According to them, Devi was a more "skilled practitioner of realpolitik" than Sudarshan and so was "better placed" to appreciate the compulsions of running a coalition government.

Both Bhagwat and Devi will attend the national council session as special invitees. The sources said this was not "unprecedented" as the sessions are open to the public and in the past, senior Sangh functionaries had attended them without taking part in the deliberations.

Though the date of Vajpayee's visit has not been finalised, his programme managers said he would spend between 30 to 40 minutes there. They said that after paying homage at the *samadhis* of Hegdewar and Golwalkar, he would interact "informally" with RSS workers but avoid a formal address. Vajpayee's visit to Resham Bagh is not the sole evidence of his acknowledgment of the RSS' presence.

Last Friday, party bosses, including Vajpayee and home minister L.K. Advani, participated in the *gurudakshina* function at human resources development minister M.M. Joshi's residence.

Along with 125 other BJP members, the two leaders donated a month's salary to the RSS in keeping with a time-honoured practice.

THE TELEGRAPH

17 AUG 2000

Paras, Rahul dropped from new State BJP panel

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, August 23

BJP STATE president Ashim Ghosh today constituted a 30-member secretariat. Two former general secretaries, Paras Datta and Rahul Sinha have been dropped from the new panel.

Ghosh said the new team, comprising mainly his loyalists, would work to consolidate the party's support base in the State. It would extend full cooperation to the Trinamool Congress in the run-up to the 2001 Assembly polls.

He was not anticipating a revolt by Datta and Sinha's followers, he said. "When I formed the new secretariat, I faced no problem from any party member. As for Datta and Sinha, I wouldn't like to make any comment based on media reports. But we will definitely haul up those who violate party discipline."

In the new secretariat, Jugal Kishore Jethalia, Debartha Sinha and Panchanan Hansda have joined Muzzaffar Khan and PD Chitlangia as vice-presidents. Debabrata Chowdhury, Tathagata



Ashim Ghosh

Roy and Pratap Banerjee are the new general secretaries. Ghosh's rival in the recent in the State unit presidential election, Sukumar Banerjee, has been made permanent invitee along with Telecommunications Minister Tapan Sikdar, Satyabrata Mukherjee and Badal Bhattacharya.

Datta and Sinha are being accommodated in the State Committee.

Ghosh said the new secretariat would prepare a detailed report on

the CPI(M) violence in Bankura, Midnapore and Hooghly districts.

This report would be submitted to party president Bangaru Laxman and Union Home Minister LK Advani at the party's national executive meeting in Nagpur later this month.

"We will present a report to President KR Narayanan in the second week of September, urging him that Article 356 should be immediately invoked in West Bengal and the Centre should intervene to check the constitutional crisis in the State.

"In fact, we think Bengal is a fit case for Article 356. But we will not ask for it till the Congress too demands President's rule here. We don't have a majority in the Rajya Sabha. And unless the Congress too backs the demand, there is little possibility of getting it passed in the Upper House.

"We experienced a loss of face in Bihar when the Congress backtracked. So, if the new PCC president, Pranab Mukherjee, agrees to support our cause, we will go ahead with our demand," Ghosh added.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 AUG 2000

BJP leaders take PM to task

98-15
28/8

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MAGPUR, Aug. 26. — A few BJP leaders today attacked the Vajpayee government over its Kashmir and liberalisation policies.

Some strongly criticised the government for being soft on the Kashmir issue. They, including the minister of state for civil aviation, Mr Chaman Lal Gupta, argued at the national executive meeting that Jammu and Kashmir be handed over to the Army for effective control of militancy.

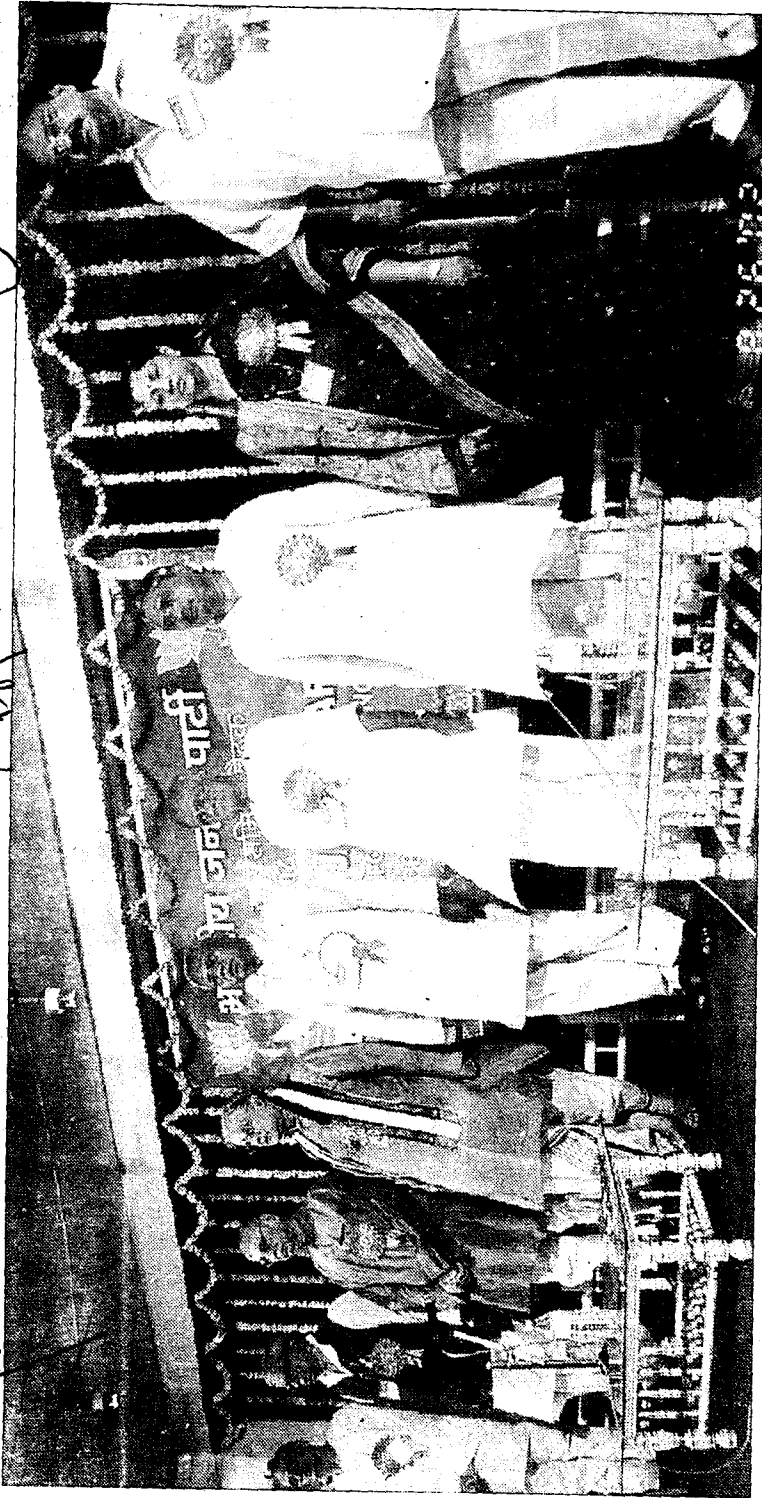
Mrs Sushma Swaraj strongly criticised the economic resolution that originally said those criticising the government on economic policies were ignorant of the benefits. She asked why the government had deviated from the Swadeshi path.

No heavyweight, except Mr Murli Manohar Joshi, was present at the meeting.

Mrs Swaraj also criticised the government for the Amarnath killings. Mr Murli Manohar Joshi pulled up Mrs Swaraj for her criticism, it was learnt.

Mr AB Vajpayee, Mr LK Advani and Mr Yashwant Sinha did not attend the meeting.

Mr Joshi fielded arguments from the leaders. Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, Mr Sahib Singh Verma, and Mr Vijay Ghel asked embarrassing ques-



Mr Kushabhau Thakre with BJP's national executive members at party's national council meeting in Nagpur on Saturday. — PTI

tions, an executive member told The Statesman. Mr Pyarelal Khandelwal and Mr Dinanath Mishra joined the chorus in opposing economic policies. (The RSS had previously criticised the government on both these counts.) Mr Malhotra wanted to know

why the government failed to control militancy in Kashmir. He asked why BJP leaders in the government were giving an impression they were not interested in abrogation of Article 370. He spoke about the party's opposition to the Article since Independence.

Some leaders hinted that the Kashmir problem was due to differences between Mr Advani, who has been reportedly advocating tough action against militants, and Mr Vajpayee, considered opposed to this, a BJP leader said.

Mrs Swaraj reportedly asked

at the meeting of the government's compulsions for giving an open field to foreign financial institutions. These institutions were damaging small and cottage industries, she alleged. How could the party support these steps, she apparently asked.

BJP meet to suggest petro hike

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NAGPUR, Aug. 26. — The BJP's national executive is set to advocate a massive hike in petroleum prices to bridge the yawning deficit in the oil pool account, which according to some party leaders is likely to reach Rs 14,000 crore by the year-end.

The hike, likely to be limited to petroleum and LPG, could be in the range of 30-40 per cent, said a BJP leader. It could come either before or immediately after the Prime Minister's visit to the USA next month.

The party's economic resolution, which will be discussed by the executive till late tonight and declared tomorrow, has reportedly dealt with the issue in detail, and suggested tough measures.

Arguments for the hike will be placed before the national council to evolve a broad consensus, and to prepare cadres to defend the government's action. Some 1,400 important partymen will attend the meeting, and will be told of the gravity of the situation.

The BJP's suggestion has come in response to petroleum

minister Mr Ram Naik's statement that he would seek the party's support on the issue. The party was extending support even before the minister had asked, said a senior member of the national executive.

The BJP's arguments are based on sound economics. Two-and-a-half-years ago, the price of crude oil in the international market was \$10 a barrel. It has now gone up to \$32 — a 220 per cent increase.

The government, however, has hiked prices by only 40 per cent. The previous government's decision to link domestic oil prices to international prices has not been followed. The deficit has, as a result, touched Rs 7,500 crore, a member said.

The economic resolution has also stressed on an awareness programme about benefits of the second generation reforms.

The party has prepared status papers on various sensitive economic issues to explain the rationale behind the government's decisions. Some of these points have been included in the resolution. It is also likely to counter the Swadeshi Jagran Manch's criticism of policies, particularly on FDI and WTO.

■ More reports on page 10

THE STATESMAN

Sinha defends Govt. policies

By Neena Vyas

NAGPUR, AUG. 27. The Union Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, today strongly defended the Government's economic policies while rounding off the debate on the economic resolution to be adopted tomorrow by the Bharatiya Janata Party's national council. And by the time he completed, there was no doubt that he had worsted his "swadeshi" critics in the RSS and in his own party.

The seven-page resolution, which is yet to be given final shape, at the very outset praised and appreciated the performance of the Vajpayee Government noting the 6.5 per cent growth achieved, and setting the target for a nine per cent "sustainable growth" for the next decade to double the per capita income.

The resolution itself did note the fears over disinvestment, lifting of quantitative restrictions on imports, especially agri products, the fears that the small-scale sector would be adversely affected by rapid globalisation, and it also admitted that development of infrastructure — power, roads, railways, ports — had not proceeded fast enough, unlike in the information technology sector where there had been a marked

Mr. Sinha pointed out that disinvestment since 1991 had yielded all of Rs. 18,000 crores while more than Rs. 61,000 crores had been spent by the Government on PSUs. The economy simply could not afford this luxury.

The resolution was moved by the party general secretary, Mr. K. N. Govindacharya, who more than hinted at the reservations of many in the party on what was seen as mindless and rapid globalisation — seeking paradise by following a path carved out by others. He asserted that every country had to chart out its own course.

The resolution talked about the new agricultural policy, but was careful not to mention the core issue, that of corporatisation of farming. Perhaps, it was thought that discretion was better lest policy arouse opposition. The resolution set a target of 4 per cent agricultural growth and suggested lifting of all restrictions on inter-State movement of agri products. Mr. Sinha in his speech promised that peak duties would continue to be imposed on agri imports so that no harm was done to the interests of the Indian farmer.

Mr. Sinha pointed out that quantitative restrictions on imports had to be lifted under the WTO regime. but the Government

prevent an adverse fallout. He said he had also imposed anti-dumping duties on 40 items to protect our industry.

The resolution noted that steps must be taken to ensure greater flow of foreign direct investment in new green field units, and not for acquiring Indian companies and raising money from the Indian capital market.

It also wanted the Government to "remove the digital divide" and ensure the benefits of the IT revolution are made available to the common people, right down to the village level.

The resolution also talked about "social justice" through emphasis on more help for the small scale sector, including credit guarantee without collaterals.

Finally, it was Mr. Sinha, who said that the "biggest swadeshi achievement" of the Vajpayee Government was Pokhran-II, for after that India's voice began to be heard with respect internationally. He said the strength of a nation was linked to its economic independence. He categorically denied that the IMF, World Bank or the WTO were being allowed to dictate India's economic agenda.

Mr. Sinha ended his defence of economic policy by exhorting party workers to aggressively defend the politics. There was abso-

THE HINDU

28 AUG 2000

'Muslims are the blood of our blood'

By Neena Vyas

*9 P-P
BJP*

NAGPUR, AUG. 27. In a significant move away from the old ideological moorings of the Bharatiya Janata Party to a large extent based on a hate Muslim attitude, the new party president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, today quoted old Jana Sangh ideologue, Deendayal Upadhyaya, to declare "Muslims are the flesh of our flesh and the blood of our blood."

Realising perhaps that shutting out nearly 15 per cent of the population was not the best way to expand the party's base, Mr. Laxman in his inaugural address to the BJP's national council session here, said the distance between India's largest religious minority and the BJP was not in the interests of the party or the Muslims, and certainly it was not in the national interest.

