

Cong reverts to Nehruvian model

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 1. — The Congress today officially distanced itself from the pro-active economic policies of the NDA government and in the process, tried to shed the "pro-rich image" it ended up acquiring during its one decade's tryst with liberalisation.

While announcing its new humane and Left-of-Centre economic thinking, which literally opposes the pro-active reforms of the government, the chairman of the Congress Economic Committee, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, officially demanded setting up of a Parliamentary Standing Committee to go into the entire disinvestment issue.

Mr Mukherjee tried hard to maintain that Manmohanomics is still alive and kicking, but the Nehruvian stamp was all the more evident on the new economic doctrine for reforms, with a pronounced concern for

the poor. Mr Mukherjee made it clear to one and all that Dr Manmohan Singh was consulted all through and was in agreement with the reformed thinking. Mr Mukherjee said it was natural to review major policy adjustments. What was left unsaid is that most of the Congress leaders felt Manmohanomics good for anything but getting the votes of the poor.

On the crucial disinvestment front, the Congress policy has "objected to the present ideological assault on the public sector" while demanding a white paper on disinvestment.

The intention behind the demand for a standing committee is clearly a post-mortem of the disinvestments so far and an eagle's eyes on the proposed ones, with special focus on the funds generated.

It reiterated its opposition to cutting the government stake

to the proposed 33 per cent in nationalised banks. Mr Mukherjee also sounded a signal of warning on the move to sell the Maruti. "Yes there is talk of selling off Maruti. But the government should spell out the reasons for doing that," he said.

The party while reiterating its support to reforms, wants the poor to be the main beneficiary, with focus on poverty alleviation and underlined the fact that the burden of reforms should not fall on the poor.

It emphasised the need to have better delivery mechanism at the rural and panchayat levels. It wants higher public investment in agriculture, opposed cut in subsidies, underlines the need to ensure food security and employment guarantee to all. In an attempted dig at the government, the Congress regretted the growth rate having stalled.

On the fiscal policy, the

Congress wants the Government to widen the tax net, reduce wasteful Government expenditure, improve revenue collection and augment saving and investment rate.

Re-emphasising the relevance of mixed economy, the document calls for healthy competition between public and private sectors.

The document will be submitted to Mrs Sonia Gandhi for her formal clearance before its official adoption.

The bottom line of the exercise is to give its pro-reforms economic policy a humane face ironically a term coined by Mr PV Narasimha Rao, an apolitical untouchable now. And when the Congress, out of power for almost half-a-decade, is repositioning itself with the hope of retracing its lost ground, the likes of Mr Manmohan Singh may find the need to change or accept the change.

THE STATESMAN

2 DEC 2001

Cong notice rejected

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 11. — The stand-off in Parliament continued today as the Speaker rejected the Congress notice inviting special discussion on the resignation of three Union Ministers under rule 184, on the ground that the subject is "sub-judice".

The Speaker's ruling came this morning at the all-party meeting he had called to find some way to allow the Lok Sabha to function.

The Congress has decided to move a rephrased notice tomorrow, with the same demand, to remove "technical anomalies" that the Speaker pointed out before rejecting today's notice.

Rejecting the Congress notice today, Speaker GMC Balayogi observed that the matter was "sub-judice" in Allahabad High Court's Lucknow Bench. He appealed to the members saying those "desirous of having discussion on the matter may give notices in appropriate form which are

admissible under rules so that the House can take up discussion at an appropriate time".

"The House is supreme in procedural matters, so much so that it can suspend the rules if the circumstances so demand," he said. But, the House would have to ensure that "nothing is said during the debate which may prejudice the course of justice in any manner".

He told Congress leaders that under rule 186 relating to admissibility of notices of motion, a notice under rule 184 should be restricted to a matter of current occurrence. The case in which Mr L K Advani, Dr M M Joshi and Miss Uma Bharati have been charge-sheeted dates back to September 1997.

To get around this, Congress has added new paragraphs in the draft notice, correlating Mr Harin Pathak's resignation from the Union ministry with its demand for the resignation of the three ministers, to make the subject of the motion topical.

There will be three more notices from the CPI-M, SP and RJD for discussions under rule 184 on the Prime Minister's statement on construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya. The Speaker has called an all-party meeting again tomorrow, in which the fresh notices will be submitted.

Opposition parties rejected the BJP offer for discussions under any rule including 184, on anything related to Ayodhya. The latter also refused to accept the parliamentary affairs minister's suggestion that the Prime Minister be allowed to make a suo motu statement in the Lok Sabha. The discussion could follow Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement, the BJP had suggested.

Prof V K Malhotra even dared the Opposition to move a no-confidence motion, since it could not ask for the resignation of the ministers under rule 184. Leader of the RJD in the Lok Sabha, Mr Raghuvans Prasad Singh, said: "This is not acceptable to us."

PM may take 'misunderstood' line on temple

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Dec. 11. — After raking up a controversy on the Ram temple, the Prime Minister may try to calm tempers by clarifying in Parliament that he was misunderstood, according to some of his parliamentary managers.

This, of course, is subject to the Opposition allowing him to issue a suo motu clarification on the issue. The TDP has demanded it, but the Congress is unlikely to allow this because it could take the steam out of the controversy.

Mr Vajpayee is likely to focus on three issues in his clarification, his parliamentary managers said. One, that the government was committed to the NDA agenda, two that the government would abide by the

■ See TEMPLE: page 8

TEMPLE:

(Continued from page 1)

court verdict and maintain status quo till then and three, that there was no question of the three ministers — Mr LK Advani, Mr MM Joshi and Miss Uma Bharati — resigning on the issue.

Not that he would make a complete volte face. But he may not even touch on matters that have ruffled some of the NDA allies, like the issue of building a Ram temple at the site of the make-shift temple and a mosque at a mutually agreed place.

Also, the Prime Minister must do a deft balancing act so that the spirit of the party's recharged hardline supporters is not dampened. Whether intended or unintended, the message has already gone to the party cadre, a BJP leader said.

The BJP spokesperson, Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, tried to prepare the ground for the Prime Minister's statement, saying that Mr AB Vajpayee had merely said that there was a suggestion that a mosque could be constructed at a different site. This was not his original suggestion, he clarified, and pointed out that the Prime Minister had also said that the place where the temple should be constructed was a matter of dispute to be settled through mutual negotiations.

Mr Malhotra also said that no reasonable person can oppose the Prime Minister's statement on an out-of-court basis to the dispute. C Vajpayee had a suggestion before some quarters, he said.

THE STATESMAN

12 DEC 2000

Sonia in Bofors challenge

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, Dec. 21: If Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had chosen an *iftar* to raise the Ayodhya controversy, Congress president Sonia Gandhi too opted for an *iftar* to return the Bofors fire, asking the government to come up with "proof" about the link between Ottavio Quattrocchi and the Nehru-Gandhi family.

Not just Sonia's bravado on Bofors, the presence of Mamata Banerjee at Sonia's *iftar* cheered many in the Congress, who termed the Trinamul chief's gesture a "homecoming". Mamata, however, made it a point to mention that she could not go to Vajpayee's do due to "preoccupation". Harkishen Singh Surjeet, Laloo Prasad Yadav and Ranjan Yadav sat with Sonia at one table, breaking bread and discussing the emerging political scenario in view of Bofors and Ayodhya.

Sonia, who avoided referring to Quattrocchi's arrest in the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) general body meet, sought to clear the air on her links with the con-

troversial Italian businessman wanted in the Bofors case. Speaking to reporters, Sonia said: "For the last 16 years they are raising the Bofors issue. Let the government investigate and come up with proof." An aggressive Sonia said she had full faith in her late husband's words when he had said on the floor of the House that neither he nor any member of his family was involved in the Bofors payoff.

After saying what she had to say, Sonia played the role of hostess to perfection, handing plates to Laloo, Surjeet, Muslim clerics and members of the diplomatic corps. Present on the occasion were the *creme de la creme* of the Muslim society, including Syed Shahabuddin, herbal queen Shahnaz Hussain and actor Akbar Khan.

The food served at her *iftar* was by far the best dished out at any VIP *iftar* in the capital. Lucknow's famous *tunde ke kabab* was a great hit with ethnic delicacies such as *doodh jalebi*, *rabri* and a range of Mughlai preparations.

Earlier in the day, Sonia asked the NDA's secular constituents to decide how far they would go alo-

ng with the BJP, which had a hidden agenda. Addressing the CPP meet, Sonia said: "We leave it to the conscience of the secular elements in the NDA to determine how long a rope they intend to give to the BJP leadership whose hidden agenda has come out of the closet and put on public display."

Justifying the Congress' insistence on the resignation of the three ministers chargesheeted in the Babri masjid demolition case, she said the issue has now come on the nation's agenda. The Congress chief pointed out that even the NDA allies have been pushed on the defensive. She expressed apprehension that the Prime Minister's rejection of the resignation demand would encourage "lawless and extremist elements" in the Sangh parivar.

"The inept handling of the Babri masjid-Ayodhya controversy by Vajpayee showed beyond a shadow of doubt that the Prime Minister is, indeed, a *swayamsevak* of 60 years standing who is committed to the philosophy of the Sangh parivar," Sonia said.

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THE TELEGRAPH

22 DEC 2000

Cong bleeds at Chhattisgarh birth

FROM SUCHANDANA GUPTA
AND RASHED KIDWAI

Raipur, Oct. 31: The Congress convulsed in Chhattisgarh's birth pangs as supporters of Vidya Charan Shukla beat up Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh minutes after tribal leader Ajit Jogi was picked to lead the new state.

Jogi was sworn in chief minister a little after midnight, but not before hours of suspense as seven MLAs, all backed by Shukla, went into hiding. The party has 48 legislators in the Assembly of 90. The BJP has 36.

The tremors started around 2 pm when about 200 men, including minister Ashok Rao, confronted Digvijay as he drove into Shukla's farmhouse to calm the leader who was eager to get the job but was ignored.

With Shukla's supporters refusing to let the car in, the chief minister stepped out and asked the men to behave themselves. This provoked the mob, which hurled abuses and began kicking and punching Digvijay until he fell.

Prabha Rau, the general secretary in charge of Madhya Pradesh who was also in the car, was spared but Ghulam Nabi Azad

was not. As he wriggled through the crowd into Shukla's home, some of the men slapped and hit him.

The men continued to shower blows on Digvijay. They ripped his kurta, flung slippers and socked him at random. Shellshocked for the first few minutes, the chief minister started striking back.

As the mob continued to work on Digvijay, some of their colleagues stood guard at the gate. "Jaiye, dekhaye wahan mukhya mantri ki pitai ho rahi hai. Uska himmat kaise hua yahan aane ki? (Go, see the chief minister is getting beaten up. How dare he come here?)" they shrieked.

It was left to Shukla to escort Digvijay inside. "It was a reprehensible incident. These were some anti-socials who had come in. Neither do they belong to the Congress nor do they have anything to do with me," he later said.

But even as Shukla was denying the men's links with the Congress, the "anti-socials" trooped in to touch his feet, chanting "Vidya bhaiyya zindabad".

Though Shukla refused to comment on Jogi's nomination, the move is a huge setback for the leader who had launched a mass movement for a new state.

Shukla was not present at the

swearing-in, which took place at the police parade ground, but he appears to have given in. He will need the support of at least 16 MLAs to avoid the anti-defection law.

A former Union minister, Shukla is not trusted by too many, especially 10 Janpath. Jogi, on the other hand, has the backing of Sonia Gandhi though he lost last year's Lok Sabha elections from Shahdol, not too far from Chhattisgarh.

The former IAS officer edged out Shukla after a two-hour meeting this afternoon between the Congress top brass and 41 of the 48 MLAs.

Shukla arrived for the meeting at 10.30 but left in a huff after an hour. Asked if he was planning to leave the Congress, Shukla quipped: "I am as good a Congressman as Arjun Singh and Madhavrao Scindia." Both leaders had deserted the party seven years ago, but are now close aides of Sonia.

Jogi had almost given up hope on Sunday when Digvijay, Rau and Azad left Delhi for Raipur without him. But a 10.35 pm appointment with Sonia changed it all: she told him to take the morning flight to Raipur. "I am confident you will do well," a smiling Sonia said.

CHHATTISGARH: VITAL STATISTICS

Roots
The history of Chhattisgarh can be traced back to very early times when it was known as South Kosala. The Aryan migrants to the South passed through it. Excavations have led to discoveries of inscriptions and coins which shed light on the culture of South Kosala.

Tourist hotspots
Amarkantak: Located at the meeting point of the Vindhyas and Satpura ranges, it is the source of the Narmada and Sonnerivers.

Bhoramdeo: Temples built along the Sankari river. The palaces of Manwa and Madanmanjari have erotic sculptures similar to those in Khajuraho.

Kanha: Inspired Rudyard Kipling to write *Jungle Book*. Has an astonishing variety of wild animals.

Bastar: Forest area, home to Maria and Muria tribes and also to the Gond, who are completely cut off from the world.

Cultural interests: Folk forms such as Pandavani. Stage director Habib Janvir (left) based most of his works around Chhattisgarh.

Population: 1.76 crore
No. of districts: 16
Parliamentary seats: 11
Assembly seats: 90

Literacy: 79.23% (urban), 36.56% (rural)

Natural resources
Bauxite, corundum, dolomite, diamond, limestone, iron ore, tin ore, gold, alexandrite, China clay, quartz silica, fire clay, fluorite and coal.

Forest area: 59,285.26 sq km
Forest produce: Tendu leaves, chirronji, harra, batheda, mahua flower and sal seed.

Industry
Bhilai, near Raipur, has one of the country's largest steel plants.

Agriculture
Major rice-producing area.

Graphic: RAJ

740-1
20/11

Sonia throws coterie charge back at Jitendra Prasada

AMINI (LAKSHADWEEP), NOV. 2. The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today hit back at Mr. Jitendra Prasada for his charge that a coterie surrounded her, saying similar allegations were levelled against him when he was adviser to the Prime Minister and Congress president.

"Was there not the allegation of a coterie when Mr. Prasada was adviser to the Prime Minister and Congress president?" she shot back at reporters, who asked her about the charge levelled by her challenger in the November 12 party presidential election. "I would like him to stop and think about how he used to work in those days. Were there not accusations of a coterie around him?"

Mr. Prasada was political secretary to Rajiv Gandhi and Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao, when they were both Prime Minister and Congress president.

Ms. Gandhi said she regularly

met a large number of leaders and workers and listened to them. "I ask them what they think about certain issues. I might go by what they suggest to me. And at times, I take decisions of my own."

She said she was not scared by the challenge posed by Mr. Prasada and added it was not for the first time that a member of the Nehru-Gandhi family was chal-

Prasada appeals for conscience votes Page 13

lenged within the party. "It (the contest) is a perfectly democratic way. I am not at all perturbed. Do you think I am sacred by the challenge? I am not."

"Members of the Nehru-Gandhi family have been challenged time and again. Indira Gandhi was thrown out of her own party, for which she had worked for years. When Rajiv was Prime Min-

ister, there was a conspiracy hatched to remove him by people within his own party backed by none other than the President of India."

She said she did not intend to persuade Mr. Prasada to withdraw his candidature. "I have not asked anybody to persuade him to withdraw. I have read in newspapers that some colleagues have been talking to him. I have not asked anybody to do so."

Asked whether she thought someone from outside the party had instigated Mr. Prasada to contest against her, she said, "You tell me. You are better informed."

Maintaining that she stood for inner-party democracy, she said the party was functioning better after her assumption as its chief. An election authority had also been set up. "It shows my commitment to inner-party democracy." — PTI

Cabinet skips rollback issue

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 2. The Cabinet again skipped the issue of rollback in oil prices though the Railway Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, maintained she raised the demand at today's meeting. She said the topic was raised by her but the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, said he wanted more time to decide.

Ms. Banerjee was speaking to reporters after the meeting and seems to have been disappointed again. The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, had given an assurance that the rollback demand would be considered after his return from Mumbai following a knee-replacement surgery. But two Cabinet meetings later, the issue is yet to figure on the agenda. The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, said like last time, the Cabinet did not discuss the issue.

THE HINDU

3 NOV 2000

All set for showdown in Cong.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 5. The stage is set for a showdown in the Congress with no withdrawal of nomination for the party presidential election poll scheduled for November 12 when Mr. Jitendra Prasad will test his strength against Ms. Sonia Gandhi.

Though there is hardly any doubt about the outcome of the poll, Mr. Prasad has been campaigning furiously saying he decided to contest the poll in order to revitalise the Congress and restore inner-party democracy.

Even today he was in Ahmedabad where he is said to have credited the "grassroots Congress worker" for the stupendous victory in the recent local body elections in which, quite unexpectedly, the Bharatiya Janata Party was routed.

Although over the last week several senior party leaders were involved in trying to persuade Mr. Prasad to step down and avoid a contest, the former president of the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee remained adamant. Today was the last date for withdrawal of nominations and at the end of the scheduled time, Mr. Prasad and Ms. Gandhi remain in the fight.

Although Ms. Gandhi's victory should be easy, the party high command and her loyalists are not taking any chances. That explains the statement of Congress Working Committee members in favour of Ms. Gandhi as well as the resignation of Ms. Ambika Soni from the CWC to give herself time "to campaign for Ms. Gandhi."

In fact, Mr. Prasad was quite isolated in that no senior party

leader came out with a statement in his support.

It may be recalled that when Sitaram Kesri contested the presidential elections, he was opposed by both Mr. Sharad Pawar and Rajesh Pilot. At that time too there was hardly any doubt in anyone's mind who would win the elections given that the person in the seat of power has the natural advantage. In Ms. Gandhi's case she has the added advantage of belonging to the Nehru-Gandhi family.

The November 12 election has become more significant not from the point of view of outcome of the result, but the post-election scenario. Will the decision to contest the election lead to some other step by Mr. Prasad after the polls? That remains to be seen.

Hooda sure of Sonia win: Page 13

20 CWC members back Sonia

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, November 4

TWENTY CONGRESS Working Committee (CWC) members including Dr Manmohan Singh and Mr Madhavrao Scindia today 'unanimously and wholeheartedly' supported Mrs Sonia Gandhi's candidature for Congress presidency and urged other members of the electoral college also to support Mrs Gandhi.

In a joint statement, the CWC members hailed Mrs Gandhi's leadership of the party and established the almost total support the Congress president enjoyed in the highest decision-making body of the party.

The CWC has 26 members including three permanent invitees and three special invitees. Another member, Mrs Mohsina Kidwai, joined the statement initially signed by 19 CWC members, a lit-

tle later. Coming on the eve of the last day of withdrawal of nominations for the Congress presidential elections, the statement exposed the isolation of the other presidential candidate, Mr Jitendra Prasada, in the CWC.

Yesterday, CWC member Ambika Soni had resigned her AICC general secretaryship to campaign for Mrs Gandhi in the November 12 election.

The CWC members recalled Mrs Gandhi had in May, 1991 declined the CWC's unanimous invitation to take over as Congress president after Mr Rajiv Gandhi's assassination. In early 1998, the call was renewed by party workers all over the country and Mrs Gandhi could not this time disregard their wish.

"During the past 30 months, she has with single minded dedication and determination held the party together, encouraged free debate and transparency. Wide ranging

consultation, discussion and debate have distinguished her tenure," the CWC members said.

Urging Congressmen to support Mrs Gandhi, the CWC members said, "This is a significant moment in the history of our great organisation. This is a moment to recall the inspiring example of the giants of the freedom movement, who under Mahatma Gandhi made the Congress a mighty national movement. It is a moment to look back with pride and look forward with confidence and renewed hope."

The others who signed the statement were Pranab Mukherjee, Arjun Singh, N. D. Tiwari, K. Karunakaran, A. K. Antony, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Ahmed Patel, R. K. Dhawan, K. Vijay Bhaskar Reddy, Motilal Vora, Mrs Prabha Rau, S. C. Jamir, K. Natwar Singh, Madhavsinh Solanki, A. B. A. Ghani Khan Chaudhary, Bhajan Lal and P. M. Sayeed.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 NOV 2000

Prasada hopes to turn tables on Sonia

Our Mumbai Bureau

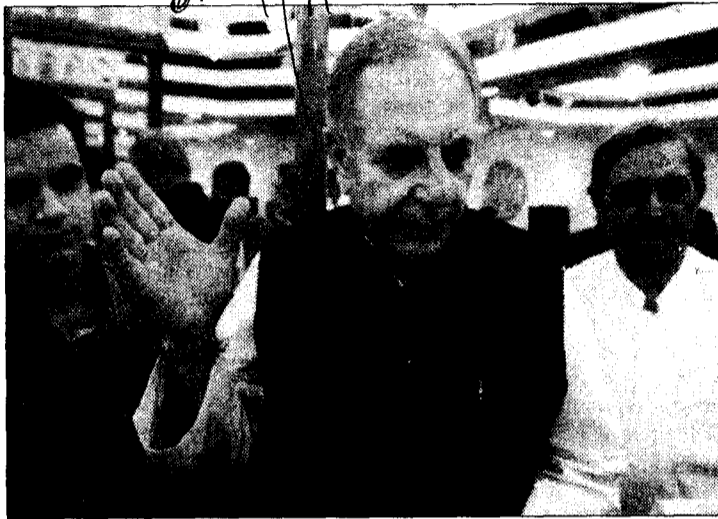
MUMBAI 8 November

DISSIDENT CONGRESS leader Jitendra Prasada, who is giving a tough time to Sonia Gandhi in the party's presidential election, claimed on Wednesday that the elections, if held in a "free and fair manner", could spring a "surprise result".

"I am contesting the elections on a 'positive agenda' and it is a battle between a coterie and the grassroots Congress workers", Mr Prasada said here.

Mr Prasada was given a rousing reception by a section of party workers at the airport but, for obvious reasons, no prominent leader from the Maharashtra Pradesh Congress committee (MPCC) was present on the occasion.

Mr Prasada, accompanied by Uttar Pradesh MPs — Begum Noor Bano and Khan Gufran Jahidi — and AICC member Mahesh Pathak, from the airport drove straight to Tilak Bhavan,



CHALLENGE ROUND: Jitendra Prasada, the lone contender against Sonia Gandhi, at a press meet in Mumbai on Wednesday.— AFP

the MPCC headquarters in Central Mumbai.

Mr Prasada claimed he wanted to restore inner party democracy and devise a "collective leadership". "If hurdles are created in this process then conflict

in the party will increase", he warned.

On the question of Sharad Pawar's alleged financial support to him Mr Prasada said: "I do not need finances from Mr Pawar. My friends can meet my needs."

Mr Prasada recalled that it was he who had supported the expulsion of Mr Pawar from the party when the latter had challenged Sonia Gandhi on the issue of her foreign origin.

However, he refused to comment on Ms Gandhi's criticism that he himself was a part of coterie during his tenure as political secretary to past Congress presidents — Rajiv Gandhi and PV Narasimha Rao. "Coterie is that when persons without any designations surround the leadership", he shot back.

"Without any dialogues and discussion the party is bound to be weakened and will not be able to take on challenges posed by communal and fascist forces", he said.

He termed as unfortunate the sacking of the Congress Seva Dal president who had welcomed him at Chennai airport. "Such incidents will spark more struggle within the party", Mr Prasada added.

The Economic Times

9 NOV 2000

Sonia's prestige fight begins

*'The counting is today, the
voting is tomorrow'*

By Smita Gupta

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Jitendra Prasad will celebrate his 62nd birthday on Sunday, but he is unlikely to relish the gift Sonia Gandhi's party managers have planned for him.

"The counting is today, the voting is tomorrow," said a Congressman, summing up the party consensus that the result of Sunday's election for the Congress president's post is a foregone conclusion. Sonia loyalists are sure of her win and are determined to ensure that the margin of victory is large enough to laugh her sole rival (Jitendra Prasad) out of political existence.

The aim is to make sure that Mr Prasad's score does not exceed that set by Rajesh Pilot and Sharad Pawar, who together secured 1,000 votes against Sitaram Kesri in the last organisational elections.

For, if Mr Prasad crosses that mark, he could emerge as another power centre in the Congress—perhaps not a direct threat to Ms Gandhi, but certainly to other leaders with aspirations to being number two.

For the moment, no one is placing any bets on how many votes Mr Prasad will garner, since very few of his supporters have publicly declared their intentions. The

reception he received in Chennai, Patna and Jaipur has been far from encouraging and the relatively warmer one he got in Mumbai was more due to his friends in the Nationalist Congress Party.

Even so, Ms Gandhi is taking the election very seriously. Instead of casting her vote in Delhi as initially planned, she will cast it in Lucknow where Mr Prasad has been camping since Saturday morning. Mr Prasad, too, will cast his vote there on Sunday. With 1,126 votes, Uttar Pradesh is the real 'battleground state'. Ms Gandhi must win convincingly from UP to re-establish her authority, which had been seriously eroded by Mr Prasad's daily pronouncements that the elections were being "managed".

Of course, Sonia loyalists have carefully gone through the list of PCC delegates from UP to filter out as many Prasad supporters as possible. The resentment among those left out—especially since both contestants will be in the city—could also mean a headache for the law enforcers in Lucknow.

If Ms Gandhi's presence in UP is expected to ~~be a~~ ~~big~~ ~~draw~~ in that state, chief ~~ministers~~ have been entrusted with the task of 'delivering' Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Chhattisgarh, Delhi and Arunachal Pradesh.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

12 NOV 2000

STRAY CLASHES IN LUCKNOW, CHENNAI

Huge voter turnout for Congress presidential poll

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, NOV. 12. The long and high-spirited battle for the Congress presidency came to an end this evening. The election, necessitated by Mr. Jitendra Prasad's decision to challenge party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, was marked by a huge voter turnout and stray clashes between rival supporters, particularly in Lucknow and Chennai.

The chairperson of the central election authority, Mr. Ram Niwas Mirdha, expressed satisfaction over the conduct of the poll. "It is a gigantic exercise and there may have been some shortcomings, but looking at the totality of things I am reasonably satisfied," he said. "The elections this time were much fairer than the ones held previously."

Lapses to be rectified

Briefing newsmen, Mr. Mirdha admitted to some lapses which would be rectified by a scrutiny committee set up by him. "I am determined to ensure that those who have undertaken the



The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, casting her vote at the party headquarters in Lucknow on Sunday. At right, Mr. Jitendra Prasad in action — Photo: Subir Roy

membership drive are not kept out."