In fact, he noted that Muslims had not been given their due role in the country's democratic process, being "used" mostly as vote-banks. They have, by and large, "neither got their rightful share in the

nation's development nor have they been able to join the national mainstream to play their due role in nation-building."

Mr. Laxman found fault with the party for not reaching out to the Muslims, almost taking it for granted that the BJP "will never receive their support." He blamed this factor for the 1999 Lok Sabha results which had not shown any gain for the party, a fact "out of sync with the calibre and prestige of our leadership." A "chief reason" for this failure was the inability "to secure Muslim votes."

He put it bluntly, saying that the BJP "cannot afford to allow this situation to continue." If the party does not mend its ways, "we shall be hurting our own future prospects."

Although in the past many party leaders had talked about trying to woo the Muslims promising them equal rights, there was also always the rider of "no appeasement" to drive home the BJP perception that Muslims had been pampered, even if this view was contrary

to the fact of Muslim social and economic backwardness.

He listed the factors favourable for wooing the Muslims. They have seen they are not threatened under a BJP Government, their religious freedom has remained intact, and the BJP's record in maintaining communal peace has been good. Plus, Muslims respect the BJP leader and Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, although they have not voted for the BJP. Mr. Laxman said he would like to see the party field more Muslim candidates and to do this the party would have to enroll dynamic and socially respected Muslims.

Then he quoted from Deendayal Upadhyaya's presidential address of the Jana Sangh session in Calicut in 1967: "Muslims are the flesh of our flesh and the blood of our blood."

In 20 years of its existence, no BJP leader had so strongly talked about Muslims as blood brothers of the Hindu majority.

'HINDUTVA ON THE BACK BURNER IN NATIONAL INTEREST'

BJP must remove the distance with Muslims: Laxman

HD-1
28/8

9-8-P
BJP

By Neena Vyas

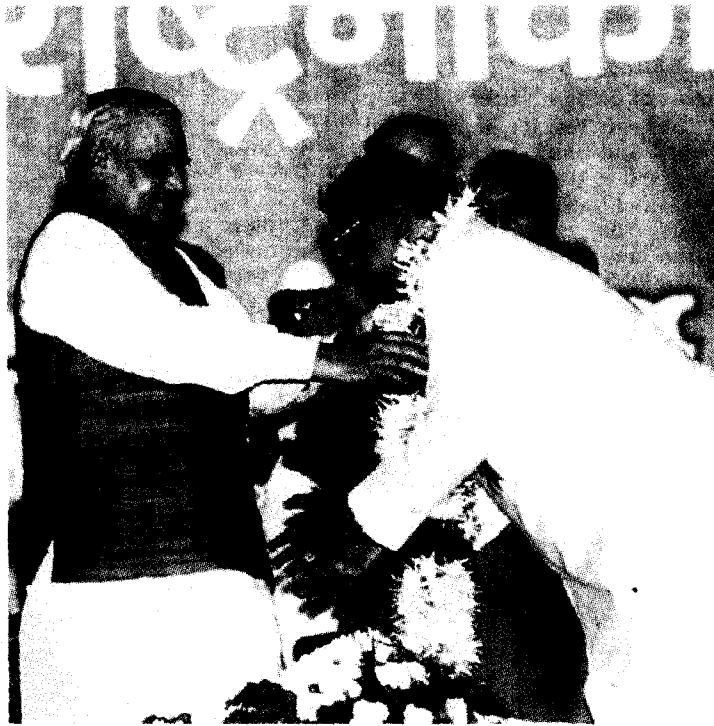
NAGPUR, AUG. 27. The taking over of the Bharatiya Janata Party by Mr. Bangaru Laxman as the new party president here today was marked by a determined effort to move away from some of the negative approaches of the past to become the preferred party of governance, which Mr. Laxman remarked, had not yet happened.

Advising his party to make a critical analysis of gains and losses, Mr. Laxman said the "BJP has not yet become the preferred party of governance" as in State after State it had been unable to get over the "anti-incumbency factor" unlike some other political parties. Possibly, he was referring to the Congress(I) in Madhya Pradesh, the CPI(M) in West Bengal, and even the Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar.

Delivering a 47-page address, Mr. Laxman identified the areas which the party must focus on — removing the distance between the BJP and Muslims by moving away from the "pre-conceived approach that the BJP will never receive Muslim support", and by consolidating gains made in an expanding social support base among Dalits, the tribals and the backward castes.

He said the party must try to prove critics wrong that the BJP had reached a saturation point, which he admitted, that in the 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha elections seemed to be true. Noting that the party did appear to have reached a "plateau", he said efforts must be made to overcome this.

He asserted that putting the BJP's Hindutva issues on the



The Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, greeting the new BJP president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, at the party's national council meeting in Nagpur on Sunday. — PTI

backburner was not a case of a "compromise to secure and remain in power" but to promote the "larger interests of the nation."

Thus, he clearly implied that the Ayodhya, uniform civil code and abrogation of Article 370 were not issues that were in the national interest.

In fact even yesterday, while talking to reporters he had said that the BJP had not grown rapidly because of these issues but

because it had espoused the struggles of the common man in different areas.

Mr. Laxman strongly defended the Government's Kashmir policy

India will win proxy war;
Sinha defends economic
policies: Page 13

— an indication of the direction of the political resolution. He summed it up by saying that the Government had clearly indicated it wanted peace, the people of

Kashmir had come out in favour of an end to daily bloodshed, and the Vajpayee Government had shown "clarity in perspective, firmness in strategy and flexibility in tactics." Praising the Prime Minister's message that talks with militant groups would be held within the parameters of 'insaniyat' (humanism), he warned that in the coming months the party would have to discuss and take a position on the basis of which talks should be held. He said that India should show "zero tolerance" towards terrorism.

Charter for social justice

On the social and economic side, he unveiled a 10-point charter for social justice, saying reservations alone were not enough, but literacy, employment and increase of income must be used as engines for removing social backwardness. He referred to the agriculture policy proposal of corporatisation of farming saying it would help achieve a 4 per cent growth in this sector, but there were strong indications of resistance to this idea from delegates who were of the view that the party would never accept this.

The Government somersault on 'swadeshi' was explained away by saying that the BJP is "not a prisoner of any dogma" and on the political side, the "dharma of coalition" was again emphasised. Today's opening of the party's two-day national council session marked the end of the Kushabhau Thakre's tenure as party president. Mr. Laxman was anointed party president in the presence of Mr. Vajpayee, the Union Home Minister, the Finance Minister, and other delegates.

THE HINDU

28 AUG 2000

'Behave like ruling party men'

Stop open criticism:

Advani

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NAGPUR, Aug. 28. — Mr LK Advani today chided the BJP leaders who publicly criticised loopholes in the party-led coalition and asked them to point out the mistakes to the "competent" person.

The competent person, a BJP leader later said, is none other than Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee.

While delivering the valedictory address at the national council meeting in the absence of the Prime Minister, Mr

Advani emphasised that BJP leaders should adopt the attitude of a ruling party and desist from making public criticisms the way they used to do while in the Opposition. It takes time for the old habit to die, he said.

The Union home minister clarified that nobody stopped BJP leaders from pointing out mistakes.

But the party should be run on the pattern of a family where the members did not publicly discuss their shortcomings.

A BJP leader said Mr Advani was indirectly referring to Mrs Sushma Swaraj's criticism of government's economic policies.

Mr Advani said the issues that got associated with the BJP in its journey to power at the Centre were not permanent. "These keep coming and going." He described the party's ideology, idealism and the nation-first policy as its strength. This made the BJP a party with a difference, he claimed.

The BJP leader held that the political and economic resolutions passed by the council would be able to meet the challenges the country was facing in terms of political instability, administrative corruption, economic uncertainty and internal insecurity. The BJP had to become the natural party of "good governance" before the end of this year.

The country should make itself capable to meet economic challenges, he said. Small industries and farmers should not be ignored in the name of liberalisation, he said.

SUSHMASPEAK

NAGPUR, Aug. 28. — Mrs Sushma Swaraj today asserted her right to speak her mind within the party. She criticised those who privately said that she had spoiled her chances of getting into the Union Cabinet by criticising party policies. Those who feel they were helping the government by fully endorsing the policies were wrong, she said. Diversity of opinion within the party would strengthen the negotiating power of the government at international fora, she said.

— SNS

Swadeshi hawks' signal: Swadeshi hardliners' critique of Vajpayee government's policies intends to send a strong signal to the Prime Minister that the party could not be taken for a ride, according to some BJP leaders.

They claimed that Mr Vajpayee was not getting real feedback about the adverse impact of his policies as he was surrounded by a coterie of advisors who favoured globalisation.

The criticism assumes significance in the context of Mr

ADVANI:

(Continued from page 1)

Vajpayee's visit to the USA in September. At least it would prevent the government from giving any commitment to the USA on issues that the party had been opposing, a BJP leader said.

The national executive meeting would be remembered for hardliners' attempt to put a check on government's policy of unfettered liberalisation and globalisation. How far they would succeed to influence the policy would be tested later.

Mrs Swaraj shot into the limelight for articulating Swadeshi interests. Her strong plea to the BJP-led coalition to safeguard the country's interests made her speech the third most important feature of the BJP conclave, after the illness of the Prime Minister and Mr Bangaru Laxman taking over as the party president.

The party's economic resolution, prepared by Mr Jagdish Shettigar under the guidance of the Prime Minister's Office, was drastically amended to appease the hardliners. The original draft spoke of the party fully endorsing the economic policy. This paragraph was taken off after strong objections. Even on WTO, FDI and petroleum price hike, the resolution was amended, a BJP leader said.

Even Mr Yashwant Sinha was forced to say that India should be built by Indians and that the government would take the party into confidence if there was a need to change the BJP's longstanding views on sensitive issues.

THE STATESMAN

29 AUG 2000

■ See ADVANI: page 6

Re-inventing the BJP

The Bharatiya Janata Party is quite unlike other political parties. No, we are not referring to the 'party with a difference' tag the organisation earned back in its infancy when it stood apart both for its ideological commitment and the discipline it fostered in its cadres. Today, that tag is in tatters, thanks to coalitional pragmatism and increasing rebellion in party ranks. The BJP is different because it is India's only 'ideas' party; it is a party where ideologues are employed full-time to craft electoral strategies and think up socio-philosophic formulations. The BJP invented the term 'social engineering' to at once get rid of the upper caste image it was burdened with and to widen its base. Social engineering fused together the party's backbone of upper castes with the more socially backward castes, and with spectacular effect, especially in the politically crucial Uttar Pradesh. With the exit of Kalyan Singh, that experiment has lost much of its sheen. Another area of concern for the party has been its anti-minorities image. The BJP's first overtures in this respect were made some years back in Goa at a meeting of its national executive; it has since followed this up with periodic promises made in its party manifesto as well as in other forums. But evidently not with much success, as is apparent from party president Bangaru Laxman's renewed call from Nagpur. Indeed, Mr Laxman admitted that the BJP had made little headway in its effort to reach out to the Muslims. What is behind the BJP's current call? Is it an image building exercise by a party that is now in office, and must therefore demonstrate a social conscience? Is it an electoral strategy? Or is it a genuine attempt at course correction?

It is a mix of all, judging by the imperatives before the party. The BJP is now at the head of a coalition, where no single ideology can prevail. The move is also an electoral compulsion. Today, the BJP has reached a plateau both in terms of the seats won and the votes polled. It needs to expand its base — whether in order to go it alone in future elections or to get into a coalitional arrangement. In UP, which was once its bastion, the party base has shrunk following Kalyan Singh's exit. It must soon put together a viable social base or face an electoral rout. An alliance with the BSP would most certainly give it a winning base, but Mayawati will agree to it only if the BJP publicly adopts a minority-friendly face. However, this is not the only compulsion before the party. Currently, the BJP has a single USP and that is Atal Behari Vajpayee. Without him it is nothing. In other words, the BJP must evolve a long-term vision — for itself and the country — or find itself following the same course as the Congress, the party it is ironically attempting to replace. The Muslims are important not because they are a vote bank, but because they are vital for the idea of India. Ideological extremists like the Swadeshi Jagran Manch must be jettisoned — again because they can have no place in a modern India. If the BJP is to emerge as the Grand New Party, it must do so not by turning into a replica of the Grand Old Party but by re-inventing itself totally.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

30 AUG 2000

Move to resolve contradiction of sharing ideology and taking different stands

RSS, BJP in truce hunt

7.1.80

SUDESH K VERMA

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NAGPUR, Aug. 29.— The BJP and RSS appear to be trying to resolve the contradiction of sharing ideology and convictions, but taking differing stands on issues facing the nation. The fact that most senior BJP leaders, including those in government, were in the RSS and visit the RSS headquarters for guidance and support, has added to the contradiction.

While senior leaders of both organisations are trying to give an impression that the RSS and the BJP are independent and should work together, lower-level cadres are unlikely to accept this summation for long. The "independent-organisations" line won't sell, said an RSS leader.

This contradiction was evident when Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee visited the RSS headquarters along with Mr LK Advani, but did not commit

PASWAN PAT

CUTTACK, Aug. 29.— Mr Ram Vilas Paswan today lauded the BJP's "newfound eagerness to give the party a more liberal face by accord- ing priority to win over the minorities".

What happened in Nagpur shows that the BJP wants, for the first time, to try and reach out to the minority community, he said.

Mr Paswan said this would benefit the BJP and the NDA and nullify the secular card played by the Opposition. He, however, added that the BJP's new approach would reap benefits only if the Sangh Parivar adopted it. — SNS

himself to following the Sangh line on economic or Kashmir policies. "Two intelligent people are bound to have differences," he had told reporters.

Mr Vajpayee reportedly told senior RSS leaders recently

that there were no differences between him and the RSS in "national reconstruction". He had indicated that he respected the RSS but was unable to implement its agenda.