The election was conducted at 36 polling stations at the PCC headquarters, including Uttaranchal, Jharkhand and Chattisgarh. The counting will take place on

November 15 at the AICC headquarters in the capital. Assam and Kerala could not take part because of their inability to the complete membership drive. In time, on account of elections to local bodies. Voting in Nagaland

and Mizoram were held on Saturday in deference to requests from the State units. There was a high turnout, with over 95 per cent of the nearly 8,000 delegates casting their vote. "The huge turnout also shows the seriousness with which the party workers have taken it," Mr. Mirdha said.

Shiela flaunts ballot

The voting was not without its share of drama. Leaders vied with one another to prove their loyalty to Ms. Gandhi's victory. In Delhi, the Chief Minister, Ms. Shiela Dixit, and Mr. Satish Sharma created a stir by openly displaying the ballot paper on which they had voted for Ms. Gandhi.

'No expelling Prasad'

In an apparent bid to heal wounds, Ms. Sonia Gandhi ruled out any action against Mr. Prasad for contesting. "Contesting elections is a part of the democratic process. There is no question of expelling him," she told newsmen in Lucknow.

More reports on Page 9

THE HINDU

13 NOV 2000

In praise of Jitendra Prasada

By Harish Khare

BY LATE this evening, Ms. Sonia Gandhi should have been declared elected president of the Congress. The margin of her "victory" is bound to be decisive. Irrespective of the many serious flaws in the "election", Ms. Gandhi will henceforth stand on a somewhat tenuous democratic footing. By this evening she will have washed off the stains of illegality that had coloured her "presidency" so far. In a very small way, she has put behind her the constitutional crime of March 14, 1998, when she encouraged a coup against a democratically-elected Congress president. Had Mr. Jitendra Prasada not committed the "treacherous" mistake of challenging the Nehru-Gandhi family, Ms. Gandhi's leadership would have remained coated in constitutional dubiousness. If nothing else, for this alone she should be grateful to Mr. Prasada for providing her with an occasion to earn a kind of democratic veneer.

Likewise, most of the Congress leaders — the Madhavrao Scindias, the Manmohan Singhs, the A. K. Antonys — should also be thankful to Mr. Prasada for giving them an opportunity for expiating their own sins in abetting the 1998 constitutional crime. Perhaps at a subconscious level Mr. Prasada himself was performing some kind of penance for the sin of presiding over that illegal meeting of the Congress Working Committee that "elected" Ms. Gandhi, after ousting Sitaram Kesri.

And, many of the State-level leaders should also be grateful to Mr. Prasada for engaging Ms. Gandhi in a contest, even if it was to be an unequal battle from the beginning. Suddenly the 10 Janpath establishment became solicitous of the Pradesh Congress bosses. The Elangovans, the Girija Vyases, the Subash Chopras, who were flirting with marginalisation and powerlessness, found themselves courted by the otherwise arrogant "coteries". What is more the "delegates" — including the wives, servants, drivers — got at least a polite letter from Ms. Gandhi, seeking their votes. Anything or anyone who becomes a cause for restoring some balance between haughty dynastic arrogance and democratic decency should be applauded.

is no longer enamoured of dynasties and feudal orders. It is the Congress' internal affair if the Sonia cabal is able to browbeat the rest of the organisation into paying obeisance to the "Family", but the rest of the country would abandon the Congress rather than sing the dynasty hymns. Nor is the electorate obliged to subscribe to the Vijayabhaskara Reddys' and the K. Karunakarans' chant that "there is no alternative to Sonia".

Yet the Congress' historic role and place in the Indian polity remains unsurpassed, at least till such time as the BJP is able to evolve itself into a non-sectarian, inclusive and accommodative organisation, harmonising the nationalist and egalitarian aspirations of all sections of Indian society. The robust presence of all-India political parties is crucial to the survival of a pan-Indian polity. Paradoxically enough, for now the Congress survives and even prospers where it is able to market itself as a regional party, an almost independent alternative to the ruling or challenging party in this or that State; this process of regionalisation of an all-India party is not exactly a happy development but perhaps an inevitable byproduct of the double handicap of dynasticification and over-centralisation.

The next few months will witness massive as well as ugly manoeuvres to rearrange equations among the various functional and potential coteries. The senior leaders who behaved admirably as organisational men and helped rescue the Congress from the dynasty's destructive demands, now have another task before them: they must insist Ms. Gandhi go about in a wholesome manner repairing her deficiencies in skills of communication, charisma and credibility.

If for better or worse Ms. Gandhi is to be the Congress' supreme leader and its prime ministerial candidate, then they must use their just-demonstrated usefulness to insist that she can rule only by tapping the collective creative energies of the entire organisation; only then can the Congress reap a rich harvest of new ideas, innovations and inspirations. In other words, the Jitendra Prasada agenda must become the Sonia agenda.

Anything or anyone who becomes a cause for restoring some balance between haughty dynastic arrogance and democratic decency should be applauded.

organisation, and no one had the stomach for another round of internal fragmentation.

Now that the Congress is legally a property of the Nehru-Gandhi family, has the party *ipso facto* overcome its creeping marginalisation in the Indian polity? Once the hired crowds leave after joyfully dancing and celebrating Ms. Gandhi's grand victory, the Congress will realise that the party's diminishing assets and increasing liabilities remain more or less unchanged. However, a small advantage has indeed accrued to the Congress. In a way the Jitendra Prasada-inspired challenge has helped dispel whatever doubts had arisen about tenability of Ms. Gandhi's so-called charismatic leadership after the Congress touched its lowest-ever Lok Sabha tally of 112 seats. To the extent there is bound to be a certain degree of cohesiveness over the leadership issue, the "elected" Ms. Gandhi should help the Congress redefine its collective urges and aspirations; what the party stands for and what the party is opposed to. In other words, the Congress has to convince the country that it has a *raison d'être* other than keeping the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty in a position of real or illusory power.

Unfortunately the massive "victory" has not — and cannot — make up for Ms. Gandhi's severe and debilitating leadership deficiencies in terms of competence, commitment and compassion. Consequently, the Congress will remain conspicuously handicapped as it undertakes the twin tasks of repairing its electoral "winnability" on a national scale and of redefining its profile in the context of an India that has changed beyond recognition since the days Indira Gandhi presided over South Block. The two tasks go hand in hand, one necessarily reinforcing the other.

In other words, the Congress will have to come to terms with the fact that democratic India — an India that is increasingly wired to a vibrant global community —

STATECRAFT

Even before the actual votes were cast on November 12, the Jitendra Prasada effect was being felt. It has, for example, gone mostly unnoticed that recently when the Congress swept the panchayat polls in Gujarat, the AICC took care to attribute the victory to the "Congress activists"; contrast this bow in the direction of the humble worker with the dynastic vanity displayed only two years ago, in November 1998, when the Congress had fortuitously won Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi. The CWC resolution had laid the entire credit at Ms. Gandhi's feet for bringing the minorities, the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes back to the Congress. It is a different matter that the CWC was conspicuously silent when it came to explaining why within six months these very vote-banks abandoned the party when the Congress went to the polls with her as the prime ministerial candidate.

Indeed the organisational leaders — the Digvijay Singhs, the Ashok Ghelots, the Ahmed Patels, the Pranab Mukherjees — have another reason to be obligated to Mr. Prasada for unwittingly creating a situation which allowed them to exorcise the organisation of the ghost of a split. It has been the private conclusion of most Congressmen that from mid-1994 onward 10 Janpath had become the source of internal destabilisation and a possible split. At least those who floated the Congress (I) believed that they had Ms. Gandhi's blessings in their splitting adventure. In a way since then the Congress leaders have been made to understand that unless Ms. Gandhi was accepted and humoured as a leader, the party would be subjected to further convulsions. The reason why the entire Congress rank and file rallied behind Ms. Gandhi so brazenly and so inexplicably was because of a desire to rescue the party from her insecurities and ambitions. All the unhappy and sceptical state leaders knew that any attempt to dislodge a non-performing Ms. Gandhi would mean another split in the

TIME FOR THE BLUES: PARENT PARTY'S STAND AN EYE-OPENER FOR EX-PM

Cong gives Rao the short shrift

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 12 OCTOBER

IN A carefully crafted political obituary to the premier who rang in economic reforms and built for the party the very bedrock of its current platform, the Congress, on Thursday, firmly distanced itself from the verdict pronounced by Judge Ajit Bharihoke against Mr P.V. Narasimha Rao.

Ironically, the loudest refrain was of the by now cliched one-liner that Mr Rao himself had coined in the aftermath of the hawala charges which felled several of his key critics in the party, just prior to the 1996 Lok Sabha elections and which brought the United Front to power at the Centre: "The law will take its course."

Underlining the irony of the official reaction, the ex-premier's committed comrade-in-arms in the Cabinet on economic liberalisation during the first half of the

decade, Dr Manmohan Singh, was among the few top leaders of the party who paid a visit to Mr Rao's residence soon after the verdict on the JMM bribery case was pronounced on Thursday.

Party spokesperson Ajit Jogi, reading out the official reaction of the party, held: "The Congress party has great regard the independence of the judiciary."

As a "political party committed to the rule of law," he said, the party could only observe that Mr Rao had the right to appeal against the verdict. Making it more than plain that the current high command in the party will leave Mr Rao to his own resources on the JMM bribery case, the party spokesman held in the main Opposition party's reaction to Thursday's significant development.

"Doubtless, he will do so and the law will take its course." With this, the Congress leadership under Ms Sonia Gandhi made it

patently clear that Mr Rao the dark horse from outside the Nehru-Gandhi clan who took over from Rajiv Gandhi as the chief of the Congress party and successfully ran the government for its full five-year term since June 21, 1991 despite the fact that he was a perceived as a virtual "outsider" in the party's pecking order was of no use to it politically any longer.

Ms Gandhi's visit to Mr Rao's Motilal Nehru Marg immediately after the September 29 was, in the face of this, a strictly private affair.

Former finance minister and the ex-premier's close ally in the implementation of economic reforms and liberalisation, despite sharp criticism at the time, Mr Manmohan Singh, also paid him a personal visit on Thursday after the passing of the verdict.

Mr Singh, who continues to be the most public face of reforms within the Congress party until

Thursday, following the virtual ostracisation of Mr Rao by the current party high command, had to countenance the leadership's inclination to play political tic-tac-toe with economic reforms during the last Parliament session.

Subsequently, he begged off the inhouse panel to spell out the Congress' current stand on economic reforms, a subject with which he is perceived as virtually synonymous.

Apart from Mr Singh, the only other constants from the party publicly supportive of Mr Rao since end-September have been former Youth Congress chief Maninder Singh Bitta and now NCP leader Devendra Dwivedi.

The official response of Mr Rao's parent party is also interesting when viewed against the general perception among the rest of the Opposition that the Congress party has virtually been reduced to a "me, too" even on economic reforms.

The Economic Times

13 OCT 2006

A107

Thumping victory for Sonia

9 p. Prasad

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, NOV. 15. In the end, it turned out to be a no-contest. The Congress today gave Ms. Sonia Gandhi a thumping mandate, with 7,448 out of the 7,712 votes polled going in her favour. Her challenger, Mr. Jitendra Prasad, could muster only 94 votes, a mere 1.21 per cent of the votes polled.

The outcome, though a foregone conclusion, surprised even Mr. Prasad's supporters who were expecting him to at least match the performance of the late Rajesh Pilot who polled 323 votes while contesting against former Congress chief, Sitaram Kesri. The results, in hindsight, prove that though Mr. Prasad mounted a high-spirited campaign, he was never really in the fight, not even in his home State, Uttar Pradesh — where he secured less than one per cent of the over 1,100 electoral college votes.

The first member of the Nehru-Gandhi family to face a contest for presidentship, Ms. Sonia Gandhi also becomes the first from the family to be formally elected to lead the party. And de-

spite the challenge to her leadership, today's result proves that the party rank and file is solidly with her. The result also provides

her the mandate to create her own team and bring about greater assertiveness in decision-making. A triumphant Ms. Gandhi hint-

ed as much during a chat with newsmen after being declared elected. She has already summoned all the Congress Chief Ministers to the capital on Friday for a stock-taking session and revealed that she planned to unveil a new agenda for the party at the AICC session.

The Congress president, however, disagreed with suggestions that the poll process had not been fair. "There may have been shortcomings but looking at the totality of the process, it was not only fair but also transparent." She refused to commit herself to the constitution of a central parliamentary board, saying "there may or may not be one".

Questioned about Mr. Prasad's future in the party, Ms. Gandhi said as far as she was concerned she saw nothing wrong in his contesting. "He has done nothing wrong, he was well within his rights to do what he did."

Mr. Prasad, on his part, said he felt vindicated by the result because the issues raised by him were still relevant. He said he would continue to raise issues that he considered were for the party's good.



The Congress president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, receiving the certificate after she was re-elected party president at the AICC headquarters in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

THE HINDU

16 NOV 1990

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SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2000

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SONIA'S TASK AHEAD 18/11

THE EMPHATIC "VICTORY" of Ms. Sonia Gandhi in the Congress organisational elections has given her the distinction of being the first ever member of the Nehru-Indira dynasty to have been elected as president of the party. It was Sitaram Kesri who had set the ball rolling when he agreed to give effect to the provisions in the party's constitution; it may be true that the elections, even at that time, were reduced to an unequal contest in which Kesri did make full use of the advantage he had as president (a post to which he had anointed himself replacing Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao) leaving the two other contestants — Mr. Sharad Pawar and Rajesh Pilot — way behind in the final tally of votes. But then, Kesri was not a member of the dynasty. To the extent that Ms. Gandhi agreed to a similar course was, indeed, a positive step.

It is another matter that by reducing the whole exercise into yet another occasion to underline loyalty to the "leader" all those in the party's working committee (Mr. Jitendra Prasada happened to be the odd man out in the working committee, for once) and the State units had let go of an opportunity to introspect on the state of the party. The support Ms. Gandhi enjoyed in the organisation was not in doubt and it was clear from the beginning that Mr. Prasada's challenge was only of symbolic importance; and this was established in the number of votes she secured. It is now clear that the party's ranks have pinned all their hopes on Ms. Gandhi and in this sense reaffirmed their "faith" in the ability of a member from the Nehru-Indira dynasty to revive the party's fortunes.

Be that as it may, Ms. Gandhi has a difficult task ahead. To begin with, elections to the Pradesh Congress Committees will have to be held; the various State units are already out with resolutions "authorising" the party president to nominate the PCC chief. This certainly is not in the

interest of the party and unless Ms. Gandhi stands firmly against this tendency, there can be very little hope for the revival of the party. Meanwhile, Ms. Gandhi's first step after her election as president — a meeting with all the Congress Chief Ministers — is certainly a positive signal; but then, it is important that she makes use of this to have a meaningful dialogue rather than let it become yet another occasion for all the partymen to rise up in praise of the leader. The experience in those States where the Congress is still in power can indeed help in a big way to understand the factors that led to the party's decline and decimation in many other parts. The lessons from Madhya Pradesh, perhaps the only State where the Congress has continued to remain a strong force, can help the party in drawing up its future course.

Similarly, there is no way that Ms. Gandhi can postpone any further the task of formulating the party's views on the economic reforms. While on the one hand the party cannot afford any populist slogans on the measures now being taken by the ruling BJP-led coalition on the economic policy front, the leadership cannot shun a serious debate within the party on its future course on this issue. It is also necessary now for Ms. Gandhi to initiate a discussion within on the churning process in the social arena (in the post-Mandal context) in such States as Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. After all, the Congress decline in these States was caused by the party's inability to remain relevant in the fast-changing social context. Unless the party organisation is re-invented in these States as also in such other States as West Bengal and Tamil Nadu — an agenda that Ms. Gandhi had set for herself when she replaced Kesri as party president in April 1998 — her emphatic victory in the organisational elections will have very little utility.

THE HINDU

18 NOV 2000

WHAT A FARCE!

Sonia elected Congress president

AS expected Sonia Gandhi was elected Congress president with an overwhelming majority polling 98.88 per cent of the votes. Her opponent, Jitendra Prasada got only 94 votes, much less than Sharad Pawar and Rajesh Pilot who got 850 and 325 votes when they contested against Sitaram Kesri in 1997. After the election Sonia was a picture of confidence and described the victory as a milestone of inner-party democracy. She has some nerve! The campaign and polling showed how jittery she was and proved that the Congress is still too frightened of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty to even dream about inner-party democracy. Prasada did not stand a chance, not because of Sonia's popularity, but because the state units were too busy trying to prove that they were more loyal than the queen. He was not allowed access to the basic infrastructure that any Congressmen contesting should be entitled as a matter of course. He was not given a list of delegates, PCC offices were closed to him when he came calling, leaders refused to take his phone calls and some PCCs went so far as to lock up their offices and go into hiding at the mere rumour that he was in town, the party organ *Congress Sandesh* refused to take cognisance of his candidature. Even on the day of polling, leaders determined to prove their loyalty to Sonia made a mockery of the secret ballot by brandishing their marked ballot papers in front of photographers and TV cameras. Congressmen should pray to be spared so much democracy.

Her loyalists are celebrating, but the real victor is Prasada who was bold enough to stand up and be counted. He has reached a dead end in his political career in the Congress and is unlikely to occupy the position of the main dissident leader, but he will be remembered for at least trying to bring some semblance of democracy into a party which has sold its soul to the dynasty. The fact that the Sonia coterie was forced to stoop to such tactics to ensure a win is a tribute to the threat Prasada posed to the Gandhi family's future. He was never a heavyweight leader, strong enough to take Sonia on properly, and his candidature should not have worried her. But her inability to brook any opposition made her want to inflict a crushing defeat on Prasad, in the hope that it will frighten all others from ever thinking of trying it again. Sonia destroyed what little was left of Congress' image as a democratic party, and thrust the election process below a farce.

THE STATESMAN

18 NOV 2000

Prasada revolt call against Sonia

FROM RASHIED KIDWAI

New Delhi, Oct. 20: Rebel Congress leader Jitendra Prasada has written a letter to "crores of party workers", virtually asking them to revolt against Sonia Gandhi.

The letter exhorts them to speak out "fearlessly, without any inhibition and hesitation, without any apprehension of reprisal from vested interests, coterie, sycophants and time servers".

The four-page "open letter" questions the rationale of allying with "tainted leaders" like RJD boss Laloo Yadav and ADMK chief Jayalalitha, but is silent on P.V. Narasimha Rao's conviction

in the JMM bribery case.

Though Prasada is yet to officially declare himself as a candidate for the top party post, his actions in the last few days have left no one in doubt that he is aiming to grab the space of the principal dissident lying vacant since the exit of Sharad Pawar and the death of Rajesh Pilot.

Prasada, in fact, seems to have taken over from where Pawar left off. Without raising Sonia's foreign origins, the letter makes it clear that she is incapable of taking independent decisions and that the coterie around her is calling the shots. It claims that under Sonia, a rudderless Con-

gress has lost contact with the masses and is responsible for the rise of the BJP.

"There is a growing feeling that our ideological vision has blurred and our participation in popular causes has dwindled," Prasada writes.

The letter rues the lack of transparency in decision-making. It accuses the leadership of neglecting the sentiments of grassroots workers and ignoring the high moral pitch of the Panchmarhi declaration.

"This election, therefore, must be dedicated to the restoration of the dignity of humble Congress workers. This can be ensured if

they are allowed to vote freely and fairly. The Congress will be revitalised if their verdict is genuinely respected and not subverted by manipulation," Prasada writes.

He cites the example of Bengal, Tamil Nadu, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar and Orissa, saying that under Sonia, the party is in a shambles in these states. "In states where we face diverse political combinations, the Congress has failed to make any headway," he says.

Before this missive, Prasada had written four letters to Ram Niwas Mirdha questioning the manner in which party polls are being conducted.

THE TELEGRAPH

2 1 1 1 2 00

Kesri and three transitions in Cong.

By Harish Khare ^{HD-13}

NEW DELHI, OCT. 25. To the extent that Sitaram Kesri had become in recent years one of the central figures in determining the external direction and internal priorities of the Congress, his death symbolically marks the last of the three transitions the party has undergone in as many years. ^{MC}

First, in his death the Congress has lost its most unapologetic advocate of the Mandal politics, and by definition his death means that the party's links with the social justice constituency stand weakened. Both within and outside the party, Kesri was known for promoting and patronising the "backwards" and their political interests. Leaders such as Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan, Mr. Veeramani, Mr. Nitish Kumar and Mr. Kanshi Ram were welcome visitors to his residence; they shared confidences and trust with him. Within the party he patronised promising backward class leaders such as Mr. Ashok Gehlot and Mr. Dharam Singh. His death weakens the Congress' collective instinct for maintaining and strengthening bridges with the "backward" constituency.

The second transition can be dated to May 20, 1999 when Kesri was demonstratively roughed up by the Congress goons at the party headquarters. That planned roughing up was administered to the old man just as the Congress Working Committee members were arriving at 24, Akbar Road to



The President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, placing a wreath on the body of the former Congress president, Sitaram Kesri, in New Delhi on Wednesday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

discuss and expel the Sharad Pawar-P.A.Sangma-Tariq Anwar trio for daring to "challenge" Mrs. Sonia Gandhi. Someone had decided that Kesri — as also others — was among the "suspects", lacking in hundred per cent loyalty to the leadership. That evening, the country silently watched the physical humiliation of Kesri and drew its own conclusions about the Congress and its leadership; there was a disagreeable note to that evening of May 20, and put in place rough attitudes, which inhibit wholesomeness in decision-making. Though the Congressmen failed to protest this organised hooliganism and all that its symbolised, the electorate

had its say soon in the general elections.

And, the third transition, of course, took place on March 14, 1998 when the Congress Working Committee took the unprecedented and unconstitutional step of stripping an elected president of his post. The constitutional coup was hailed widely as restoring the party's leadership back to the site of its only natural entitlement — the Nehru-Gandhi family. When the historians get to chronicle the import of that eventful day, most of the honorable men of the Congress would be shown to have acted way less than honourably; even those who owned their rehabilitation and place in the CWC to

the old man had no qualms in abandoning him. The transition that day cast the Congress(I) once again in the dynastic mold, and the consequences are visible.

What is most ironic is that Kesri should have died just when the Congress was to begin formally a poll process. It is supreme irony that all the three candidates of the last presidential election — only third in its 112 year history — are metaphorically out of the picture. Rajesh Pilot and Sitaram kesri are dead, and Mr. Sharad Pawar has been expelled. There is an altogether a new Congress, and Kesri's departure on Tuesday night only emphasises that newness and all its implications.

26 OCT 2000

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SLOGANEERING, SCUFFLES MARK OCCASION

30/10

Prasada files nomination

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 29. Endings days of suspense, the senior Congress leader, Mr. Jitendra Prasada, today filed his nomination papers for the Congress presidential polls, setting the stage for a contest against the incumbent, Ms. Sonia Gandhi.

Mr. Prasada, also a former vice-president of the party, drove in a motorcade to the AICC headquarters at 24, Akbar Road and filed his nomination papers on the last day of the nomination today. He was accompanied by three MPs and some MLAs.

Till Saturday, Mr. Prasada had refrained from disclosing his plans in clear-cut terms for contesting the presidential polls and maintained that he had raised certain issues which should be resolved. At the same time, he



Mr. Jitendra Prasada after filing his nomination

vowed to continue his "fight on issues to its logical conclusion."

In a statement, Mr. Prasada said he had raised issues pertaining to revitalisation of the party, inner-party democracy, free, fair and impartial elections, autonomy to all organs of the party, respect for the party constitution, dignity and respect for the grass-roots worker and upholding the party ideology to fight divisive forces.

The occasion of Mr. Prasada's filing of nomination papers at the AICC headquarters was marked by jostling, sloganeering, and minor scuffles between his supporters and the Sonia loyalists. Posters of Ms. Gandhi and huge hoardings of Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi reminded the party workers to maintain the tradition of "great leadership".

Emerging out of the party headquarters, Mr. Prasada said that his decision to contest the party's presidential polls was a tribute to the late Congress leaders, Sitaram Kesri and Rajesh Pilot, who had made efforts for inner-party democracy. He said it was also to honour the wishes of the party-men. Later, the chairman of the party's central election authority, Mr. Ram Niwas Mirdha, told reporters that 87 nominations had been filed. Of these, he said, 82 were in favour of Ms. Sonia Gandhi and five for Mr. Prasada.

Of the five nominations filed in favour of Mr. Prasada, two were from Uttar Pradesh and three



Policemen trying to prevent a clash between the supporters of Ms. Sonia Gandhi and Mr. Jitendra Prasada during the filing of nominations at the AICC office in New Delhi on Sunday. — Photo: S. Subramaniam

jointly from Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Chandigarh, Maharashtra, Orissa and Jharkhand. Three MPs from U.P. — Begum Noor Bano, Mr. Khan Gufran Zahidi and Mr. S. S. Bundela — and nearly half a dozen party MLAs from the State supported Mr. Prasada's candidature.

The AICC spokesman, Mr. Ajit Jogi, said Mr. Prasada's nomination showed there was inner-party democracy in the Congress.

As many as 8,500 Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC) delegates from all the States and Union Territories are likely to participate in the multitiered process of the presidential elections, slated for November 12. Scrutiny would be held tomorrow and the last date for withdrawal of nominations is November 5.

First to contest against Nehru-Gandhi family: Page 13

THE HINDU

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A DAY OF CHAOS AT AICC HEADQUARTERS

Prasada will take on Sonia Gandhi

By Smita Gupta
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: It was a day of chaos and confusion at All-India Congress Committee (AICC) headquarters. The reason: Congress Working Committee (CWC) member Jithendra Prasada, breaking weeks of suspense, filed his nomination papers for Congress party president's post on Sunday.

After the nomination papers were filed, a skirmish between Mr Prasada's and current Congress president Sonia Gandhi's supporters broke out, indicating that the battle lines were well and truly drawn.

While Sonia followers shouted slogans proclaiming that no one had the right to contest against their leader, a supporter of Mr Prasada tore up a Sonia poster.

As soon as the slanging match began to take a ugly turn, chief spokesperson of Congress Ajit Jogi and party MP Renuka Chowdhury—apart from the policemen posted there—calmed down the two groups.