According to the truce formula, the RSS will express its opinion on sensitive national issues irrespective of the government position, and the government will take decisions depending on its assessment of national interests. The RSS spokesman, Mr MG Vaidya, told **The Statesman** that the RSS and the BJP are different organisations and are free to take different stands on a particular issue.

On Kashmir, the RSS wanted the state administration to be handed over to the Army and the Centre not to accept Hizbul Mujahideen's talks offer. But the BJP rejected the proposal. The RSS's role is limited to expressing its opinion, Mr Vaidya said. It would not launch any agitation against the Centre. He said he under-

CONG CRITICISM

NEW DELHI, Aug. 29.— The Congress has criticised the economic resolution passed at BJP's Nagpur conference, saying talk of second-generation economic reforms had only propaganda value.

Foreign investors were hesitant to invest in India after the RSS-backed SJM's attack on multi-nationals and liberalisation, it said.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi criticised yesterday's police firing in Hyderabad. It was unfortunate that the police used brute force to kill people who were protesting a government decision, she said. — SNS

stood the BJP's compulsions of being a part of a coalition government, but said the RSS would not bind itself with these compulsions. The stand is expected to save the RSS from embarrassment if the Centre

takes any unpopular step. The RSS lineage of the BJP leaders in the government, therefore, need not deter them from taking decisions that might be criticised by the RSS leadership — such as the ones on Kashmir and foreign direct investment in various sectors.

This was evident in Mr Vaidya's attempt to draw a distinction between the RSS and its affiliates such as the BJP, Swadeshi Jagran Manch and the VHP. The RSS doesn't control the organisations, he said. "We don't issue directives."

He clarified that the RSS doesn't have "membership" and people who became a part of the RSS need not necessarily be so for good.

Similarly, he said, the RSS is not controlling the VHP or the Swadeshi Jagran Manch. The organisations are free to take a stand and the RSS will decide whether to support it, he said.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 30, 2000

THE BJP'S SEARCH FOR A NEW LINE

THE ADDRESS OF the BJP's new president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, at the national council meet at Nagpur, exhorting his partymen to give up their animosity to the religious minorities and work towards widening the party's social base may sound unusual. Given the long history of the BJP's majoritarian approach to politics (for that matter the very spirit behind the foundation of the Bharathiya Jana Sangh) and the fact that its organisational muscle constitutes those who were drawn into the fold essentially in the course of the campaign dominated by Hindutva slogans, any radical shift in its central theme can hardly be achieved by mere exhortations by its leaders. And in this context, Mr. Laxman's address to his national council members in Nagpur can be of little more than rhetorical significance. After all, the impression that the BJP and the various other outfits of the Sangh Parivar are anti-minority was not the creation of outsiders; their own activities hitherto and the slogans as well as the statements by functionaries (at various levels including those at the top) over a period of time have underlined the revanchist character of the platform. Indeed, the rationale behind advocating a shift at this stage as spelt out by Mr. Laxman clearly shows that it was not a call for a change of heart but rather an exposition of the conditions needed for the party to expand its base.

It may be true, as Mr. Laxman had insisted on pointing out, that incidents of physical attack against members of the Muslim community have ceased to take place after the BJP-led NDA came to power at the Centre. After all, the BJP had agreed to put on hold the Ayodhya issue, the scrapping of Article 370 of the Constitution and a Common Civil Code even earlier when the party found it necessary to gather non-communal forces on its side. But then, the fact that sections within the Sangh Parivar — the VHP and the Bajrang Dal in particular — continued to campaign on these issues apart

from turning their ire on members of the Christian community and institutions run by them since the BJP came to power cannot be glossed over. And in most instances when such attacks took place, the BJP's senior leaders were seen condoning such acts. The remarks by a VHP functionary after nuns in a Madhya Pradesh village were attacked — that it was an expression of patriotism — or the manner in which the brutal killing of Graham Staines and his two sons was seen as an occasion to start a debate on conversions can hardly be seen as an aberration. Instead, one could discern a pattern in all these. And it is in this context that the new line — that the BJP will now strive to shed its animosity towards the Muslim community — will be received with some scepticism.

Be that as it may, the Nagpur meet of the BJP's national council was significant for another reason. And that is the virtual subjugation of the party organisation to the Government at the Centre. Mr. Vajpayee's advice to his partymen that they must desist from making critical remarks about the Government was subtle, the address by Mr. L. K. Advani where he made it clear to the ranks that they must stop behaving like the Opposition is a clear indication that the BJP's leaders would like the party to learn a lesson or two from the Congress(I) on how a ruling party must function. It is a different matter that some of the strident critics of the party's handling of the situation in Jammu and Kashmir or others opposing the Government's economic policy are also those who found themselves excluded from the power structure. But then, the fact that the RSS has made no secret of its opposition to some of the initiatives of the Vajpayee Government on the economic policy front is something that the BJP leaders cannot wish away. And it is in this sense that the economic policy resolution adopted at the Nagpur meet — in tune with the Chennai declaration — assumes significance.

12-11-2000

30 AUG 2000

BJP bid to resolve UP crisis, adopts package formula

Kalyani Shanker
New Delhi, July 5

castes which form the backbone of the BJP has to be retained. "What we have, we hold. There is no doubt that the forward castes are with us and we do not want to lose them. Also we can survive only when we have our base," confirmed a senior BJP leader.

With this in view, the leadership may favour candidates from the forward caste for both the Chief Minister and the State BJP President. The names of Rajnath Singh, who comes from Rajputs for the Chief-Ministership and Kalraj Mishra (Brahmin) for the party chief's posts are being tipped. In fact on June 11, when the Prime Minister had summoned the UP leaders for a meeting, the change

THE BJP leadership has decided to adopt a package approach to resolve the Uttar Pradesh crisis. The package idea is part of the BJP's efforts to put its house in order and also give a shock treatment to its members.

Faced with a sagging image of the party and an approaching Assembly elections, the leadership has favoured that it is better to go for a package formula than any ad hoc measure. In that way many persons in the party can be accommodated and many groups can be humoured.

There will be positions to offer both at the State-level and at the national level as the party is about to complete its organisational elections. Effecting a chain change will not be a problem.

The basic thrust behind the strategy is that at all costs the forward

defer the decision until the panchayat polls were over.

Meanwhile the BJP general secretary Govindacharya is said to have given a report that the situation was becoming from bad to worse and the leadership should either strengthen Ram Prakash Gupta or

change him. The problem for Gupta is he has not been given a free hand and he is carrying on a coalition government with the same ministers who were in the Kalyan Singh cabinet. "It is possible to strengthen him but there is an element of risk," admitted a BJP leader.

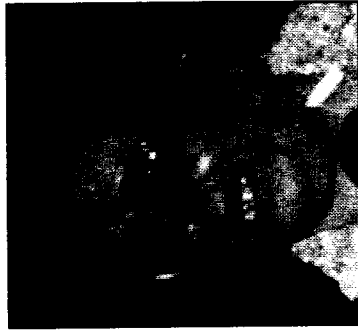
Coincidentally, by the third week of this month, the elections for the

state BJP president are likely to be held.

"When the elections for the national party president is due next month, it is not good to change the current State BJP chief," a senior BJP leader pointed out.

The Prime Minister is said to be quite unhappy at the recent panchayat elections in which the party has not done well. And just before that there had been a series of setbacks right from the Lok Sabha elections to the subsequent Rajya Sabha elections, council elections and by elections giving a jolt to the BJP leadership. Apart from this, the state unit is also suffering from groupism.

The BJP also has to counter the Kalyan Singh effect. After he was thrown out by the party, the backward classes may feel alienated and the BJP has to assuage the feelings. At the same time, it is not interested in projecting just any backward for the sake of it.



was more or less expected to be announced and Mr Ram Prakash Gupta was also resigned to his fate. A clear hint was given to him by the party President Kushi Bhai Thakre. However, the decision could not be implemented as the other leaders combined against Rajnath Singh and opposed his candidature for the Chief Ministership. It was decided to

Protect the small investor: Vajpayee

By Oommen A. Ninan

MUMBAI, JULY 9. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, today called for spreading the equity culture among more and more sections of society and in newer regions of the country.

"Stock markets cannot be a closed club of a small group of participants. There is no reason why stock exchanges should not launch a massive education campaign to attract even wealthy villagers to invest their savings in the equity market, rather than in unproductive assets such as gold," Mr. Vajpayee said addressing a gathering on the occasion of 125th anniversary of the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) here.

This is the first time that a Prime Minister is visiting any stock exchange in the country.

"As the BSE grows bigger, it should also carry the small investor with it," the Prime Minister said. Small investors were always at a disadvantage because of lack of knowledge and inadequate access to trading opportunities. Said Mr. Vajpayee, "As we all know, investor confidence was particularly dented by the scandals that broke out in the wake of the first wave of liberalisation in the early 90s. They slowed the process of liberalisation, besides weakening the evolution of a national consensus over economic reforms."

The Prime Minister urged all the market participants to ensure that the mistakes of the past are not repeated. "What this sobering experience points to are three basic imperatives," Mr. Vajpayee pointed out. They were better investor education, more effective regulation, and the need for all participants in the market to develop a long-term perspective, rather than an instinct for quick, short-term gains. "Let nobody forget that investment is, primarily, an act of faith. The faith of genuine investors, especially of small investors, must not be allowed to be shaken by unscrupulous operators who often cause artificial volatility in the market. If rigging of elections and cricket



The Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, lights a lamp to mark the 125th anniversary of the Bombay Stock Exchange. He is flanked by the BSE president, Mr. Anand Rathi, (right) and Ms. Dina Mehta, vice-president. The Maharashtra Governor, Dr. P. C. Alexander, is behind Mr. Vajpayee.

— Photo: Vivek Bendre.

matches is bad, rigging of the stockmarkets is equally bad," he added.

Commenting on the recent movement in indices, Mr. Vajpayee said "I sometimes wonder: Should the sensitive index of our stock exchanges dance mainly to the tune coming from distant bourses? I also think that the capital markets should adopt a more balanced approach towards the so-called New Economy and our traditional economy. Let us not forget that India has built huge strengths in manufacturing, core industries, financial and other services, and also agriculture. We cannot afford to see these strengths grossly undervalued."

Faster economic growth requires a far higher level of resource mobilisation as investments into all the productive sectors of the economy. This is where our stock exchanges have a critical role to play. The Prime Minister concluded, "I see

you as the torchbearers of faster economic growth."

Pension funds

The Union Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Shina, said insurance and pension funds would enter the stock markets soon which would give more depth to equity market. The Finance Minister said that India was recognised as one of the fastest growing economies with the current growth rate of 6.8 and 6.4 per cent during the last two years. If India had to grow at a rate of 8-10 per cent, resources needed to be mobilised to achieve this growth.

Leaves for Delhi

PTI reports

The Prime Minister left for Delhi tonight on a special Indian Air Force aircraft at 11.15 p.m. Originally scheduled to leave at 8.30 p.m., he was delayed after his special IAF Boeing 737 was grounded due to a technical snag.

Call to the press: Page 15

THE HINDU

10 JUL 2000

BJP softens stand on NC demand

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JULY 12. The Bharatiya Janata Party has softened its stand on the National Conference and its demand for a discussion on autonomy for Jammu and Kashmir as if on cue from the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee.

No sooner had Mr. Vajpayee invited the Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, for talks here, the party spokesperson, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, decided to describe Dr. Abdullah as a "great patriot" although a few days earlier a senior party leader, Mr. J. P. Mathur, had said he represented "Muslim fundamentalism."

The party's tone on the autonomy resolution passed by the State Assembly had been much harsher than that of the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister from day one. However, after the RSS passed a strong resolution supporting abrogation of Article 370 of the Constitution, dismissal of the Farooq Abdullah Government, and the National Democratic Alliance breaking ties with the NC, the Vajpayee Cabinet "rejected" the autonomy resolution, as demanded by the RSS and the BJP.

But after the Prime Minister's indication yesterday that he had invited Dr. Abdullah for talks, the BJP's tone has noticeably

changed. Although yesterday the BJP general secretary, Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, had rejected the proposal of the Law Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, and stated that the "Cabinet decision rejecting the autonomy demand was final," today the party vice-president, Mr. J. P. Mathur, said that in his view the talks could yield results in the very areas suggested by Mr. Jethmalani.

The party's stand remains that there should be "no going back" from the present situation. But it seems the Government has left the door open for "devolution of more powers" which could be in the form of more subjects to be transferred from the concurrent

or union list to the State list. Some articles of the Constitution could also be "adapted" for Jammu and Kashmir through a presidential fiat, some senior party leaders indicated. Yet another view was that nothing would come out of the dialogue with the NC, but it would have served a useful purpose by preventing an immediate decision by the NC to walk out of the NDA. Party leaders denied that the Government had given into pressure created by the National Conference by its threat to walk out of the NDA.

But it is admitted that neither the BJP nor the Government would have liked to see the start of the unravelling of the NDA.

THE HINDU

30.7.1996

Sikdar wins, Ghosh new State BJP chief

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, July 30

ASHIM GHOSH was elected BJP State president for the next three years here today. He defeated Sukumar Banerjee by a margin of 35 votes.

Ghosh got 163 votes and Banerjee bagged 128. Never before has the election to the party president's post been so tense in the State. And till the last moment, rival camp supporters were involved in hectic lobbying with State Council members.

"We have now set a precedent in the BJP. The president has always been a consensus candidate. But the rivalry between leaders forced the elections. What's most unfortunate, money played a big role in the poll. I have information that Sukumar Banerjee's lieutenants offered money to State Council members to vote for him," said Tapan Sikdar, who was backing Ghosh.

"In fact, the Banerjee camp broke the code of conduct and tried every trick in the book to win the election. It is because of their adamant stand that elections to the president's post were held for the first time in 20 years," Sikdar, Minister of State for Telecommunications, said.