Mr Jogi, commenting on the episode, said, "The Congress is a democratic party, anyone is free to file his nomination for party president."

In the morning, there was an air of great anticipation at Mr Prasada's Teen Murti road residence. His supporters vied for the attention of TV cameras to deliver lectures on "inner party democracy" and the poor leadership quali-

ty of Sonia Gandhi. Interestingly, party MPs Noor Bano, Gufran Zaidi and S.S. Bundela—who have filed nomination papers for Mr Prasada—maintained a discreet silence on the group's future plans.

Noor Bano merely said that it was a battle about issues dear to the heart of Congressmen, a point of view rubbished by former UPCC chief Salman Khurshid.

"There are no issues involved in his candidacy. He has offered no alternate view on how to enhance the role of the workers," Mr Khurshid said.

On the other hand, Mr Prasada, flanked by his supporters shouting slogans, said he was contesting to honour the wishes of the



Jitendra Prasada

ALL THE CONGRESS' MEN

- 'Anyone is free to file his nomination for party president,' says Ajit Jogi
- 'There are no issues involved in Prasada's candidacy,' says Salman Khurshid
- 'I am contesting to honour the wishes of party workers,' says Jitendra Prasada

Rajesh Pilot. "Kesriji was our leader, I pay homage to him. Rajesh Pilot started this campaign, I pay homage to him," he said.

A campaign committee for Mr Prasada will be constituted shortly. Mr Prasada will now travel all over the country to lobby for support.

Later, Congress election authority chairperson Ramniwas Mirdha said that another six sets of nomination papers had been filed on Sonia's behalf, taking the tally of nomination papers for her up to 80. Voting, he said, would take place on November 12, after which the ballot boxes will be brought to Delhi.



PARTYING IS SUCH SWEET SORROW: Supporters of Mr Prasada at the AICC headquarters in New Delhi on Sunday as they go down to the grassroots with support.

More arrests in Kani

VANCOUVER: Canadian authorities said on Saturday that more arrests were likely in connection with the 1985 bombing of an Air-India airliner off the coast of Ireland in which 329 people were killed.

On Friday, a spokesperson of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had announced the arrest of two suspects—Ajaib Singh Bagri and Ripudaman Singh Malick. They have been charged on eight counts. Malik and Bagri are in custody and will appear in a Vancouver provincial court on

Monday. Charges against them include first degree attempted murder and connection with a s explosion the same day at Narita Airport that killed gage handlers. The being transferred to flight from a flight f when the explosion o-

The two arrested n highly influential pe the community, who l eral occasions, met to political leaders. Mali

No turning back now, says Prasad

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, October 30

DISSIDENT LEADER Jitendra Prasad tended to rule out today the withdrawal of his candidature against Mrs Sonia Gandhi in the election to the Congress president's office. In fact, he sought to showcase his electoral bid as "a battle between coteries and grassroots party workers".

"Every candidate contests for winning. I have filed my papers. Where else can I go now," Mr Prasad told newsmen here. Later in the day, Mr R N Mirdha, chairman of the Congress' Central Election Authority, found his nomination papers, and those filed on behalf of Mrs Sonia Gandhi, in order.

Besides setting up a regular campaign panel, Mr Prasad plans to visit all State capitals for mobilising support.

Anxious to lend an altruistic touch to what essentially was a power game, Mr Prasad said he

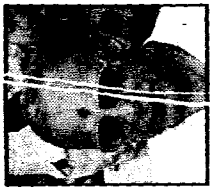
wanted to save the Congress from cabals and coteries eating into the vitals of all political parties.

"They encircle the leadership, insulate it from workers and block channel of intra-party communication."

completely of the blame for the Congress' sorry state.

"I also hold myself responsible for what has happened," he said. "But time has come for the party to change."

Prasada's agenda



- Respect for party constitution.
- Fair elections.
- Full term for party panels at all levels.
- Decentralisation of party work.
- Leaders should not decide on behalf of organisational bodies.
- Daily meetings of Parliamentary Board.
- Regular meetings of other party committees.
- Democratic functioning of frontal bodies.

tion."

A day after becoming the first ever Congress leader to challenge the Nehru-Gandhi family's hold on the party, Mr Jitendra Prasad decided from attacking Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

He also agreed with a questioner that he could not absolve himself

other elections for which leaders had campaigned.

Mr Prasad's eight-point recipe for restoration of 'workers' dignity' included discontinuation of the practice of authorising leaders to take decisions falling in the domain of various organisational bodies.

In a proposal aimed at curtailing the party chief's vast powers, he demanded that the Congress Parliamentary Board (CPB), which hasn't been in existence since the days of former Prime Minister Mr P V Narasimha Rao, be constituted on a regular basis for formulating the party's responses to emerging issues.

In what clearly was a reaffirmation of the issues raised by him in an open letter to partymen some days ago, Mr Prasad remarked:

"The Congress will lose its relevance if we do not steadfastly combat ideologies and parties that promote narrow loyalties. This was the message of (the party's) Pachmarhi (session)."

Tiger killing: SC summons Zoo Authority chief

THE SUPREME Court has summoned the Central Zoo Authority chief for a detailed account of the steps taken to preserve tigers in zoos and reserve forests.

Voicing concern over the recent killing and skinning of a tiger in an Andhra zoo, a three-judge bench today directed the Central Zoo Authority chief to appear on the next hearing on a PIL to explain the position. The PIL filed by a wildlife activist, Navin M. Raheja alleged the Government has failed to curb poaching of tigers. Referring to Government's inaction, the court asked: "Has anything been done? Will animals be slaughtered because they cannot sit in dharmas or vote?"

The bench comprising Chief Justice A.S. Anand, Justice R.C. Lahoti and Justice Brijesh Kumar further said: "It distresses us that tigers in captivity should have no protection from those who keep them in zoos." **HTC, NewDelhi**

ELECTION FEVER TAKES ITS TOLL

CWC polls worry senior Cong leaders

Swaraj Thapa

NEW DELHI 29 NOVEMBER

THE CONGRESS is preparing for the next stage of internal democracy — elections to the CWC. But the story in the party is that very few of the bigwigs are willing to take the plunge this time.

Holding them back, to their utter consternation, is the decision they themselves subserviently endorsed last year — to accord 33 per cent reservation to women and another 20 per cent for weaker sections and minorities. This is eating up six of the 12 seats in the CWC for which elections will be held. For the male-dominated, top-heavy party, this means that effectively, there are only six CWC seats for which they can aspire, without opting for the nomination route.

Ironically, the party increased its CWC membership from 20 (10 elected and 10 nominated) to 24 (12 elected and 12 nominated) after the Panchmarhi conclave.

The ramifications of the decision are creeping in now and party bigwigs are putting the blame on senior member Pranab Mukherjee, who drafted the rules that has left them with even lesser leeway for manoeuvring and manipulation.

“Since it was Mr Mukherjee who drafted the rules, we assumed that he would take care. But it seems he did not consider the consequences fully,” a senior CWC member complained.

Women leaders in the party, of course, are more than pleased and are keenly awaiting the CWC elections. With eight seats (four through the elected route and four through nomination) at their disposal, they have nothing to complain about.

Among those expected to make it to the CWC are Ambika Soni, Margaret Alva, Prabha Rau, Mohsina Kidwai and Chandresh Kumari.

TN factionalism to test Sonia

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 29 NOVEMBER

WITH FACTIONALISM tearing apart the Congress, president Sonia Gandhi's authority, after her re-election, is being put to test by the coming PCC polls in some states.

The focus is on Tamil Nadu where rebels, backed by general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad, is pulling out all the stops to oust state PCC chief E.V.K.S. Elangovan who had been personally chosen by Ms Gandhi.

The various factions in the state — these include the likes of K.V. Thanka balu, Anabarasu and T. Ramamurthy who had been at loggerheads only sometime back — scored major gains on Wednesday when they managed to get the PCC to authorise Ms Gandhi to nominate its next chief.

The TNCC was one of the few states to have refrained from following the other PCCs in this regard. Such a move had been resisted strongly by Mr Elangovan, who was being backed by Mani Shankar Aiyar and R. Prabhu.

A contest would have enabled Mr Elangovan to become the official nominee, which would have then forced everyone to vote for him.

Mr Aiyar, by forcing the idea of a contest, had even managed to thwart such a move by the pro-changers at a meeting last week.

Mr Prabhu, additionally, had contended that it would be better if the PCC approved the unanimous re-election of Mr Elangovan.

Wednesday's move to get the PCC to authorise Ms Gandhi indicates that the lobbies have managed to prevail in the first stage.

The Economic Times

30 NOV 2000

NINE OTHERS ACQUITTED; HEARING ON OCT. 11

Rao, Buta convicted in MPs bribery case

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 29. A special court here today convicted the former Prime Minister, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, and his Cabinet colleague, Mr. Buta Singh, in the 'Jharkhand Mukti Morcha case' on charges of bribing members of Parliament to buy votes to save the minority Congress(I) Government in the no-confidence motion in 1993. Nine others were acquitted.

On the quantum of sentence, the court said it would be determined after giving an opportunity to Mr. Rao and Mr. Singh to put forth their arguments and fixed the case for hearing on October 11.

This is the first time in independent India that trial in a corruption case at the highest level and particularly against a former Prime Minister has ended in conviction.

Mr. Rao, who was present in the jampacked court hall in the high-security Vigyan Bhavan, was visibly upset. He told reporters, "I have nothing to say. I don't know on what grounds..." Asked whether he would file an appeal, he said, "I have to consult my lawyers."

The judge, Mr. Ajit Bharihoke, found the two accused guilty under Section 120 (b) IPC (criminal conspiracy) and Sections 7, 11, 12 (abetment to corruption) and 13 (1) (d) (dealing with abuse of office by a public servant to secure pecuniary advantage for himself or others) of the Prevention of Corruption Act.

Nine other accused were, however, given the benefit of the doubt: the former Union Ministers, Mr. Satish Sharma and Mr.



The former Prime Minister, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, coming out of the Vigyan Bhavan court, in New Delhi on Friday.

— Photo: Shanker Chakravarty.

Ajit Singh, the former Haryana Chief Minister, Mr. Bhajan Lal, the former Karnataka Chief Minister, Mr. Veerappa Moily, the former Karnataka Ministers, Mr. H.M. Revanna and Mr. Ramalinga Reddy, the former Rajya Sabha member, Mr. V. Rajeshwar Rao, and the Karnataka liquor barons, Mr. D. K. Adikesavulu and Mr. M. Thimmegowda. The CBI case was that Mr. Rao, who was heading a minority government, hatched a criminal conspiracy with other accused to save his government during the no-confidence motion in the Lok Sabha on July 28, 1993 by influencing some Opposition MPs allegedly through payment of hefty bribes.

The CBI filed the first chargesheet on October 30, 1996 against Mr. Rao, Mr. Buta Singh, Mr. Satish Sharma and four JMM MPs —

Mr. Shibu Soren, Mr. Shailendra Mahto, Mr. Suraj Mandal and Mr. Simon Marandi. The second and third chargesheets were filed in December 1996 and January 1997, naming the other accused.

The judge relied on the statement of the approver, Mr. Mahto, who had said that each JMM member received Rs. 50 lakhs after the voting took place and the no-confidence motion was defeated.

The court held that the recovery of money from the Nauroji Nagar branch of the Punjab National Bank in South Delhi substantiated Mr. Mahto's statement. "This evidence was sufficient to prove the prosecution case against the accused Mr. Narasimha Rao and Mr. Buta Singh," the judge said.

Parties cautious: Page 13

DESTRUCT BUTTON

5/10/99 Sonia under challenge in her party ✓

CONGRESS'S membership numbers are dropping precipitously — both “primary” and “active” members have fallen by more than 50 per cent since its last organisational elections in 1997. According to Ram Niwas Mirdha, falling numbers are explained by the fact that those who are now left are “genuine” members, which would imply two things. One, here is an admission that past membership figures were fake. Two, if this search for genuine members continues they may soon add up to the Gandhi family and not more. Sonia Gandhi must be more exercised about the fact that AICC's organisational elections have come up again, where her leadership is under challenge, and two other contenders have had the temerity to throw their hats into the ring — Kapil Sibal and Jitendra Prasada. Sibal may not be a serious contender, but Prasada's candidature should have set alarm bells ringing in the Sonia camp — when last heard, she was busy handpicking returning officials for the polls. This raises the spectre of what happened during the last polling round, which were widely regarded as having been manipulated, and the doddering Sitaram Kesri was able to trounce able men like Sharad Pawar, leading to the latter's exit from the party.

This suggests another reason for the party's declining numbers, ability is read as a threat to dynastic ambition and is cut to size. The coterie around Sonia has now trained its guns on Digvijay Singh despite, or perhaps because of, his having delivered a convincing victory for the Congress during the last Assembly poll in MP. In other words, the Congress is adept at decimating its most able people and shooting itself in the foot. In that case, its declining numbers shouldn't be a mystery. Priyanka has given birth to a child, which may have raised visions among Sonia supporters of perpetuating the dynasty for another two generations. The problem is, given the trend of falling numbers, the Congress may not be around that long.

THE STATESMAN

19 SEP 2000

Confusion in Cong over economic reforms panel

SANJIV SINHA
NEW DELHI, JUNE 2

FIRST, there was confusion in the Congress over its approach to the ongoing economic reforms. And, as if that was not enough, there is now an unseemly controversy in the party on whether a panel to review the economic policies is being constituted.

Whereas senior party leaders, including party chief Sonia Gandhi, have "indicated" the need to form a panel of MPs and other experts to review the party's economic policies and suggest appropriate changes, the party's media department has been inexplicably denying that such a committee is to be constituted. In response to a specific query on the issue, the party's official spokesperson had a couple of days back officially stated that "there was no move to form a panel to review the party's economic policies." Party sources say that sev-

eral senior CWC members have taken up this fresh "controversy" with Sonia, protesting over the manner in which unnecessary confusion is being created when a "policy decision" regarding the setting of the panel has already been taken.

The leaders are said to have pointed out that such confusing signals will only further damage the party's image which is already in a bind following the controversy over the nuclear deterrent issue. A senior party leader told *The Indian Express* today that it was "strange" as to how the party's official spokesperson had denied the move to set up an economic panel when the party chief herself had agreed to it.

Ironically, senior CWC member Pranab Mukherjee, who is the chairman of the media department, is most likely to head the panel since he is the seniormost leader well-versed with economic affairs and also because former Fi-

nance Minister Manmohan Singh has already indicated his unwillingness to head the committee.

However, if sources in the media department are to be believed, the rationale behind the decision to deny the constitution of the committee was to "avoid the tussle among anti and pro reformists from coming into the open and also prevent hectic "lobbying" among party members to be on the panel." That the panel is on the anvil is apparent from the fact that the party's deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, Madhavrao Scindia reportedly met senior leader Pranab Mukherjee last evening to finalise the list of names (for the panel) as well as its terms of reference. Mukherjee is being consulted since, apart from being an expert on economic matters, he is also the chief whip in the Rajya Sabha and the panel is to comprise MPs from both Houses as well as experts in the economic sphere from outside.

INDIAN EXPRESS

3 JUN 2000

AICC serves showcause notice on Ramamurthy

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 6. The Congress(I) high command today issued a showcause notice to the former Tamil Nadu unit chief, Mr. Tindivanam Ramamurthy, and gave him seven days to submit a reply. The party's action follows Mr. Ramamurthy's outburst after his dismissal.

Announcing the party's decision, the spokesman, Mr. Ajit Jogi, said, "Mr. Ramamurthy's actions are prima facie irresponsible and he has been issued a notice to show why action should not be taken against him."

Protesting his removal, the former TNCC chief on Monday had some harsh words for his successor, Mr. Elangovan, calling him a "deserter" and predicted a 1996-type split in the State unit. He also made a thinly-veiled attack on the party chief, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, saying "it is a very wrong move by the Congress(I) president, which will end the history of the party in the state". He also came down hard on the CWC member, Mr. Arjun Singh, accusing him of holding Ms. Gandhi captive.

The action against Mr. Ramamurthy seems to signal the leadership's attitude. Similar changes have been made in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Pondicherry, Jammu and Kashmir, Bihar while a change of guard is on the anvil in Karnataka. Mr. Ramamurthy was the only one to have made public his protest and the party's action was meant to deter others following suit. "We cannot afford to give the impression of acting from a position of weakness. Indiscipline will not be tolerated," said a CWC member.

Justifying the decision to replace some PCC chiefs while the organisational elections were on, the CWC member, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, said the working committee had, in a resolution, empowered Ms. Gandhi to make the required changes. Terming the recent appointments a "routine affair", Mr. Mukherjee said it was necessary in some States as part of the revamping process.

Shrugs off notice

Our Chennai Special Correspondent reports:

Shrugging off the showcause

notice, Mr. Ramamurthy said he was happy the high command "resorted to the democratic practice at least at this stage." Asked about his future plans if he was expelled from the party, he shot back: "My reply might be accepted by the high command."

Continuing his tirade against the party high command particularly Mr. Arjun Singh, the former TNCC(I) chief charged that the nomination of Mr. Elangovan revealed Mr. Singh's stranglehold over the party. "No self-respecting Congressman will accept the nomination of Mr. Elangovan," he declared.

Claiming that he was "in touch" with some CWC members opposed to Mr. Singh and also with local party leaders to decide on the next course of action, he said, "we will show which is the real Congress in Tamil Nadu."

Meanwhile, the former MP, Mr. R. Anbarasu demanded Mr. Ramamurthy's expulsion for his outburst against the leadership and locking up the party office yesterday.

On the other hand, Mr. Elangovan dismissed Mr. Ramamurthy's

remarks saying, "he is a one-man army. And he cannot do any damage." Mr. Elangovan is likely to formally take charge on June 9. A group of party functionaries including the former TNCC(I) president, Mr. M. P. Subramaniam, have organised a reception for him at the airport.

NEW DELHI

JUN 7 1991

Pranab may head Cong. economic committee

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 8. The former Finance Minister and Congress Working Committee (CWC) member, Mr. Pranab Mukerjee, is tipped to head the internal party panel for fine tuning the party's economic policy. Contrary to speculations the basic objective of the proposed committee is to suggest "mid-course corrections" to the economic reforms programme initiated by successive Congress Governments beginning with Rajiv Gandhi in 1984.

The proposed panel is likely to include nearly two dozen Congressmen and economic experts from outside the party like Mr. Arjun Sengupta. Though Dr. Manmohan Singh has chosen to stay out of the committee he will have a final look at whatever the panel comes up with.

Mr. Mukherjee, who has held the portfolios of Finance and Commerce in Congress Governments, is expected to prepare a "base paper" outlining the objective of the committee and its terms of reference.

The idea for a reappraisal of the party's economic policy was first mooted by the introspection committee headed by Mr. A.K. Antony, which felt that the party had suffered because of the perception that the package of economic reforms are for the benefit of the rich and there was need for the party to come clear on the subject.

An influential section in the party like Mr. Arjun Singh, Mr. Rajesh Pilot and Mr. Vayalar Ravi have been advocating the need for the party to adopt the "pro-poor" image in its economic policies. Significantly it was Mr. Manmohan Singh, former Finance Minister, who really impressed upon the party leadership to set up a group to seriously look into the issue. He reportedly told the party leadership that rather than talking in generalities it would be better to set up a mechanism whereby those who had reservations could point out the specific objections and also come up with alternatives.

The Congress president is already in possession of a list containing 35 party leaders and economic experts at various levels. She is expected to pick up two dozen members from the list suggested by senior party leaders. Apart from Mr. Scindia and Mr. Mukerjee the list also includes names of Mr. N.D. Tewari, Mr. Vayalar Ravi, Mr. Murli Deora, Mr. Arjun Singh, Mr. Rajesh Pilot, Mr. Shiv Shankar, Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyer, former MP's Mr. Shiv Shankar, Mr. Prithviraj Chauhan, Mr. J. Kurien and economic expert Mr. Arjun Sengupta.

Though it was the Congress which initiated the economic reform process, the party is now keen on drawing a distinction between the reforms that it initiated, with what is being practised by the BJP led NDA Government." The

whole purpose of the exercise is to determine what needs to be done in order to ensure that the poor are not left behind" sources close to the leadership said. The party believes that the current policy followed by the Government benefits only a section of the society while the poor are being left behind, and is keen to give itself a pro-poor image by opposing cuts on food security subsidies.

The leadership's view is that "the poverty alleviation programmes are not working well, and the situation has been further worsened for the poor because of the cutbacks in the food security sector." Party leaders draw a distinction between the process that the party initiated and the one being followed by the present Government. "Our reforms were aimed at helping all sections of society not just a section of it", a CWC member said.

The need for a reappraisal on the issue has acquired an urgency in the party because of the restiveness in its ranks that while the party is getting none of the credit for initiating the liberalisation process, it has had to bear the blame for some of its unpopular policies like the cutback in subsidies. The party finds itself handicapped in its bid to make political capital of the BJP's policies because the Government counters it by saying that it is merely following the policies initiated by its predecessors.

10-13 9/6

- 9 JUN 2000

High-flyer who rose above his circumstances

An IAF fighter pilot-turned-politician, the 55-year-old Rajesh Pilot died the way he lived — in the fast lane.

Born in a poor family on 10 February 1945, Pilot lost his armyman father, Jai Dayal Singh, at an early age and was brought up by his brother who sold milk in posh localities of Delhi.

Born Rajeshwar Prasad Singh, he was nicknamed Pilot by his family and friends after he joined the Indian Air Force. The name stuck. Pilot got his BA degree from Meerut University. Joining the IAF, he flew fighter aircraft and transport aircraft during his 15 years of service.

However, it was not long before he began nurturing political aspirations.

Joining the Congress, he got a ticket to contest the 1980 Lok Sabha elections. Winning his maiden venture, Pilot was elected in 1985 but lost in 1989.

Returning to the Lok Sabha in 1991, Pilot never looked back and was re-elected in every election thereafter. In the 1999 Lok Sabha election, he defeated RK Sharma of BJP by a margin of 6,902 votes.

Pilot got his ministerial break in the Rajiv Gandhi government in which he was made minister of state for transport during 1985-86. Within a year, he was given independent charge of

transport as minister of state, the portfolio he held till 1989.

In the PV Narasimha Rao government during 1991-96, Pilot held independent charge of the ministries of communications and home (internal security). He ordered Chandraswamy's arrest while in office. But differences with his senior colleague, the then home minister, Mr SB Chavan, saw him shifted to the ministry of environment.

He lost the race for Congress leadership to Mr Sitaram Kesri, but is remembered more as one of the architects of Assam Accord, and for ending a farm-

ers' agitation in Uttar Pradesh.

Seen as a man to be watched for the future, Pilot proved a bold member of the Congress, fearless in airing his views in party fora.

For this reason, Pilot was feared, disliked and respected, all at the same time in party circles.

Pilot also authored an autobiography of sorts, *Flight to Parliament*. He made rapid strides in his party career, becoming a member of the Congress Working Committee in 1992.

With his farming and defence background, Pilot founded the Jai Jawan, Jai Kisan Trust, a charitable organisation for the welfare of farmers, ex-servicemen and weaker sections of society.

THE STATESMAN

12 JUN 2000

Car crash cuts short Pilot's life

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 11. — Rajesh Pilot died in a car crash today at Bhandana in Dausa, his Lok Sabha constituency near Jaipur.

The former Union minister was 55 and is survived by wife Rama, a son and a daughter.

The senior Congress leader was on his way to the Jaipur airport to catch a flight to Delhi when his jeep, which he was reportedly driving himself, rammed into a Rajasthan Road Transport bus at 4.45 p.m.

He was quickly brought to the Sawai Man Singh Hospital, Jaipur, with multiple head injuries. He was by then in a coma and his heart had stopped beating.

Doctors operated on him in a last-ditch effort before declaring him dead, said hospital authorities.

Mr Pilot's personal security officer, Mr Hari Singh, too died in the accident. Three others in the jeep, including MLA Mr Mahendra Meena, were injured.

Rajasthan chief minister Mr Ashok Gehlot, Union agriculture minister Mr Nitish Kumar, and several other leaders including Ms Girija Vyas and

Mr GS Shekhawat visited the hospital.

Mrs Pilot and her daughter have rushed to Jaipur. Mrs Sonia Gandhi, who expressed deep shock, went to the Pilots' 10 Akbar Road residence and saw the family off.

Mr Pilot's body was being flown to Delhi tonight for cremation tomorrow.

The Congress president has cancelled her trip to Jaipur tomorrow where she was to attend a series of party programmes.

Messages of sympathy poured in tonight cutting across party lines. The President, Vice-President and Prime Minister expressed deep shock. They were joined by Mr LK Advani, Mr PV Narasimha Rao, Mr VP Singh, Mr GMC Balayogi,

Mr Laloo Yadav, Mrs Rabri Devi, Mr ND Tiwari and Mr K Natwar Singh.

Mr Pranab Mukherjee said the CWC will pass a resolution by tomorrow. The BJP described Mr Pilot's death as a loss not to the Congress alone but to the nation.

■ More reports, obituary on page 8



Rajesh Pilot

THE STATESMAN

T 1 JUN 2000

Rajesh Pilot killed in road accident

By Sunny Sebastian

JAIPUR, JUNE 11. The Congress(I) leader and former Union Minister, Mr. Rajesh Pilot, died in a road accident in his home constituency, Dausa, Rajasthan, this evening. Mr. Pilot, who attended a series of public programmes during the day in Dausa and Sikrai tehsil in the district, including a 'yagna' at Sikandra for world peace, was on his way to Jaipur when the accident occurred on the Agra-Jaipur national highway around 4.15 p.m. The doctors,

12/6
Dr. S.R. Dharker, Principal of the Sawai Man Singh Medical College, and Dr. N.K. Mathur, hospital superintendent, who lead the team which tried to revive Mr. Pilot, declared him dead around 7.15 p.m. "He had multiple injuries on the head and chest.

There was no breathing or pulse beat when he was brought to the emergency ward around 5.15 p.m.," they told reporters. Though the doctors do not officially confirm it, in all probability Mr. Pilot was "brought dead".

Mr. Pilot's wife, Mrs. Rama Pilot, a Congress(I) MLA in the Rajasthan Assembly, was not with him during the tour.