Had Sikdar not thrown his weight behind Ghosh, his victory would have been almost impossible. In fact, Ghosh's win proved Sikdar's control over the State unit.

After the result was declared at the SVS Vidyalaya, where the election was held, supporters broke into a dance and picked Sikdar up on their shoulders. "This is not a victory for me, but for BJP workers and

Sikdar," said Ghosh. BJP general secretary KN Govindacharya and State party observer Bansilal Sonjee oversaw the election. "Democracy has won the day. Except for some council members, who were absent, everybody turned up and voted peacefully," Sonjee said.

After his defeat Banerjee said he was averse to contesting, but was fielded by party State general secretaries Rahul Sinha and Paras Datta. It has been alleged that upset with Sikdar, the Trinamool wanted the Datta-Sinha camp to control the BJP, so that they could fall in line with the Trinamool's line of action.

"We have information that the Trinamool wanted Banerjee to win so that the BJP would remain their slave in the State. We respect the Trinamool as the major alliance partner. But we expect to be treated as equals," said State Executive Committee member Arun Gupta.

Sikdar alleged that some senior leaders, to serve their own interests, used Banerjee. It is unfortunate that a leader like Banerjee could not pick his lieutenants properly. "This infighting must stop. The party will take action against senior leaders who flouted party discipline. We will continue to have an alliance with the Trinamool," said Sikdar.

Ghosh will select his office-bearers early next month. Leaders said that some of the rival camp members are willing to apologise for their conduct to get berths in the new president's executive committee. But it is doubtful whether Sikdar and Ghosh would accommodate them.



Ashim Ghosh (right) greets his supporters after being elected the State BJP president in the city on Sunday. Photo: Pabitra Das

UP BJP leaders arrive in Delhi to meet PM

SHARAD GUPTA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 11

96-1
12/6

IN a sudden development late on Saturday night, the entire Uttar Pradesh BJP brass, including Chief Minister Ram Prakash Gupta, arrived here amidst speculation that a change of guard in the state was imminent.

Gupta, accompanied by state PWD minister Kalraj Mishra and urban affairs minister Lalji Tandon, arrived here at 10.30 pm. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Minister for Home Affairs L K Advani and BJP chief Kushabhau Thakre will meet Gupta, Mishra and Tandon, besides Union Minister for Surface Transport Rajnath Singh first separately and then together after 9 am tomorrow. Rajnath has emerged as the frontrunner in the race to succeed Gupta.

The state BJP leaders had held a meeting at the state party headquarters in Lucknow on Saturday afternoon, ostensibly to discuss the party's preparedness for the ongoing panchayat polls.

Party general secretary in-charge of UP K N Govindacharya too had a couple of meetings with UP leaders in Luc-

know yesterday. Govindacharya also called on Thakre this evening, apparently to discuss the change of guard in the state.

The party had initially planned to replace the Chief Minister only in July after both panchayat polls and organisational elections of the BJP in the state were over. But Gupta's inability to conduct the panchayat polls peacefully seems to have been his undoing.

BJP workers have clashed with those of its allies, the Loktantrik Congress and the Jantantrik BSP, in a number of districts.

The situation reached a flashpoint in Hardoi where state power minister Naresh Agarwal is alleged to have got the official BJP candidate "abducted" to facilitate unopposed election of his younger brother, Mukesh, for the post of zilla panchayat member.

Bowing to the BJP cadre's demand, Gupta yesterday ordered a CID inquiry into the Hardoi incident, leaving Agarwal fuming. The infuriated power minister yesterday threatened to sever his ties with the BJP and align with either the BSP or the SP for next year's assembly elections.

INDIAN EXPRESS

12 JUN 2000

BJP opposes package

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 19. The Bharatiya Janata Party is unmistakably opposed to any autonomy package for Jammu and Kashmir that would take the State back to the pre-1953 status. It will oppose any attempt by the State Government to adopt through its Assembly the recommendations of the State Autonomy Committee report.

"The mistakes made by Nehru cannot be allowed to be repeated," the party vice-president, Mr. J. P. Mathur, said today. The BJP would prefer to see more articles of the Constitution made directly applicable to the State and the cutting down of areas which give Kashmir a special status.

The party made its stand clear even as the special session of the State Assembly in Srinagar began to deliberate on the Autonomy Committee's report.

"We will not allow any situation that will take Kashmir back by decades," Mr. Mathur emphasised and more than hinted that

the party would oppose any attempt to adopt the Autonomy Committee's recommendations "both inside and outside the Assembly." The BJP was still committed to scrapping Article 370 of the Constitution which gives Kashmir a special status. But, the concession it is prepared to make is that it will not allow this view to become an obstacle in the path of attempts to find a political solution to the problem.

The party is aware that at an informal level "some talks" are going on with the Hurriyat leaders. "If anyone has grievances, the Government should be ready to talk. What is the harm in talking to our own people who are citizens of this country," the party leader said, but added that "no person who is not an Indian" should be allowed to participate in the discussions. The BJP was also opposed to a trifurcation of the State along communal lines into Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh, as demanded by some.

Hurriyat ready for talks: Page 13

20 JUN 2000

Advani's J&K autonomy remark puts BJP in a fix

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 23. — The Union home minister's statement in London that the Centre was not against granting autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir has put the BJP in a fix.

The BJP today sought to redefine the concept of autonomy to accommodate Mr LK Advani's views and tell partymen that it hadn't diluted its stand.

Mr Advani's statement has created confusion among BJP members, who have always equated autonomy with a demand to restore the pre-1953 position, when even the Supreme Court didn't have jurisdiction over the state.

The party rejected the autonomy demand raised by some National Conference members in the J&K legislative assembly. But it supported the

FAROOQ 'WARNED'

NEW DELHI, June 23. — BJP leaders today said the Prime Minister had hinted during his talks with the J&K chief minister that he couldn't continue raising the autonomy demand and remain an NDA partner. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Dr Farooq Abdullah met yesterday to discuss the fallout of the autonomy debate in the J&K Assembly.

Mr Vajpayee reportedly told Dr Abdullah that he should ensure that the Assembly didn't vote on the autonomy resolution. Dr Abdullah in turn argued that he should be considered the representative of the state's opinion. — SNS

demand for greater devolution of power by the Centre.

The party took exception to a reported remark of an NC MLA that the Indian Army and BSF were responsible for militancy in the state. If the MLA had said so Dr Farooq Abdullah should pull him up, the BJP spokesperson, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, said.

He said the party was opposed to autonomy if it meant restoration of the pre-1953 position. "Never, never, this, he asserted. The party, however, would welcome a discussion if autonomy meant a greater devolution of power, Mr Naidu said. The BJP and the NDA government are committed to greater devolution and decentralisation of power. The party believes in a strong centre and strong states.

Advani's J&K autonomy remark puts BJP in a fix

"We've travelled a long way since 1953," he said. Nothing prevented the elected legislators to focus on development, health care, infrastructure, roads, communications, information technology, agriculture and allied activities. Some of these items were already there in the state's list, he said.

What Mr Advani meant by autonomy was that the state should get more powers to improve these, Mr Naidu said. The BJP favoured a discussion on the issue within the constitutional framework, he said.

On the NC contention that its manifesto was committed to autonomy, Mr Naidu said that even the BJP's manifesto talked of abrogating Article 370. The BJP and NC accepted the Centre's national agenda for governance that talked of neither autonomy nor Article 370, he said.

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

JAMMU, June 23. — The special session of J&K legislative Assembly on the autonomy issue has been extended by a day. The Speaker, Mr Abdul Ahad Vakil, said members will meet again on Monday to speak on the motion.

The legislative council session has also been extended by two days, its chairman, Mr Abdul Rashid Dar, said.

The motion seeks to discuss the state autonomy committee report in the light of the state Cabinet decisions of 19 January and 15 March. It now seeks the approval of the House.

German team in Srinagar

Germany may now have a better understanding of the impact of cross-border terrorism after its security officials' team visited Jammu and Kashmir, SNS reports from New Delhi. The visit was necessitated because of speculation that Indian militants might be using Germany as a safe haven. Indian intelligence agencies say Germany reportedly has quite a few members of groups active in J&K and the North-east.

An all-party meeting will be convened in Srinagar to discuss the recommendations of the State Autonomy Committee.

THE STATESMAN

24 JUN 2000

Autonomy tops RSS meet agenda

FROM BASANT RAWAT

Ahmedabad, June 29: The autonomy resolution passed by the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly is likely to dominate the annual RSS meet beginning here on July 1.

Initially, the two-day meet was to discuss contentious issues like conversion and internal security. However, the autonomy issue assumed top priority after the Farooq Abdullah government adopted the resolution.

The move is significant in view of the fact that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, one of the Sangh parivar constituents, has called for the dismissal of the National Conference government.

However, BJP president Kushabhau Thakre had yesterday ruled out the dismissal of the Abdullah government.

The RSS meet will also discuss the economic policies of the Vajpayee government which have drawn flak from Swadeshi Jagran Manch, another Sangh group.

The conclave at Koba village, near Gandhinagar, is expected to be attended by around 230 *prant pracharaks* and *kshetriya pracharaks*.

RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan, Thakre, VHP leader Ashok Singhal and VHP international vice-president Pravin Togadia will be present.

Former RSS chief Rajendra Singh and veteran leader N. Deshmukh would not attend because of health reasons.

NC meet to pick team

The National Conference working committee will meet tomorrow to

select a ministerial team to interact with central and state governments and political parties on the autonomy issue, PTI quoted sources as saying in Srinagar.

The meeting, convened by party president Farooq Abdullah, will also discuss the situation consequent to the adoption of the resolution.

Union heavy industries minister and Shiv Sena leader Manohar Joshi has demanded the immediate dismissal of the Farooq Abdullah ministry.

"The way Abdullah's National Conference government has raised the issue of autonomy for the state is objectionable. Therefore, I demand that it be dismissed," Joshi told reporters.

Abdullah was also criticised by Shiv Sena youth leader Uddhav Thackeray.

He expressed concern over the autonomy resolution and appealed to all parties to oppose the demand.

The Sena leader also demanded suspension of the Jammu and Kashmir government. He said Sena ministers in the Union government and its members in Parliament would take their demand to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee after his return from abroad.

The autonomy resolution will also be condemned by the Maharashtra Congress at a rally on July 1.

State party chief Govindrao Adik today said: "The passing of the resolution poses a serious threat to the national and religious unity of the country. This is a very serious situation."

THE TELEGRAPH

30 JUN 2000

PM talks to Khurana, crisis blows over

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 1. The Madan Lal Khurana crisis in the Bharatiya Janata Party has blown over. The party, which removed him from the post of vice-president on Friday evening, has now decided not to take any further action after he publicly declared today that he would not raise in the Lok Sabha the three economic issues he has been talking about.

At a meeting of over an hour between the Prime Minister and the former Delhi Chief Minister last evening, Mr Khurana was persuaded not to give notice for a discussion in the Lok Sabha on the cuts in subsidies of food and fertilizers, the Sankhya Vahini project and the lifting of quantitative restrictions on the import of 1,429 items from the United States.

Apparently, it was Mr. Arun Jaitley, Minister for Information and Broadcasting, who played the good Samaritan. The Prime Minister called Mr.

Khurana for a discussion and the crisis blew over. A beaming Mr. Khurana today told reporters that from the very first day all that he had been asking for was a discussion within the party, and "yesterday, the Prime Minister assured me that the three issues raised by me would be discussed in the party." He then agreed to drop his plan to raise them in the Lok Sabha on the Prime Minister's advice.

Senior party leaders today ruled out the possibility of Mr. Kushabhau Thakre, party president, taking back the order removing Mr. Khurana as party vice-president. The reason was that organisational elections are on and a party president is to be elected by early June whose prerogative it will be to appoint a new team of central office-bearers.

At the same time no further action was being contemplated as the "matter has been resolved". It was only a storm in a tea-cup, a senior party functionary commented, while "welcoming" Mr. Khurana's announcement that as a "disciplined soldier of the party" he had decided to heed the advice of the Prime Minister. Tomorrow, the BJP parliamentary party will be chaired by the Prime Minister, as is the practice, and Mr. Khurana may be given an opportunity to raise the matter. The party had no explanation for the Government's anxiety to prevent a

debate in Parliament on decisions that parliamentary standing committees have criticised severely even though such a debate carried no risk as it would have been discussed under a rule where there is no voting.

The committee headed by Mr. Devendra Prasad Yadav on Food and Civil Supplies and the one headed by Mr. Somnath Chatterjee on Communications have both used strong language against cuts in subsidies and the green signal for the Sankhya Vahini project. All BJP MPs serving on these committees signed the reports.

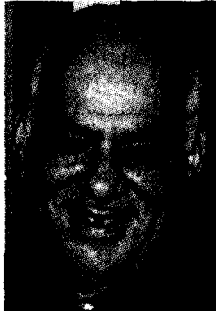
The party tried to draw a distinction between party MPs serving on parliamentary committees criticising the government, and those such as Mr. Khurana giving vent to their personal views and apprehensions about government decisions. The party has also not been able to come up with an answer on why it was silent when a Cabinet Minister allowed his official bungalow to be used as the publisher's

address for a booklet which has virtually described the Sankhya Vahini project as a security risk and a sell-out to the Americans. UNI reports: The party's senior vice-president, Mr. K. Jana Krishnamurthy, has welcomed Mr. Khurana's decision not to raise contentious issues in the Lok Sabha. Asked to comment on the former Delhi Chief Minister's decision, Mr. Krishnamurthy said, "all is well that ends well".

PM indicates considering rollback of prices

NEW DELHI, MAY 1. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today indicated that his Government might consider the allies' demand for a rollback of the prices of foodgrains sold through the Public Distribution System. Mr. Vajpayee told presspersons here that he did not think the demand for a rollback was justified but at the same time clarified that "a final decision on the issue is yet to be taken."

His Government had declared that "given the economic situation of the country, the Government has to take certain hard decisions which will not be popular." — PTI



Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Khurana...
arrive at a truce.

THE HINDU

- 2 MAY 2000

CONG.(I) INCOHERENT ON N-ISSUE: PM

Keep issues within party, BJP MPs told

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 2. With the Khurana episode still fresh in everyone's mind, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, used the occasion of the BJP's parliamentary party today to remind the party MPs that while the Government believed in "transparency" and was "ready to discuss any issue" they must not rush to the press or take up in public matters for which the right forum was the party.

The episode is being treated as a "closed chapter" by the party, but, strangely, Mr. Madan Lal Khurana, who was to have been given an opportunity to discuss the three economic issues he had raised, did not attend today's meeting. A direct outcome of the Khurana drama is that a 30-page document entitled, "Sankhya Vahini, Data Network for the Nation", was circulated among the party MPs in defence of the project that has come under sharp criticism from the bigwigs of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. This was also one of the issues raised by Mr. Khurana. The document has apparently been prepared at the instance of the Prime Minister's Office and is an effort towards meeting criticism, but in the process it has also raised new issues. Mr. Vajpayee lashed out at the Congress(I) for its "incoherence" on the nuclear deterrent issue, a theme he had dwelt with last week while responding to the debate on the motion of thanks to the President's address to the joint sitting of Parliament.

The two teams sent by the par-



The Prime Minister, A. B. Vajpayee, and the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, at the BJP Parliamentary Party meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday. — Photo: V. Sudershan.

ty, one to Rajasthan and the other to Gujarat, came back to predictably report that in Rajasthan the State Government had enough funds at its disposal but had not done enough to relieve hardships faced by the people on account of the drought, while in Gujarat the State Government was doing a "good job".

The party has also scheduled a meeting of the Central Election Committee at the Prime Minister's residence on May 5 to select candidates for two Lok Sabha seats — Aska in Orissa vacated by Mr. Naveen Patnaik of the BJD when he became Chief Minister and Panskara in West Bengal.

Cong. look at n-policy: Page 13

THE HINDU

- 3 MAY 2000

Basu at ex-PMs' club: Roadblocks ahead

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 16

EVEN BEFORE it could take off, the idea of a new third front appears to have hit a roadblock. When the four former Prime Ministers and West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti Basu got together at Banga Bhavan this morning, the prime objective, it seemed, was to discuss the possibility of forming a third front against the Congress and the BJP.

Midway through the discussion, the objective got diffused with suggestions being made that there should be a more broad-based formation that could include elements from the Congress to combat communalism and defend secularism.

The fact that several of the erstwhile constituents of the third front remain part of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) made the task of forging such a front anew a trifle difficult task. Until it materialised, it made

more sense to try and bring the secular-minded people and forces together on some sort of platform.

While Mr H D Deve Gowda slipped away without meeting reporters after the conclave, Mr Chandrashekhar said the meeting discussed the present political situation and the possibility of forging a third front.

Mr V P Singh refused to give anything away, merely maintaining that their main agenda was to meet West Bengal Chief Minister Jyoti

Basu. Mr Inder Kumar Gujral, who reportedly called for a broad-based platform, however, told newsmen

that the meeting only discussed "the national situation as it stands today".

It was left to Mr Basu to outline the nature of the discussion. Although they had gathered with the intention of trying to build a third front against the Congress and the BJP, Mr Basu admitted that "nothing has been decided".

Picture on Page 12

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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LOYAL SOLDIER

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Khurana apologises again P.P. 9 8 79

MADAN Lal Khurana, the former chief minister of Delhi, recently sacked as BJP vice-president, must be one of the most "disciplined soldier" of his party if his repeated protestations are to be believed. A voluble, impulsive opportunist, Khurana makes a habit of putting both his feet into his mouth at regular intervals and apologise profusely, insisting that he is a loyal member of the party. This is the third time he has shot off his mouth and then had to eat his words, losing a significant post in the bargain. When his name figured in the *hawala* list, he criticised the party for asking him to step down from the chief ministership of Delhi. Finding himself abandoned he returned to the party claiming to remain a "disciplined soldier". However the fracas he had created in stepping down ensured that when his name was cleared he was not reinstated. During the last assembly elections Khurana revolted against the RSS suddenly discovering his concern over the attacks on Christians and resigned from the Union ministry. Instead of approbation which he was misguided enough to expect, the party accepted his resignation and suspended him for anti-party activity — clearly the BJP condoned the attacks even if they did not instigate them as they claim. Again Khurana had to eat crow, which he promptly did, saying he was misquoted and would remain loyal to the Sangh.

In an attempt to grab the headlines, Khurana did it again, he went swadeshi hoping to get the support of the Sangh and criticised the Government's economic policies. But for the third consecutive time he was firmly put in his place, losing his party post in the bargain. The RSS did not come to his rescue, he had displeased them earlier when he spoke for the Prime Minister against the Sangh. Khurana is out on a limb, narrowly escaping expulsion. With nowhere to go and not wishing to become another Kalyan Singh or Vaghela he has dropped his charges, apologised on the advice of the PM, and reaffirmed his "loyalty" to the BJP. But the party is not in a forgiving mood. Now that he has nothing to lose, he might hold his tongue!

THE STATESMAN

5 MAY 2000

NDA steps up campaign to oust Rabri

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 5

THE NATIONAL Democratic Alliance (NDA) members today intensified their campaign for the resignation of Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi while emphasising that a person on bail had no moral or ethical right to continue in a Constitutional office.

Expressing shock at Rabri Devi's continuance as Chief Minister, Samata Party president Jaya Jaitly said if the Constitution did not bar such persons from occupying public offices, then there was a definite need to make suitable changes in it for the purpose.

The framers of the Constitution could never have imagined that such a situation would ever arise in the country when a person granted bail in a corruption case would run the administration of a State, she said.

The shocking state of affairs, where the previous Chief Minister was in jail and the current one was out on bail, was shameful not only for Bihar but the entire country, she said while stressing that such degradation of political values could not be allowed.

Criticising the Congress for employing double standards, she recalled that the party while extending support to the Rabri Government recently had resolved in the common minimum programme to fight corruption in the State. The Congress must now declare its stand on the issue and explain why it was continuing to support the govern-

ment led by a person facing charges of moral turpitude, Mrs Jaitly stated.

Referring to today's developments in Bihar, Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) general secretary M Venkaiah Naidu stated that granting of bail did not amount to acquittal and, therefore, could not be used as an excuse for not resigning.

Conceding that there was no express provision in the Constitution that a chargesheeted person must step down from a public office, he nevertheless pointed out that the dictates of convention must be followed in this regard. A precedent had already been set by her husband Laloo Yadav who gave up the office before her, Mr Naidu said.

Referring to RJD president Laloo Yadav's comparison of the case with that of Union Ministers L K Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, who have chargesheets pending against them in the Babari Masjid demolition case, the BJP leader said the two situations were vastly different.

There was a difference between a case involving moral turpitude and that regarding

a political agitation, he emphasised. In this connection, he cited the instance of freedom fighters of the Congress party who were chargesheeted in 1947 and other leaders who were chargesheeted for participating in political agitations during 1977. Many such

people were subsequently inducted into the government as Ministers, it was pointed out by Mr Naidu.

He also denied the allegation of political vendetta raised by Laloo Yadav against the NDA government. While observing that the fodder scam case had not been initiated by the current government, Mr Naidu pointed out that the investigations had been started by the erstwhile United Front Government which had RJD members as ministers.

Demand for Advani, Joshi's resignation: The CPI-M today made it clear that chargesheeted Union Ministers L K Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi must first quit if the norm that those holding public office should step down if chargesheeted is to be observed and applied equally to all.

Pointing out that the principle has been

violated and continues to be defied by the BJP leadership and the Vajpayee government, the CPI-M polituro recalled that both Mr Advani and Mr Vajpayee were chargesheeted by the CBI in a special court in Lucknow for their involvement in the demolition of the Babri Masjid. "This is a criminal case which is now before the court," it said, while reacting to the chargesheet filed against Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi and RJD chief Laloo Prasad Yadav.

According to the party, the circumstances in which the case has been filed against the Chief Minister, implicating her along with Laloo Yadav, makes the move "highly suspect and motivated".

It maintained that since the Bihar Assembly elections, the BJP-led alliance and the Vajpayee Government has been making all efforts to ensure that the RJD-led alliance does not form the government in Bihar. Despite the clear verdict given by the people, the Governor "shamelessly" called the NDA to form the government after swearing in Nitish Kumar as the Chief Minister.

When this manoeuvre failed, during the one week tenure of Nitish Kumar, the Governor gave sanction for the prosecution of Mr Laloo Yadav and Rabri Devi in the disproportionate assets case.

After the Rabri Devi established its majority, the latest step to destabilise the government has been taken with the CBI filing a chargesheet against the Chief Minister in the court, the politburo said.

Charges framed in another case

THE DESIGNATED CBI Court of Mr S K Lal on Wednesday framed charges against RJD president Laloo Prasad Yadav, former Chief Minister Jagannath Mishra and 49 other accused in regular case No-20 (A) 96, a conspiracy angle case of the multi-crore fodder scam. Other politicians against whom charges were framed included former Union Minister Chandradeo Prasad Verma, Former Animal Husbandry Minister Vidya Sagar Nishad, legislators Dr R K Rana, Jagdish Sharma and Ex-MLA, Dhruv Bhagat.

HTC, Patna

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 6 APR 2000

Former four take stock of grand alliance

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FROM KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, April 7: For the four unemployed former Prime Ministers, the churning in the Congress has come as a blessing.

The ex-premiers — Chandra Shekhar, V.P. Singh, H.D. Deve Gowda and I.K. Gujral — who recently joined hands to relaunch themselves by reviving the third front, are meeting here shortly to take stock of the situation arising from the proposed anti-Left Congress-Trinamul tie-up in West Bengal.

Sources close to V.P. Singh said that any truck between the Congress and the Trinamul would erode the credibility of the parent party, especially in the eyes of the minorities.

Rather, the Congress' indirect alliance with the NDA would give the aspiring quartet the opportunity to court the minorities and secular forces, though not if Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee pulled out of the saffron camp. In that case, they would have nothing to rejoice about.

Barring the Left, the Congress was the only centrist party with a track record of fighting the BJP. Even the Janata Dal (United) compromised its secular principles to ally with it.

Sources close to the four said they are avidly following the developments. Though Gowda and Gujral refused to comment, a source close to Singh said if the Congress aligned with the Trina-

mul before the latter severed ties with the NDA, the third front would benefit. Since a vast section of the electorate is opposed to both the BJP and the Congress, there is tremendous scope for the revival of the third front, he said.

But even as the ex-Prime Ministers are keeping their fingers crossed, the CPM is in a dilemma. The Marxists are irked with the Congress for talking about a "grand alliance" with the Trinamul. But at the same time, they do not want the Congress to weaken as a national party.

According to them — with most regional parties who swore by secularism coopted into the NDA — only the Congress could take on the BJP.

The ex-Prime Ministers are therefore not wasting any time. They are going ahead with their mission earnestly.

On Sunday, Gowda and V.P. Singh are scheduled to address a rally in Ghaziabad to highlight the Centre's "anti-people" policies. They have also planned a series of meetings to rouse the dormant third front forces.

V.P. Singh yesterday addressed the sixth all India conference of the Democratic Youth Federation of India (DYFI), the youth wing of the CPM, at Thiruvananthapuram, and predicted that the Congress would suffer all over the country if it forged an alliance against the Left in West Bengal.



Singh: Back in business

Advani asks Congress to join 'mahajot'

9.8.1874
INDORE, APRIL 12. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, today made an open call to the Congress(I) to join the 'grand alliance' ('mahajot') to defeat the CPI(M)-led coalition in the West Bengal Assembly elections next year.

"We have decided that if the Congress joins the maha alliance, then with it and if does not, then without it, we will defeat the CPI(M)-led alliance," Mr. Advani told reporters here.

(But elsewhere, the call was rejected by senior Congress(I) leader and the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Digvijay Singh.)

Maintaining that the Assembly elections next year was the opportune time for removing the marxists from power, he said the Congress(I) "is in a fix and unable to take a decision" on the Trinamool Congress invitation to join the 'grand alliance.'

The Home Minister said that though a section of

the Congress(I) in West Bengal had been opposing the move because of the BJP's presence in the alliance, it was in the party's interest to join it. "Or else, it will suffer in West Bengal".

Mr. Advani criticised the Congress for 'not playing a constructive role of a responsible opposition'.

"The party, which had opposed the Laloo-Rabri duo throughout the elections in Bihar, has taken a 'U-turn' and supported it in forming the government." Though the NDA Government had completed two years, the Congress(I) had played a 'negative role' on major issues such as Pokhran and Kargil.

Mamata rules out merger

PTI reports from Calcutta:

The Trinamool Congress chairperson, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, today ruled out the possibility of merger with the Congress(I).

THE HINDU

13 APR 2001

RSS irked over shelving of temple, Article 370 issues

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The growing indiscipline within the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the shelving of core issues like the Ayodhya temple and scrapping of Article 370 have started worrying the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The Sangh's unhappiness on this score is abundantly reflected in the latest issue of its mouthpiece *Panchajanya*.



Kushabhau

Devoted to the 20th anniversary of the founding of the BJP, the journal in Hindi has lauded the party's growth over the past two decades, but it has also taken a critical look at its policies and performance. The journal has not only deprecated indiscipline in an article but questioned party president Kushabhau Thakre on it in an interview.

"Indiscipline in the organisation is growing day by day, like the cross-voting in Uttar Pradesh recently. What would you say about it?" the journal asked Mr Thakre. In another question, it asked Mr Thakre, "What steps is your organisation taking to end this kind of indiscipline?"