Party workers said Mr. Pilot, who had to catch the 5.40 p.m. Jet Airlines flight to Delhi, was himself driving the Marshall jeep. The accident took place at Bandana village on the border of Jaipur-Dausa districts, some 40 km from here. The jeep reportedly collided against a Rajasthan Roadways bus which was headed for Mathura.

A Youth Congress(I) worker, Mr. Mahendra Sharma, who was accompanying the entourage, said the impact of the collision was such that Mr. Pilot was thrown out of the vehicle. The escort Gypsy, which had crossed the bus just before the accident, reversed and picked up the body and sped to the SMS Hospital. There were five persons including Mr. Pilot in the vehicle.

His personal security officer, Mr. Hari Singh, died on the spot, while the Congress(I) MLA, Mr. Mahendra Meena, who was sitting in the front with Mr. Pilot, sustained multiple fractures. The condition of Mr. Banwari Lal, a party worker, is said to be serious.

Immediately after hearing of the accident, the Rajasthan Chief Minister, Mr. Ashok Gehlot, and the Union Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, who were in a meeting, reached the emergency ward of the hospital. Mr. Gehlot and his Cabinet colleagues, the PCC(I) president, Dr. Girija Vyas, remained in the emergency ward till the doctors finally gave up.



Pilot... 'uncompromising dissenter'

The Rajasthan Governor, Mr. Justice Anshuman Singh, also visited the hospital.

"I cannot express myself. It is a great loss to the party. Mr. Pilot was a leader of eminence. Within the party he had his individualistic style of functioning," Mr. Gehlot said while coming out of the emergency.

The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, also contacted Mr. Gehlot on phone in the emergency ward to ask about the condition of Mr. Pilot.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Pilot attended many functions, and the fateful one which delayed him was the inauguration of a computer school. As someone advised him to skip the function, Mr. Pilot reportedly said, "It is better not to postpone such auspicious moments."

Tributes on Page 13



Senior Congress(I) leaders, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee and Dr. Manmohan Singh, outside the residence of the Congress(I) M.P., Mr. Rajesh Pilot, who died in a car accident in Rajasthan on Sunday — PTI

SONIA HELPS COOL TEMPERS OVER DEMAND

10-1 13/6 Tearful farewell to Pilot

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 12. In a remarkable show of dignity and grief, the Congress(I) today bid an emotional farewell to its senior leader and CWC(I) member, Rajesh Pilot, who died in a road accident yesterday.

Led by the party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, admirers and critics alike came together to give him a hero's farewell. Thousands of workers thronged his residence and the party office to pay their last respects. The Delhi Government accorded a State funeral.

The CWC(I), in its condolence resolution, expressed "profound grief and sorrow" at the sudden death. "His untimely death is not a loss to the Congress(I) alone but to the entire nation — one that would be very difficult to fill,"

Lauding him for championing the cause of the poor and the downtrodden, the resolution said it was always the welfare of the people that guided his actions; and though outspoken, "his outspokenness was never aimed at an individual".

Ms. Gandhi arranged a special flight for Pilot's family to travel to Jaipur and return with his body. She was also present at the airport to receive the body last night.

Working closely with members of Pilot's family on the details of the funeral, the Congress(I) chief took direct charge of the arrangements at the party headquarters on 24 Akbar Road, where the body was brought around 2 p.m. Ms. Gandhi, along with Mrs. Rama Pi-



The President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, consoling Mrs. Rama Pilot, wife of the deceased Congress(I) leader, Rajesh Pilot, in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI

lot, helped stave off a potentially ugly situation over the insistence by a section of party workers that the Government allot a plot in the vicinity of Raj Ghat for a memorial. Led by the Congress(I) MP from Meerut, Mr. Avtaar Singh Badhana, they were demanding a memorial and threatened to take it by force if the Government refused.

Ms. Gandhi deputed a senior leader to call on the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, and make a case for the same. When the Government turned down the request, she sent the CWC(I) member, Mr. Ahmad Patel, the Rajasthan Chief Minister, Mr.

Ashok Gehlot, and the Rajasthan PCC(I) chief, Ms. Girija Vyas, to explain the situation to Mrs. Pilot.

Mrs. Pilot came out of the house and addressed the crowd, saying, "I will not allow anybody to play politics over my husband's body."

Driver arrested

UNI reports from Jaipur:

The Rajasthan Transport Minister, Mr. Chhogaram Bakolia, said that Ramdhan, driver of the State Roadways bus involved in the head-on collision with Pilot's jeep, has been arrested and the conductor suspended.

More reports on Page 13

THE HINDU

13 JUN 2000

AN OVERVIEW: PARTY INDULGES IN IMAGE-BUILDING EXERCISE

Cong to take fresh look at reforms, give pro-poor tilt

Swaraj Thapa
NEW DELHI 13 JUNE



Manmohan

NOT WANTING to hurt the sentiments of their senior leader Manmohan Singh, the Congress high command has decided to take a fresh look at the party's economic policies as an overview exercise.

According to party circles, who insist that the expert committee to be set up to discuss the issue will not be conducting a review, the underlying objective will be to formulate a proper articulation of the party's economic stand which, while reaffirming the pro-poor tilt, will be distinct from that of the BJP's.

The leadership, while wary of stepping on sore toes, seems inclined to think that an "overview" was necessary to send the right signals to the people that the party's reforms agenda had been charted, keeping the interest of the poor in mind. At the same time, the constant refrain by the BJP that they were only following the Congress' footsteps, while proceeding ahead with second generation reforms, has also forced the party to make a fresh assessment and come out with a line which can be identified only with the Congress.

The constraint on the leadership to desist from hurting the feelings of Mr Singh, considered the architect of liberalisation, however, is more than evident. Mr Singh, who has refused to have anything to do with the committee, is dead against the use of the term "review" in any part of the committee as well as its recommendations.

He firmly holds the view that the policies he professed were the reasons for the party's decline in successive elections, as has been made out to be by some leaders in the party.

Bihar unit feels let down by RJD, turns to high command for support

Swaraj Thapa
NEW DELHI 13 JUNE

ANGRY AT being continuously sidelined by the Rabri Devi regime with the RJD paying little heed to their complaints, Congress ministers in Bihar have sought the intervention of the central leadership. The ministers said the image of the party, which is a coalition partner, is getting a severe beating following the recent incidents of violence in the state.

The Congress leaders are now demanding an all-party coordination committee meeting where they can vent their views on administrative matters. The committee was formed recently when Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav called on Congress president Sonia Gandhi.

The party appears somewhat helpless about how to react to the caste killings in the state. While on the one hand, being a partner in the coalition it cannot fully criticise the government, on the other hand, the poor law and order situation in the state is tarnishing its image.

While condemning the recent killings of Bhumihars in Navada on Tuesday, the party attempted to give it a twist by maintaining that the root cause was socio-economic. "The killings were not law and order related, but a direct outcome of socio-economic conditions of society," Congress spokesperson Ajit Jogi said.

The Congress leaders agreed that the coordination panel will

help tighten the loose ends in the Rabri Devi establishment. However, the RJD has already postponed the first meeting of the committee from June 17 to June 21.

According to party circles, besides the AICC general secretary in charge, Mohsina Kidwai and former union minister Madhav Singh Solanki, the other Congress leaders in the 16-member committee will be acting PCC president Chandan Bagchi, CLP leader Furkand Ansari and leader in the legislative council Mohinder Singh.

The committee has chief minister Rabri Devi as its chairperson and RJD president Laloo Yadav as the convener. Other RJD representatives, representatives from other supporting parties are also its members.

The Congress said demand for a functional committee had been on for sometime following the realisation by state leaders that the RJD was continuously ignoring their presence.

The charge against the RJD has been that its leadership always pulled rank and direct access to the central leadership in Delhi to point to their insignificance in the scheme of things. Congress ministers, who have been making the rounds of Delhi, have been repeatedly complaining that the Rabri government has been turning a blind eye to the much touted agreement which promised to ensure a better government for Bihar.



Sonia

Congress urges Speaker to disqualify Subrata

HT 1
15/6

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 14

THE CONGRESS Legislature Party (CLP) today moved the Assembly Speaker, Hasim Abdul Halim, to disqualify Subrata Mukherjee from the House. Mukherjee, who was elected on a Congress ticket, is contesting the CMC elections as a Trinamool Congress candidate.

CLP leader Atish Chandra Sinha said that Mukherjee's fighting the CMC poll on a symbol of another party duly approved by the State Election Commission, would attract penal provisions under the 10th Schedule of the Constitution. "He should be disqualified as a Congress MLA, for there is ample proof against him under the Anti-Defection Act." On a previous occasion, the CLP had moved the Speaker to cancel the membership of four Congress MLAs who had been working for the Trinamool

outside the House. But the case against them was not so foolproof as in Mukherjee's case, Sinha said.

Mukherjee, the Trinamool's mayoral candidate, is unfazed over this development. "I have done nothing against the law. Who are these people trying to discipline me for being unprincipled? Did not some of them vote for the candidate of another party in the last Rajya Sabha election?" He says that

Chowdhury last night and pressured him to initiate action against Mukherjee under the Anti-Defection Act because they have to take a strong anti-Trinamool stance in the CMC poll".

While agreeing that the Congress could not unilaterally seek an alliance with the Trinamool on the latter's terms, the move against Mukherjee was better avoided. "The Anti-Defection Act is very difficult to enforce and in the last 15 years all the rulings by the legislatures had been rejected in the courts," he said.

Assembly Membership

being an AICC member, only the Congress president could initiate action against him.

The CLP itself appears divided over Sinha's move against Mukherjee. A CLP insider told *The Hindustan Times* that the decision was not taken at the CLP meeting. "Some Calcutta MLAs—Somen Mitra, Saugata Roy, Tapas Roy and Sultan Ahmed among them—met PCC president A B A Ghani Khan

Sources said that Mukherjee, once summoned by the Speaker to reply to the charge against him, could always ask for dates and the process could drag till the next Assembly polls. After all, they said, the CLP failed to produce adequate evidence against Sanjoy Buxi, Ashok Mukherjee, Tushar Mandal and Sabuj Datta who had gone over to the Trinamool despite being Congress MLAs since 1998.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 JUN 2000

AICC sacks Paresh as State YC chief

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, August 2

9. P. P. - 90
20/10

STATE YOUTH Congress (YC) president Paresh Pal was removed from his post today by the party high command for violating its directive and going ahead with the Bangla bandh on 31 July.

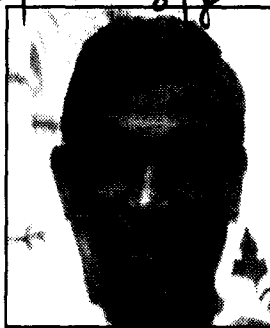
"This morning, the AICC faxed a message to PCC chief ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury informing him about the party's decision," Congress Chief Whip in Parliament Priya Ranjan Das Munshi told *The Hindustan Times* over the telephone.

Pal was away in Raiganj on party work and was unavailable for comments on the AICC decision. "It is unfortunate, but he should have shown some restraint. He not only insulted the State Congress by going ahead with Bangla bandh despite repeated appeals to him to call off the strike, he also humiliat-

ed Barkatda who had personally asked him to withdraw the bandh," CLP Chief Whip Abdul Mannan said.

AICC sources say that the high command was contemplating section against Pal from the time he attended Mamata Banerjee's rally in the city on July 21. Pal,

Congress leaders pointed out, did not even seek permission from the PCC to share the dais with the Trinamool chief. "He was increasingly becoming very adamant and was unwilling to listen to the advice of all those who are close to him in the PCC. For the last few days, he was even avoiding leaders like Abdul Mannan, Shankar Singh and Sultan Ahmed, all Ghani Khan loyalists and close associates of Pal," a source



charged.

Youth Congress leaders denied having received any such message from the AICC. With Pal out of town, they refused to react to the development. However, many of them said that Pal was critical of the AICC and the PCC for refusing to take

a definite stand on a Mahajot with the Trinamool.

In fact, Pal is not only a vocal supporter of the *Mahajot* concept, he is also among those Congress MLAs who are close to the Trinamool chief. After the recent Calcutta Municipal Corporation polls which resulted in a hung board, Pal tried his best to get the Congress to back the Trinamool's efforts to form the board. The State Congress over-ruled him and

decided to abstain from voting.

So cosy is Pal's relationship with the Trinamool that Mamata Banerjee did not put up a candidate against him in the CMC polls. "Pal was just looking for an excuse to leave the Congress. His decision to go ahead with the bandh was a step in that direction," said PCC vice-president Pradip

Bhattacharya.

Pal may be a bit too keen, but is the Trinamool willing to take him? In the last couple of months, Pal has earned the complete confidence of Mamata Banerjee. "But he should come out in the open now. Mamata Banerjee has told him categorically if you want to join us, say it publicly. There will be no secret understanding. We have welcomed everybody who wants to fight the CPI(M) under our banner. So let him approach us, I am sure Mamata will take him," said Trinamool general-secretary Mukul Roy.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

3 AUG 2000

'UNDECLARED WAR AGAINST INDIA WILL FAIL'

Borders cannot be redrawn on religious basis: PM

710-1
16/8

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, AUG. 15. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today told the Pakistani rulers that borders could not be redrawn "either in the name of religion or on the strength of the sword". The Prime Minister used the occasion of his Independence Day address from the ramparts of the Red Fort to tell the Pakistani establishment that it would not be able to get its way "through the undeclared war that it has been waging against India".