Mr Thakre admitted cross-voting in U.P. was an issue of concern for the BJP, but said it has become necessary to seriously consider "the kind of challenges we have to face in U.P." On indiscipline, Mr Thakre said he did not think disciplinary action alone would be the answer. The challenge before the party, he said, was larger. "Those who have come to the BJP, are in a way from a society that is before us. That society is polluted, and it is in that soci-

ety that we have to work, entrench ourselves."

If Mr Thakre evaded a direct answer by talking about "larger challenges" in U.P., *Panchajanya* brought up Ayodhya and Article 370 — which, it said, the BJP had left out when forming the National Democratic Alliance government — and forthrightly asked, "Have you put them in cold-storage, or will you raise them again?"

Mr Thakre said that if the BJP put these core issues aside, other allies too, did the same. Indeed, some points from the BJP agenda, like making India a nuclear power, or creating separate states of Vananchal and Uttaranchal, were accepted by other allies. "So, will you raise those issues again?" persisted *Panchajanya*. "In my view, instead of worrying about tomorrow's meal, we should be thinking about today's dinner," responded Mr Thakre.

In its article, *Panchajanya* was sparing. If the BJP's growth over the past two decades was "immense", it said, its loss of idealism and ideology needed to be addressed. It refuted arguments of "difficulties, limits and aberrations of the present political set-up" and wondered whether whatever possible within the present set-up is being done. "Uttar Pradesh holds the mirror."

It slammed the BJP for factionalism and acrimony, and said the party had obviously failed to ensure that "idealism and responsible behaviour" percolated down to the lowest rung. It was particularly harsh on those in the BJP "aspiring to become an MP without having done organisational work", those MPs aspiring to become ministers and those ministers who hankered after "powerful and fruitful portfolios".

THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 APR 2000

Mahajot is a grand idea, says Fernandes

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, April 14

DEFENCE MINISTER George Fernandes said here today that the *Mahajot* was a grand idea and the way the political scene was shaping up in Bengal, the State Congress would disintegrate very soon.

"Mamata Banerjee is doing a good job. The *Mahajot* can bring about a total change in this State. I am willing to help her. I wish her success in her venture," Fernandes told *The Hindustan Times*.

He said the Congress adopt a practical approach and respond to the political need of the hour. "I advise Congressmen to heed Home Minister L K Advani's suggestion that they should immediately join the *Mahajot* to defeat the CPI(M) Government," he said, adding, "I wouldn't like to comment on Sonia Gandhi but I would definitely say that the Congress is moving in the wrong direction."

Fernandes pointed out that he wouldn't be surprised if the State Congress joined hands with the CPI(M) to fight the *Mahajot* "because they have exposed themselves in Bihar". "To defeat the NDA Government in that State, they not only teamed up with the CPI(M) but also with Laloo Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal," he said.

Talking about the proposed review of the Constitution, Fernandes said that a lot of "ill-

informed discussions" were being carried out by people who are expected to possess a better knowledge of the Constitution. "The Constitution Review Commission set up by the Union Government is not authorised to amend the Constitution. It is Article 368 of the Constitution which provides for amendments," he said. "And that too the amendments to the Constitution can only be done provided it is passed by two-thirds majority in both the Houses of Parliament. So when you have this kind of a safeguard, why create such a hue and cry?"

Talking about defence-related matters, Fernandes said the Sukhoi controversy was based on misinformation spread by the media. "We have our commitments and we will acquire the required number of Sukhoi fighters as decided by the Government of India in due time. The deal is very much on and there is no controversy whatsoever," he clarified. "The Advanced Jet Trainers will also be inducted into the Air Force to give it a cutting edge." The minister also said the Government will lay stress on strengthening the armed forces.

"Besides expanding the Navy, we will strengthen our Air Force and Army. But this does not mean that we are in an aggressive mood. We have never attacked any country but we have been attacked in the past. So we would like to keep our armed forces in proper shape," he said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 APR 2008

The humbug called 'mahajot'

By Harish Khare

Neither Ms. Mamata Banerjee's success in her obsessive anti-marxist crusade nor Mrs. Sonia Gandhi's political mistakes ipso facto make the "mahajot" a desirable idea.

HD-12
19/4
“THE GRAND Moghul of the Congress is fast becoming a comic figure. He is suffering from the delusion that from his room in Ballygunge Circular Road he can rule Bengal by hurling his disciplinary thunderbolts from time to time. It is of no concern to him that what he is doing is ultra vires of the Congress Constitution itself. And it is of no consequence to him that through his penal measure he may soon be expelling the entire public from the Congress.” Thus spake Subhash Bose in December, 1940, at his vitriolic best, against the Congress High Command, symbolised in this case by Maulana Azad.

Nearly 60 years later, the paraplegic Mr. Ghani Khan Chowdhury, otherwise fondly called “barkatda”, has become the latest and the most unlikely defender of the Calcutta-would-not-be-dictated-to-from-Delhi tradition of defiance and autonomy. The tradition is deeply ingrained in Bengali political culture. After all, it had taken the combined prestige and power of Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Patel to put down the challenge from Subhash Bose. After Independence, Jawaharlal Nehru avoided the confrontation with “Calcutta” by the simple device of allowing B. C. Roy his fiefdom. It was only during the Indira Gandhi regime that Mr. Siddhartha Shankar Ray tamely fell in line.

Later the CPI(M) continued the tradition by its shrill disagreements with New Delhi, though the marxists invariably took care to season their dish of regional demonstrativeness with a liberal sprinkling of ideological pepper. The “national” leadership of the CPI(M) itself avoided the problem by becoming an appendix to the West Bengal unit. Within the Congress, the problem resurfaced with Mr. Pranab Mukherjee’s “revolt” against Rajiv Gandhi’s high-handedness. Ms. Mamata Banerjee parted company with Mr. Sitaram Kesri’s Congress 1997, though ironically not without considerable instigation from “10, Janpath”; Ms. Banerjee’s departure was used by the “10, Janpath” intriguers to demand that Mrs. Sonia Gandhi be allowed to occupy the centre stage.

Even two years later — and after two

general elections — Ms. Banerjee has not returned to Mrs. Sonia Gandhi’s Congress. And, now, Mr. Chowdhury says he is prepared to walk out of the Congress(I) if he is not allowed to have his say in the matter of the proposed “mahajot”.

The sudden endorsement of the “mahajot” idea by almost the entire West Bengal Pradesh Congress(I) Committee is as much a throwback to the tradition of “Calcutta defying Delhi” as it is a reaffirmation of the new accent in our political culture of “power at any cost”. The Congressmen in West Bengal have been out of power for nearly two decades, and if Ms. Banerjee is in a position to change that equation of powerlessness then they would be quite happy to hitch their wagon to her caravan, irrespective of the company she may keep.

As far as the BJP is concerned, it sees its growth in West Bengal as part of a larger growth of the Hindutava appeal. In the latest issue of “BJP TODAY”, the party’s West Bengal general secretary notes: “In the 1989 Lok Sabha election, the BJP fielded its candidates in 19 out of 42 constituencies, securing a little over one per cent votes. As in other parts of the country, the Ram Mandir agitation aroused many a dormant soul in the State and imbibed in hearts a sense of solidarity with national pride. The result was over 12 per cent votes in the 1991 elections.” This share dropped, again, to 6.88 per cent in 1996, and the Congress(I) share was 40 per cent, up from 36 per cent in 1991. It was not until Ms. Banerjee allowed herself to be provoked into forming her Trinamool Congress that the Congress(I) vote share fell dramatically to 15 per cent in 1998 and still further to 13 per cent in 1999. Obviously Mrs. Sonia Gandhi’s undisputed stewardship of the Congress(I) ship was not enough to convince the traditional Congress voters to come back to the mother organisation.

It is Mrs. Sonia Gandhi’s failure as a

vote-catcher that has changed perceptions within the West Bengal unit. The crux of the matter was stated, in 1940, by Subhash Bose: “Authoritarianism on the part of a dictator or a group may be tolerated if either of them has the necessary following and position in particular area. In the case of Bengal, neither the Maulana nor even Mahatma Gandhi should be unaware of the real position.”

No wonder, then, the “high command” can be so easily defied. Mrs. Sonia Gandhi’s entirely unjustifiable arbitrariness in

STATECRAFT

the recent matter of the Rajya Sabha elections has given the West Bengal Congress(I) an acute cause of resentment. It is the same Somen Mitra crowd that had two years ago denounced Ms. Banerjee’s vociferously for her reluctance to declare the BJP as “communal”; now they could care less if the Trinamool Congress leader keeps on singing paeans to Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee. Never before was crass opportunism sought to be conveniently packaged as pragmatism.

Nor is it any surprise that the most vocal salesman of the “mahajot” idea is none other than Mr. Lal Krishna Advani, once serenaded as the most ideological among the sangh parivar’s ideologues but now metamorphosed into an adroit practitioner of political opportunism of the most crass kind. Mr. Advani is keen to rope in the Congress(I) in the “mahajot” contraption because such an arrangement would finally allow the BJP to claim that it had exorcised itself of the communal ghosts. Once the Congress(I) allows itself to be conned into sharing the political bed with the BJP, that too on Mr. Advani’s terms, a hefty pay-off in terms of respectability and acceptability would accrue the BJP way beyond West Bengal.

Yet neither Ms. Banerjee’s success in her obsessive anti-marxist crusade nor Mrs. Sonia Gandhi’s political mistakes *ipso fac-*

to make the “mahajot” a desirable idea for the West Bengal Congress(I). As inheritors of the Subhash Bose legacy, “Barkatda” and others should know the Congress(I) is much bigger than Mrs. Sonia Gandhi and her follies. And unless they can persuade Ms. Banerjee to disengage herself from the BJP, the central leadership cannot allow itself to be blackmailed into this “mahajot” business, even if a section of the West Bengal Congress(I) wants to walk out. Granted it is the business of a political party to capture political power and that no rigid “ideological” posture can become paramount; but, then, a political party is also known for what it stands for and what it opposes.

Nearly 50 years ago, the dilemma and a way out of it was spelled out by Jawaharlal Nehru: “I think that the thing to be absolutely clear about is which way the Congress looks and which way it is going, and this should be declared in words of one syllable, if I may say so, which can have no two meanings. There is a tendency, and a natural tendency for us, to seek peace; by peace I mean concord. We ought to seek that, of course. But when this kind of an organisational peace is sought by covering up differences, by slurring over them, not knowing what we are or what we intend to do, then we do not get concord or peace, but merely a continuing confusion which leads you to trouble some time or other.”

The need for this kind of clarity in thinking was as relevant in 1951 as it is today. To the extent that the Congress(I) has the burden and obligations of an all-India political party, it cannot permit the West Bengal crowd to break political bread with the BJP if the leadership sincerely values whatever meaning it has come to invest in its battle against the Sangh parivar. There is a new interconnectedness in the Indian polity, and no political party that seeks a presence all over India can afford the luxury of running with the hare in West Bengal and hunting with the hounds in the rest of the country. Notwithstanding the cumulative record of marxist failures and aberrations, the “mahajot” idea remains an exercise in political expediency, ultimately inimical to the long-term interest of the Congress(I) and of the polity at large.

THE HINDU

19 APR 2000

BJP's triple trouble

The stars are not shining for the National Democratic Alliance. The Bharatiya Janata Party is finding it difficult to keep its act together in the face of setbacks that have cut into its confidence. The results of the Assembly elections proved that the people were not particularly convinced about the Hindutva agenda, and even in states like Orissa they have preferred the more controversial image of ally Biju Janata Dal to that of the BJP. In Bihar, despite the vigorous campaign, the electorate brought the Rashtriya Janata Dal back as the single largest party with the BJP a very poor second. And although governor Vinod Pande forgot constitutional propriety to aid the installation of a NDA government it was not destined to last. In that legislators from the usually vulnerable Congress party did not succumb to the lure of money and power and temporary chief minister Nitish Kumar was unable to muster the necessary support. The entire Opposition in Bihar proved that it had come of age by rallying behind Laloo Prasad Yadav against the communal forces represented, in their opinion, by the NDA. The issue was also raised in both Houses of Parliament with the proceedings being stalled effectively by irate opposition members demanding the recall of governor Pande. The point to be understood here is that even today it is not possible for parties in power to tamper excessively with the system. And that there is an inbuilt system of checks and balances which, if exercised effectively, can prevent the erosion of the system. The Opposition, for instance, also succeeded in getting the Gujarat government to withdraw its controversial order removing the ban on government employees from joining the RSS. The opposition parties united in the Parliament to stall proceedings until the order was withdrawn, resulting in a major defeat for the BJP which had, at one point, even toyed openly with the idea of removing the central ban on government servants from participating in RSS activities and seeking its membership. The third quick setback for the present government has come from US President Bill Clinton's decision to visit Islamabad, despite India's efforts to prevent this visit from taking place. Prime Minister Vajpayee who had almost staked his government's reputation on this was informed by President Clinton that he would be stopping at Islamabad on his way back to Washington. Another government would have reeled under the weight of these setbacks but the BJP has the patience and tenacity to wait out the spell of bad luck, in the hope that matters will get back to even keel again. But there is a despondency reflected in the silence of the usually vocal party. Needless to say the Opposition is particularly buoyed over its success, and can be expected to press home its advantage in the coming weeks. The rare cooperation witnessed between the Congress, Left and other opposition parties within and outside Parliament will, in all probability continue, leading to further tension for the BJP and its allies in government. The fact remains, and this has been well articulated before India and the world, that there is no single party or coalition that can claim to represent the people of this pluralistic country. Suffice it to say that a fire has been lit under the cauldron. And the results will not be predictable.

THE ASIAN AGE

11 MAR 2000

Vajpayee faction in RSS gets moderate selected as deputy to hardline chief

By Ramu Bhagwat

The Times of India News Service

NAGPUR. There was some good news at last from Nagpur for the Vajpayee government which is said to be jittery over the appointment of swadeshi hardliner K.S. Sudarshan as the new RSS chief. Mohan Madhukar Bhagwat, unanimously elected as 'sarkaryavah' (number two in the hierarchy) by the organisation's governing council late on Saturday night, is believed to be a moderate who could restrain the hawks in the RSS.

According to Sangh insiders, 49-year-old Mr Bhagwat is more in the mould of Balasaheb Deoras who was known for his pragmatic approach on matters political. Though relatively less experienced, Mr Bhagwat's elevation to the post, earlier held by veteran H.V. Seshadri, augers well for the Vajpayee faction in the RSS and may it from letting the initiative pass to the Advani group. This could explain why another contender for the post, hardliner Suresh Ketkar, was not chosen for the number two slot, the sources added.

Mr Bhagwat, who hails from Chandrapur district in Maharashtra, brings with him dynamism and rich experience. Born on September 11, 1950 in Sangli, he obtained a bachelors degree in veterinary science. Mr Bhagwat started as a *pracharak* in the RSS and served in this capacity in Akola and Nagpur. Six years earlier, he was appointed Akhil Bhartiya Sharirik Pramukh and last year took over as the Akhil Bhartiya Pracharak Pramukh.

After taking charge, Mr Bhagwat said he would endeavour to give a new impetus to the organisation by preparing its volunteers to meet the challenge of the new millennium.

In the RSS hierarchy, the *sarkaryavah* is one of the most important posts and the constitution of the organisation says the person holding this position looks after its day-to-day affairs.

Although Mr Bhagwat was tipped for the post even before the *pratinidhi sabha* met on March 10, his appointment came only last

night at the ongoing session of the three-day governing body meeting of the RSS.

Significantly, by electing a younger man for the crucial post, the RSS has made its intention of infusing new vigour into the organisation clear. Mr Seshadri, who could barely travel because of ill-health, has stepped down and has now been made joint general secretary along with Madandas of Calcutta.

Talking to newsmen on Sunday, Mr Madandas said the RSS had not yet finalised who would take up the pivotal task of coordinating between the RSS, BJP and other *Sangh parivar* constituents. "The decision will be taken in the next couple of days," he said while denying reports that the responsibility would be given to him. Before being appointed RSS chief, K.S. Sudarshan was responsible for this sensitive job. Besides, new executive members and heads of different RSS committees have also been appointed for the next three years.

If at his press conference on Friday Mr Sudarshan took an aggressive stance by criticising the Vajpayee government's liberalisation policy and seeking changes in economic advisors, Mr Bhagwat on Sunday unveiled the RSS' moderate face, saying, "We are confident the Vajpayee government would not bow down to the dictates of World Bank-IMF or the WTO regimes."

Besides the resolution on the national economy which called for basic changes in the decision-making process to make it more pro-poor, the *pratinidhi sabha* adopted four more resolutions. One on the recent visit of Pope John Paul II criticised his views on conversion, another resolution said there was "a deliberate attempt to attack the ancient Hindu culture through the pro-West media and foreign TV channels."

While the fourth resolution expressed concern over the insurgency in the north-eastern states, especially in Tripura, where four RSS activists reportedly abducted eight months ago are yet to be freed, the fifth resolution sought a central legislation banning cow slaughter.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

13 MAR 2000

Jaitley, Sushma find place on BJP list for RS polls

*Dilip Kumar, Gavai will be
Cong. candidates from state*

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Information minister Arun Jaitley, law minister Ram Jethmalani and surface transport minister Rajnath Singh have been cleared by the BJP parliamentary board as nominees for the March 29 Rajya Sabha biennial elections.

Senior party functionary Sushma Swaraj, who contested the Lok Sabha elections from Bellary against Congress president Sonia Gandhi, has won the party nomination from Uttar Pradesh.

While Mr Jaitley has filed his nomination from Gujarat, Mr Jethmalani, who will be jointly supported by the BJP and the Shiv Sena in Maharashtra, has also filed his papers. Along with Ms Swaraj and Mr Singh, media personality Balbir Punj has been nominated from Uttar Pradesh. Sitting members Ram Bux Varma and Ramnath Kovid are the other candidates from the state.

Former Madhya Pradesh chief minister Kailash Joshi and party leader in the state assembly Vikram Verma are set to fill in the vacancies from the state.

S.S. Ahluwalia, a former Congress MP who had joined the BJP before the general election, has been nominated from Bihar. Another former Congressman Rajasekhara Murthy will be in the fray from Karnataka. While Orissa party chief Manmohan Samal is being fielded from the lone seat in the state, party general secretary in Himachal Pradesh Kripal Parmar has been nominated from his state.

Among the others whose names

figure on the BJP list are Rav. Shankar Prasad (Bihar), Lekhraj Bachani (Gujarat) and Bal Apte (Maharashtra).

Meanwhile, the Congress also released its list of candidates. Thespian Dilip Kumar and RPI president R.S. Gavai will be the party's candidates from Maharashtra. MPCC president Govindrao Adik, making the announcement in Mumbai on Monday, said the two would file their nomination papers on Tuesday, the last day for filing nomination papers.

While former MPCC chief Prataprao Bhosale and Ram Pradhan were serious contenders for the seats, other aspirants withdrew from the race as the party decided against fielding those who had lost in the last Lok Sabha elections.

By selecting Dilip Kumar and Mr Gavai, the party has sent a message that it cares for the minorities and Dalits who supported it during the last Lok Sabha and assembly elections. Besides, it has ensured the total support of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) since the NCP would not like to be seen as not supporting either Mr Gavai or Dilip Kumar.

Welcoming the nomination of Dilip Kumar, MRCC president Murli Deora said the party's nominees would win without any problem. "I was interested. But since the party has decided not to consider persons who fought the last Lok Sabha elections, I respect the decision," Mr Deora said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 MAR 2000

BJD expels top leader ✓ for six years

110 | By N. Ramdas 4/2

BHUBANESWAR, FEB. 3. In a major political development in Orissa, the Biju Janata Dal president and Union Mines Minister, Mr. Naveen Patnaik, today expelled the chairman of the political affairs committee of his party, Mr. Bijoy Mahapatra, for "anti-party activities" for six years.

With the elections to the Orissa Assembly slated for February 17 and 22, the expulsion of Mr. Mahapatra will in all probability trigger chain reactions affecting the electoral fortunes of the BJD in the undivided Cuttack and Puri districts.

In a surprise development, Mr. Atanu Sabyasachi, a journalist with a local daily, landed at the district headquarter, Kendrapara, this afternoon and filed his nominations for the Patkura seat as the BJD candidate.

Mr. Mahapatra had filed his papers as the BJD candidate for this seat on Wednesday. Mr. Sabyasachi filed his papers at 2.58 p.m., leaving no scope for Mr. Mahapatra to take any other step.

Today was the last date for filing nominations for the second phase.

Reacting to the decision, Mr. Mahapatra said it was nothing but "back-stabbing" and the BJD did not mean Mr. Patnaik alone.

THE HINDU

4 FEB 2000

The BJP and its roots in Gujarat

By Asghar Ali Engineer

The BJP has a more moderate face where it has to rule in an alliance and a hardened face where it is in power by itself, as in Gujarat. It is for the allies of the BJP to reflect on this.

MD 10
M2

THOUGH THE BJP's growth has been quite phenomenal all over India thanks to the Ram Janmabhoomi issue it took up in the late Eighties, its growth in Gujarat has been much faster and deeper. It is the only State where the BJP is in power on its own. Again it is the only State where the BJP and other members of the sangh parivar, such as the VHP, the RSS and the Bajrang Dal, are not only sticking to their ideology but also behaving in an aggressive manner. While in Uttar Pradesh the BJP lost a number of seats in the last Lok Sabha election and fears it may lose more, the party has no such apprehensions in Gujarat. The attitude of the Keshubhai Patel Government shows how confident the BJP is of its strength in the State. The BJP also captured 30 of the 48 municipalities in the State in early January maintaining its supremacy in urban and semi-urban areas.

The way the BJP is behaving in Gujarat clearly brings to the fore what remains its hidden agenda at the Centre and in other States. The BJP has been maintaining that it has given up its Hindutva agenda and that it has nothing but the NDA's common agenda for governance. The BJP maintains that it neither intends to strive for construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya nor desires to enforce a common civil code or delete Article 370 from the Constitution. In its Chennai declaration too it made this clear. "The BJP has no agenda", the Chennai declaration said, "other than the common agenda of the NDA." Obviously the statement was calculated to allay the suspicions of allies such as the DMK, the MDMK, the Janata Dal(U) and the Trinamul Congress.

Mr. L. K. Advani also had to mollify the hardcore elements in Chennai by saying that the BJP was not diluting its ideology. He advised the BJP leaders and cadre not to "get imprisoned by dogma" but denied that the BJP was diluting its ideology for the sake of power. The thrust of Mr. Advani's address was that the party was "evolving" as the circumstances in the country changed. The BJP had gone through many changes and this was one such phase. While responding to the "challenges of the times", the BJP's constants were "nationalism" and "charac-

ter", which were derived from ideology and idealism.

Is the BJP really responding to the challenges of the times or is it adopting certain strategies to survive in power? There is a great deal of difference between the two. Judging by what the BJP Government is doing in Gujarat, it is hard to be convinced by Mr. Advani's assertion that it is responding to the challenges of the times. Rather, the BJP is adapting to the given circumstances without compromising its core ideology. The BJP has a more moderate face where it has to rule in an alliance and a hardened face where it is in power by itself, as in Gujarat. It is for the allies of the BJP to reflect on this. How can the BJP, if it is honest in its assertion that it has no separate agenda of governance, behave radically differently in States where it is in power on its own? Does it mean the BJP has two separate agendas of governance, one of the NDA and one its own? It certainly seems so.

Just look at what the BJP Government has been doing in Gujarat. The VHP's attacks on Christians began in the Dangs since December 25, 1998. The law and order machinery was a silent spectator throughout the period. The Gujarat Government also, going back on its word, allowed the VHP and the Hindu Ekta Manch to lay the foundation for a Ram temple in a Christian area, near the Dangs, in Surat district.

The Gujarat Government has also now permitted its employees to join the RSS. What will happen to objectivity and impartiality in the Gujarat administration? As it is, the administration is generally found to be subservient to the political bosses. Now if police officers join the RSS, will they show even a semblance of impartiality in controlling communal violence?

Naturally the RSS leaders are so pleased by this act of the Gujarat Government that they want the Centre to follow suit. The

ruption movement from Gujarat. Chimanbhai Patel was alleged to be most corrupt and he had to resign. The RSS and the Jan Sangh played an important role in this movement and got credit.

Later, Madhavsingh Solanki won the Assembly elections for the Congress with a two-thirds majority with the help of what was known as the KHAM formula in February 1985. He announced reservation for Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims (KHAM) and won their overwhelming support. But Patels, politically and economically the most dominant caste in Gujarat, brought down the Solanki Government within one and a half years. The 1985 communal riot in Ahmedabad was the most major one after 1969. The fall of the Solanki Government broke the back of the Congress in Gujarat for good. The party lost the support of the backward and minority sections as, faced with the anti-reservation agitation by the Patels, the Solanki Government suspended reservation for them. The BJP consolidated its position further by helping to bring down the Solanki Government.

The BJP projected itself as a "party with a difference" and filled the vacuum. There was another reason for the BJP establishing itself: the Janata Dal which had claimed to represent the interests of the weaker sections, Dalits, and minorities unfortunately came into existence under the leadership of Chimanbhai Patel who had been thrown out as "most corrupt". Hence, the Janata Dal could never take off. Also, unlike Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat did not throw up any Dalit or backward class leaders like Mr. Kanshi Ram or Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav. So, the BJP, which succeeded in attracting these sections to its fold, continues to retain their support. Mr. Shantkarsinh Waghela, who belongs to a backward class, broke off from the BJP and floated his own outfit and subsequently joined the Congress. He too failed to attract the backwards and Dalits to his fold, probably because he himself was associated with the BJP for long and was seen as breaking away to grab power.

These are some of the reasons why the BJP continues to rule unchallenged in Gujarat. The Congress will have to work very hard to replace the BJP in the State.

BJP cautious over RSS issue

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, FEB. 11. The Bharatiya Janata Party today decided to take a step back in caution and lower the rising political temperature in the ongoing controversy on allowing Government servants to get membership and participate in the activities of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). But, at the same time, the RSS chief himself came out with the view that except for personnel in the police and the judiciary, all other Government servants should be allowed to participate in RSS activities.

Senior party leader and spokesperson, Mr. J.P. Mathur, today indicated that "the issue will be discussed by the BJP leaders in the Government with the leaders of the allies," and "it will not be allowed to create a rift in the National Democratic Alliance," even as separately, at an award function organised by *Panchjanya*, the RSS mouthpiece, Mr. Rajendra Singh, the RSS Sarsanghchalak, was reported as having said that "except for the police and the judiciary", Government servants should be allowed to participate in RSS activities. The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, who was present at the function, declined to comment on the controversy.

Mr. Mathur was responding to questions in relation to the letter written to the Prime Minister by the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and DMK leader, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, on this question. Mr. Karunanidhi has said that if political parties were to start their "cultural" and "social" wings and Government servants were freely allowed to participate in these activities, it would open a "Pandora's box" and employees affiliated to rival organisations would come into conflict destroying the apolitical

functioning of the administrative machinery.

(A PTI report quoted Mr. Vajpayee as saying: "I do not want to say anything on the matter.")

The BJP's view is that senior party leaders in the Government — Mr. Vajpayee, Mr. L.K. Advani and others — were naturally expected to discuss the issue with the leaders of allied parties in the wake of Mr. Karunanidhi's letter. He was sure that "this issue will not be allowed to create a rift in the NDA".

For the last one week, senior BJP leaders at the party headquarters have been strongly defending the Gujarat Government's action in withdrawing the order that prohibits Government servants from taking part in RSS activities, saying "there was nothing wrong in this" since "the RSS was a patriotic and cultural organisation".

But the impression now is that the BJP would not like this controversy to get out of hand and become the cause of instability in the otherwise stable Vajpayee Government. Of course, Mr. Mathur admitted, that if Government servants were allowed to participate in RSS activities, the BJP would welcome it. "If people realise that the RSS is not a political organisation, and therefore restrictions on Government servants are lifted, I will be hap-



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, flank the RSS leader, Mr. Rajendra Singh, at the *Panchjanya* award function in New Delhi on Friday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

py." But it was for the Government to consider the matter.

Privately, some BJP leaders have said that the recent statements of the Prime Minister and the Home Minister — suggesting that the Centre was about to initiate a move to withdraw the restrictions on Government servants — were aimed at "facilitating" the entry into Government service of those who have been associated with the RSS.

The party leaders were also questioned on how the BJP Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mr. Ram Prakash Gupta, could go on record suggesting that even if there were notifications forbidding Government servants from participating in RSS activities, he would simply ignore these and not comply. The answer was that a notification was not a "law", implying that it was not binding.

VHP vows to cross Atal's *Rekha*

OUR BUREAU

Feb. 16: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today swore to cross Atal Behari Vajpayee's *Lakshman Rekha* "whenever there was an attack on Hindu culture" and threatened to oppose the shooting of *Water* wherever it was held.

"We will not tell you what we are going to do. But we will oppose if the film is shot anywhere in India, including West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh, unless the script is changed drastically," VHP leader Acharya Giriraj Kishore said in Delhi.

Picking up the gauntlet in Calcutta, chief minister Jyoti Basu said: "I will see to it that *Water* is shot here without any disruption. If they oppose the shooting, we know how to counter them."

Deepa and some of her crew members are scheduled to reach Calcutta on Friday for talks with Basu and his deputy Buddhadev Bhattacharya. Basu said they would discuss the location of the shoot with Bhattacharya.

In Delhi, Kishore said he was not bound by the clearance given to the film by the Centre.

Reminded of the Prime Minister's appeal to the Sangh parivar not to "compound existing problems" by crossing the *Lakshman Rekha*, Kishore shot back: "Where is the *Lakshman Rekha*? *Lakshman Rekha* is for everyone." The VHP would not sit quiet when there is an attack on Hindu culture, he added.

Alleging an international conspiracy against Hinduism, he said multinational companies were be-

hind it. "The Valentine's Day, the New Year's Day and the millennium celebrations are all aberrations on Hindu culture, damaging the image of Bharat," he said.

The VHP leader said Deepa would be allowed to shoot in Varanasi itself, provided she changed her script drastically and it was approved by the Kashi Vidwat Parishad, an apex body of scholars.

Asked why the VHP was not questioning the Centre for clearing the script, Kishore said: "The question is not of opposing any government. Even if the filming is allowed in Madhya Pradesh or West Bengal, we will not be opposing the state governments, but the shooting."

Kishore said a VHP team had met information and broadcast-

ing minister Arun Jaitley and urged him not to give permission to the film in its present form, but "we have not yet got any response from him".

He said that over 25,000 Bajrang Dal activists from across the country would protest in Bhopal on February 18, if the Madhya Pradesh government did not allow the Dal to hold its convention. Warning against any crackdown on Bajrang Dal activists, Kishore claimed that 1,700 people have so far been arrested in the state.

"The government is now asking us to shift to a new venue, about 8 km away. They are also asking us to postpone the meet for another four days, which is just not possible, given our preparations," the VHP leader said.

Stumped BJP probes

Venkaiah rules out witch-hunt **Bihar setback**

SANJAY BASAK
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 26. — The BJP may be putting up a brave front, the saffron think tank has launched an exercise to probe reasons for the “unexpected outcome” of the Assembly elections. The BJP-led NDA in Bihar is also sending feelers to all “anti-Laloo and pro-NDA factions” to join them in its bid to prop up a government in the state.

As part of the overall effort, the saffron brigade has already initiated moves to pressure the Governor, Mr Vinod Pandey, by claiming that the “party was confident that he would call the NDA to form the government, since it was emerging as the single-largest combination” in the state.

However, that the results have left partymen flustered was all too evident when some Haryana BJP men reached the party headquarters and blamed the central leadership for the debacle in the state. The BJP which had 11 MLAs has managed to retain only seven.

For a start, the analysts have zeroed in on four main reasons for the party's debacle in Bihar and Haryana. In Bihar, poll-eve differences among allies over seat sharing, failure to identify the right constituencies and rebel candidates were the main reasons.

In Haryana, a senior party leader said, the BJP's electoral arithmetic had simply gone “haywire”. The party which contested 29 seats in the Jat-dominated Haryana, “did not bother to field even a single Jat candidate”.

Also, it fielded only three Schedule Caste candidates in the state. “The party strategists were completely unaware of the ground realities,” the leader said. He also mentioned allegations that the chief of the Indian National Lok Dal, Mr Om Prakash Chautala, had “pulled strings to defeat some of the BJP candidates in the state”.

While the party spokesman, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu felt that “no one should be singled out” for the debacle, other leaders tried to put the onus on the Samata Party. “It was Samata's attitude and hard bargaining which sent wrong signals to people of Bihar”, one

of them said. The BJP had to cancel its election committee meetings as many as four times, simply because the Samata refused to budge from its demand for “additional seats.” The “drama”, played out by so-called socialists over the merger of Samata, Lok Shakti and the Janata Dal (United) did its own bit to sully the NDA's image, he added.

The leader felt that the BJP, perhaps would have “performed better had it not have to depend on its allies.” In Bihar, the BJP and the NDA issued party symbols to candidates even before the seat-sharing squabbles were sorted out, he said.

While the BJP expelled five of its rebel candidates, the Samata and the JD(U) merely disowned them. At least 25 rebel candidates of the NDA won in the Bihar.

However, the BJP which is trying to gloss over the setback, is claiming that the party has gained immensely in the Assembly polls. Claiming the gain was “hundred per cent”, Mr Naidu, said : “We had a total of 60 MLAs in Bihar, Haryana and Orissa. This time we are expected to have at least 120 MLAs, including six from Manipur...”

However, the truth is, the party is worried not simply because of its poor performance, but also the inevitable pressure it will come under at the Centre. The saffron forces are afraid that the BJP now will have to contend with periodic “arm twisting” by allies, especially the INLD and the BJD, which will no longer need to bank on the BJP to stay in power in their respective states.

The BJP will also have to watch out for “possible revival of the Third Force.”

For now, the BJP-led NDA is reportedly in touch with rebel candidates and is trying to woo them back. One of the BJP minister of state, Mr Shahnawaz, who won from Bihar, has been pressed into the service with this express purpose.

The party may be “confident” that the Governor would ask the NDA to form government, at least one BJP leader admitted that the Governor might chose to seek letters of support from each bloc intending to stake a claim to form the government.

THE STATESMAN
27 FEB 2000

P. T. O.

RSS may bridge schism with back-PM-fully call

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, January 16

TOP RSS leaders are likely to intervene to end the schism in the BJP following the incident of hijacking, and call for full support for Prime Minister A B Vajpayee.

Ironically, the Sangh leaders were among the first to be critical of the Government for buckling under the hijackers' pressure to release three militants in exchange for the freedom of the Indian Airlines passengers.

According to the RSS leaders now, any further division on the issue will lead to the weakening of the Prime Minister's position as well as that of the BJP, and might encourage its detractors to look for fissures in the National Democratic Alliance.

Therefore, RSS chief Rajendra Singh, along with senior Sangh leaders H V Seshadri and K S Sudarshan, are likely to meet BJP president Kushabhau Thakre before this month-end. Before that, they are likely to quietly advise the BJP leaders to desist from attacks on the Government and instead back the Prime Minister, saying that the swap deal was unavoidable to save the lives of the passengers.

An RSS functionary said Mr Sudarshan might also call on the Prime Minister to clear any "misunderstanding" about the Sangh's position. He will also convey its "continued" full backing for Mr Vajpayee, while seeking quick steps by the Government to improve the security environment.

The rift in the BJP has been growing ever since RSS chief Rajendra Singh was quoted by a Sangh mouthpiece, *Panchajanya*, as saying that the incident brought to light the "cowardice" of the

Hindu society. The Government, he said, should rectify lapses such as "failure" to stop the hijacked aircraft during its brief halt at Amristar.

Other RSS leaders also reacted sharply to the swap deal, calling it a major lapse, which knocked out one of the major planks of the BJP.

But the reaction in the BJP following differences among senior party leaders on the issue has now begun to worry the RSS. Contradictory statements by the BJP leaders on the Government's handling of the crisis, following the Sangh's displeasure, have been showing signs of developing into a full-scale cold war

Yesterday, BJP vice president J P Mathur, however, voiced support for Mr Advani's assessment, admitting that there were differing perceptions in the party.

According to another RSS functionary, the truth is that the Sangh leadership is "disappointed" with both the Prime Minister as well as the Home Minister for not being able to improve matters in Kashmir, which is flaring up again.

"The popular impression that the RSS is unhappy with Mr Vajpayee and pleased with Mr Advani no longer holds good," he said. "While Mr Advani's supporters may think that he has not been given the opportunity to prove his mettle, we are disappointed that both leaders have not been able to show exemplary management skills," he said.

Nevertheless the "primary concern" of the RSS, according to another RSS functionary, is that nothing should be allowed to jeopardise the position of the Prime Minister, who is playing a "pivotal" role as the head of the coalition. That concern is certainly not altruistic. It is born out of the fact that there is no alternative to Mr Vajpayee, and second, the RSS cannot expect a more "friendly" government than the present one.

Both the BJP and RSS officials say it is no secret that the Prime Minister and Mr Advani were not in agreement during the crisis.

The latter opposed any swap deal, saying it would demoralise the security forces battling the Kashmir ultras.

Mr Advani, who has the desire to wear the mantle of "tough" Sardar Patel, had to publicly back the Government's action, albeit belatedly, describing it as the "best under given circumstances". Subsequently, however, he could not help saying that the deal dented the BJP's image.



between the camps backing Mr Vajpayee and Home Minister L K Advani. The latest issue of another RSS organ, *Organiser*, has now turned its ire on the Government's agencies instead, saying that the latter have no proper co-ordination in meeting the challenge of terrorism.

Mr Advani set the ball rolling with his remark — reiterated in two separate BJP meetings — that the incident dented the party's image. When the Prime Minister's displeasure over the Home Minister's comment became known, BJP vice president K Jana Krishnamurthi and later party chief Kushabhau Thakre expressed their disagreement with Mr Advani.

Ayodhya solution not in sight

The Sangh Parivar harps on the issue of the construction of the Ram temple out of habit. But the legal bar holds. Neither the state government, nor the Centre can disturb the status quo, says
MOHAN SAHAY

THE Ram Janam Bhoomi-Babari Masjid dispute is raked up every now and then and will remain on the national agenda for many more years. Neither the government in Delhi nor in Lucknow can disturb the status quo of the disputed site, till the court cases are disposed of.

The Sangh Parivar rakes up the issue of Ram temple construction to keep the movement, which started in 1949, alive. It suits anti-BJP parties to capitalise on the controversy. But the legal bar holds and no matter what Ram Prakash Gupta and the Parivar hawks say about building the temple, it is beyond their reach.

The Babari Masjid was built in 1528 by Mir Baqi, Babar's minister. Hindus say the mosque was built after destroying a temple. They claim that at the heart of the mosque, lay the sanctum sanctorum of Ram.

In December 1949, some local "mahants" of Ayodhya surreptitiously kept the idols of Ram inside the mosque. In 1950, the premises were attached under

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Section 145 of the Code of Criminal Procedure. At that time, Pandit Govind Vallabh Pant was the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Prime Minister.

Civil suits were filed and interim orders passed restraining parties in the dispute from removing the idols and interfering with the worship of the idols. The interim order was confirmed by Allahabad High Court in 1955.

In 1959, a civil suit was filed by the Nirmohi Akhara of Ayodhya, demanding that the disputed structure be handed over to it.

Two years later, a suit was filed by the Central Sunni Waqf Board. It said the structure (the mosque) belonged to the Board and as such should be handed over to it. The title suits are pending before the Lucknow Bench of Allahabad High Court.

The disputed site on which the mosque stood, and the adjoining precincts, was 2.66 acres. After the Babari Masjid's demolition, it was acquired by the Union Government through an Act (No 33) in 1993. The Centre acquired the adjoining areas, including the Manas Bhavan.

However, the Supreme Court ruled in 1993 that the acquisition of the disputed land, including the make-shift Ram temple built on the debris of the mosque on 6-7 December 1992, would not deprive the "community found entitled to it".

Till the pendency of the title suit, the Centre is the receiver of the disputed land. The state government has no jurisdiction to tamper with the existing status of the disputed site, including the make-shift temple.

The Centre, too, cannot interfere or act otherwise to disturb the status quo ante as ordered by the Supreme Court. The legal posi-

tion apart, the Ayodhya issue is a matter of faith for the two communities involved.

After the title suit verdict is delivered by Allahabad High Court, one of the two parties would get possession of the disputed site.

If the Hindus win, they would predictably want to build the proposed temple. If the verdict goes in the Muslims' favour, they would want to rebuild the mosque. Both situations are fraught with communal ramifications.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has been suggesting that the dispute be settled through negotiations between the two communities involved.

And rightly so, because the solution is unlikely to be found in legal points, as one saw on 6 December 1992. Despite the Centre's assurances, the state government and the Supreme Court's injunctions, the mosque was destroyed.

"What was demolished was not merely an ancient structure, but the faith of the minorities in the sense of justice and fairplay of the majority. A 500-year-old structure, which was defenceless and whose safety was a sacred trust in the hands of the state government was demolished," the Supreme Court observed in 1993.

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