Using the nation's most hallowed pulpit, Mr. Vajpayee quoted the Urdu poet, Sahir Ludhianvi, to debunk the two-nation theory, and to tell Pakistan that Kashmir was and would remain an integral part of India. The "clock cannot be turned back," noted the Prime Minister.

Addressing himself to the Pakistani rulers and the audience beyond, Mr. Vajpayee spelled out five propositions of India's approach to the Kashmir dispute: first, religion or sword could no longer be used to redraw boundaries; second, this is the age of reconciliation, rather than deliberate prolonging of conflicts; third, the people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh are tired of violence and desire peace; fourth, it is time for healing the wounds in Jammu and Kashmir; and, fifth, India is prepared to heal the wounds by larger canons of *insaniyat* (humanity).

Pak. 'doublespeak'

Forgoing the urge to strike a belligerent note to match the hawkish noises made by the Pakistani leadership yesterday, Mr. Vajpayee simply noted that the global community had seen for itself as to who was responsible for derailing of the recent peace process in Kashmir. The Prime Minister pointed out that while on the one hand Pakistan kept on proclaiming its readiness for dialogue, and on the other it kept on aiding and abetting vendors of vi-



The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, delivering the Independence Day address to the nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort in New Delhi on Tuesday. — AP

olence and cross-border terrorism. This two-track approach of Pakistan would simply not do. And, rather quietly, the Prime Minister warned that no one should underestimate India's "capacity and willingness" to deal with violence, terrorism, extremism and separatism. That was as close as he came to sounding strident.

Indeed the 28-minute address

was a most un-Vajpayee performance. Not only was it the shortest of three addresses he has made from the Red Fort, the irony is that the man who is known as the country's finest and most inspiring orator in Hindi was reading from a highly bureaucratised Hindi script. The Prime Minister definitely looked uninspired.

As expected, the Prime Minister repeated his administration's

"Kargil-has-earned-us-international-respect" theme. "India's international standing has been enhanced. Our voice is being heard attentively in the capitals of the world."

'Intolerance against culture'

Somewhat unexpectedly, Mr. Vajpayee used the occasion to send out a stern message — mostly to his own Sangh Parivar constituency — that "the government would not tolerate the activities of any organisation that spreads communal discord or incites violence." Noting that "religious intolerance and hate have never been part of India's liberal culture," the Prime Minister cautioned against creating "imaginary enemies".

Minus the Pakistan part, the rest of the speech was a mixture of exhortations and a catalogue of various schemes his Government wished to implement. Building on the twin themes of "Vikas" (development) and "Suraksha" (security), Mr. Vajpayee set a target of "doubling India's per capita income in the next 10 years", which he termed the "decade of development".

His exhortation was to "create a prosperous, self-reliant, and self-confident India". In particular, he wanted the younger generation to be brought face-to-face with the changing technology. "I want to see every school and every village have access to computers and the Internet in as less time as possible," Mr. Vajpayee said. He ended with calling for a Parishrami Bharat (industrious India), Parakrami Bharat (achieving India), and a Vijayi Bharat (winning India).

Though the tone was subdued, Mr. Vajpayee's rhetoric skillfully skirted divisiveness and chauvinism; the tenor was statesman-like, with a determination to send out signals of moderation and reasonableness at home and abroad.

Peace, militancy cannot co-exist, says Farooq: Page 13

THE HINDU

16 AUG 2000

Pranab emerges front-runner

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, August 16

16/8
WITH RUMOURS that the AICC is going ahead with its plans of restructuring the faction-ridden State Congress gaining ground, the race for the top job in the WBPC is hotting up. And the name that is being bandied about for the PCC president's post is Pranab Mukherjee. But ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury, the present State Congress chief, is not going to be dumped - if things go according to plans, he will be dispatched to Delhi as an AICC member.

"We too have heard that Pranab Mukherjee is likely to take over as the PCC chief. With the Assembly polls drawing close, the State Congress needs a dynamic man like Mukherjee at the helm," said WBPC vice-president Pradip

Bhattacharya.

Other State Congress leaders have also conveyed their support for Mukherjee's candidature to the AICC. PCC working-president Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and Pranab Mukherjee are scheduled to meet Sonia Gandhi tomorrow. "I am meeting Soniaji tomorrow and things will be clear only after

Race For PCC Presidentship

that," Das Munshi told *The Hindustan Times* over the telephone from Delhi.

"During my meetings with both Sonia Gandhi and Prabha Rau (the AICC general secretary in charge of West Bengal) I have said that if Barkatda is to continue as the PCC chief, he should be given a free hand to run the party here.

Or else, there is no point in keeping him. I have also told them that the AICC should do away with dual presidentship in Bengal because this only leads to factionalism," said former PCC chief Somen Mitra.

Party insiders claim that Mukherjee's name has emerged somewhat by default. Those loyal

9-P-P-Cont 1
member of late has been hobnobbing with Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee. "They have held more than four meetings. The political significance of this development cannot be ruled out because either before or after the Assembly polls, the Congress might enter into an alliance with the Trinamool to dislodge the Left Front from power. And Mamata Banerjee would trust Pranab Mukherjee more than any other Congress leader in the State," said an insider.

But what if Pranab Mukherjee turns down the offer? In that case, both Pradip Bhattacharya and Saugata Roy - now vice-presidents in the party - could be in the running. But the problem is neither of them is acceptable to the Ghani Khan camp. They would rather settle for CLP leader Atish Sinha.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 AUG 2000

Factions in Congress warm up to Pranab

UDAY BASU
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, Aug. 21. — Pradesh Congress leaders are increasingly veering to the view that Mr Pranab Mukherjee will be acceptable to both the PCC factions, if he is appointed the new chief of the state unit.

The party high command was expected today to announce the name of the new PCC president, but the plan was deferred after Mr Mukherjee's sudden illness yesterday. He is reported to be better and will leave for Delhi tomorrow.

While Mr Mukherjee is almost certain to head the demoralised and battered state unit, leaders of the two PCC factions — belonging to the present chief, Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury, and its working president, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi — met him to express their willingness to cooperate with him.

Mr Pradip Bhattacharya, PCC vice president, said that if Mr Mukherjee is given the job, it would do a world of good to the party which is facing one of its worst crises following the emergence of the Trinamul as the main opponent of the CPI-M-led Left Front.

"It doesn't make a difference whether Mr Khan Chowdhury or Mr Mukherjee is the PCC chief. Both are highly respected

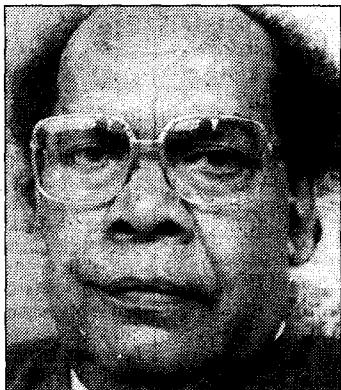
leaders of the party," he said. However, there is a feeling that some key leaders, belonging to the Khan Chowdhury camp, may join the Trinamul in the event of Mr Mukherjee becoming the new chief.

"This is not a sound reasoning. Those who want to join the Trinamul or who have already one step forward to Harish Chatterjee Street, the Trinamul

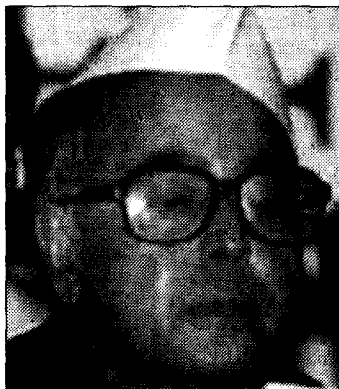
headquarters-cum-its-chief's residence, will do so, no matter whether Mr Khan Chowdhury or Mr Mukherjee is at the helm of affairs," Mr Bhattacharya argued.

The message that is to be given to the rank and file is that a rejuvenated party under the new chief will be "mobile, effective and ready to redeem the lost honour", he said. But, Mr Abdul Mannan, CLP chief whip, said many party leaders and men would not brook any insult to Mr Khan Chowdhury.

The question does not arise, said leaders who are ready to welcome Mr Mukherjee. "In that event we would protect Barkatda. Mr Mukherjee will see to it that a senior and highly respected leader like Barkatda is in no way shown disrespect," they said. It is believed that Mr Mukherjee's elevation to the post of PCC chief will give a new dimension to the Congress' tirade against the economic policies of the NDA government.



Mr Ghani Khan Chowdhury and (below) Mr Pranab Mukherjee



THE STATESMAN

22 AUG 2000

Sonia shifts Ghani to Delhi

PCC crown forced on Pranab

P.P.P. centre
22/8

SP1

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 22. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi today appointed Mr Pranab Mukherjee as president of the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee, removing a potential dissident from the national scene.

Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi ceases to be the acting president of the WBPC. Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury, the outgoing state president, has been inducted into the Congress Working Committee as "special invitee", Mrs Prabha Rau, AICC general secretary in charge of West Bengal, said here today.

Mr Mukherjee had been unwilling to accept the crown forced upon him today. He had conveyed his feelings to CWC colleagues when first sounded out a few days ago, Congress sources said. According to the sources, Mr Mukherjee's "dumping" in West Bengal — where the Congress faces grim prospects in the Assembly polls next year — was masterminded by the Madhya Pradesh troika of Mr Arjun Singh, Mr Madhavrao Scindia and Mr Kamal Nath.

It is learnt Mrs Gandhi's political advisers warned her that Mr Mukherjee's "subtle manoeuvring" might create problems in her smooth re-election as AICC chief in the party's organisational elections scheduled for October.

After Mr Rajesh Pilot who died in a car crash recently, Mr Mukherjee had emerged as the new rallying point for Sonia-baiters, and was best shunted out of the way,

they apparently told her.

Whether Mr Mukherjee was seriously nursing ambitions for the top post is not clear. But his senior colleagues felt the veteran who has held centre-stage for so long ought not to have been sent out to a state unit. "How could a leader of his stature be made president of a state unit when everyone knows that Mr Mukherjee is not an organisation man?" wondered a CWC member.

Sonia loyalists, however, rejected the "shunting" theory. The Congress, they argued, had not yet dumped Miss Mamata Banerjee's mahajot proposal, and Mr Mukherjee would be a catalyst in the forging of an alliance with the Trinamul.

Mr Khan Chowdhury is a mahajot advocate. "The mahajot is a necessity to defeat the Left Front," he said, immediately after being removed.

"I don't know whether there was any need to change the WBPC president.

Once the decision has been taken, I think the new incumbent might come forward with new ideas to rejuvenate the party," he remarked.

Mr Khan Choudhury was summoned by Mrs Gandhi this morning and told he was being moved to the CWC to make way for Mr Mukherjee. Mr Khan Chowdhury said he had himself wanted to shift to Delhi, and had recommended Mr Mukherjee's name to her.

So had he accepted willingly the CWC post offer? Yes, said Mr Khan Chowdhury.



Pranab: new role

■ Another report on page 4

THE STATESMAN

23 AUG 2001

#19-13
23/8

Govt. mishandling J&K situation, says Sonia

987
P.P.
Sonia

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 22. The Congress (I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today accused the Prime Minister and the Home Minister of not measuring up to their high responsibilities. Her remarks came in the course of her customary end of session address to the Congress(I) Parliamentary Party members.

Ms. Gandhi attacked the Government for its failure on a host of issues ranging from its mishandling of the situation in Jammu and Kashmir to the lack of a coherent approach towards Pakistan and the absence of a micro economic policy.

On Jammu and Kashmir, she said because of the Government's mishandling of the situation, the nation was oscillating between hope and despair. She lamented the fact that the Government had no consistent plan of action and was merely indulging in knee-jerk reactions "possibly in response to extraneous considerations", resulting in confusion and contradiction.

She criticised the Government for not taking adequate precautions and preparations, as a result

of which nearly a hundred people were killed. She referred to her visit to Pahalgam and said that after listening to the 'yatris' it was evident that there was much more to the incident than what was revealed in official statements. That is why the party had demanded a judicial inquiry.

Ms. Gandhi said the nation and the world had been left confused about the Government's policy on Pakistan. "Not only are they incapable of tackling cross-border terrorism, they also impose impossible conditions for resumption of dialogue." The Government's foreign policy had been reduced to dependence on others to secure results.

Terming the economic policy a failure, she said the slide of the rupee was reflective of the weakening of confidence in the Government's policies. Industrial production was stagnating, and there was no increase in the net inflow of foreign investment. The burden of the Government's policies would fall on the poor; poverty alleviation programmes were either stagnating or being mismanaged.

She referred to the fact that she had written to the Lok Sabha

Speaker demanding a Standing Committee for Disinvestment because the party wanted some order, logic and probity into the restructuring and reorientation of the public sector.

Referring to the Government claim that its policy was a continuation of those adopted by the Congress(I), she said this was not true. "The NDA's policies are a parody of ours," she said.

THE HINDU

23 AUG 2000

Pranab to keep AICC, CWC posts

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 23

NEW WEST Bengal PCC chief Pranab Mukherjee would continue to be in charge of most of the posts he was holding in the All India Congress Committee, the Congress Working Committee and the Congress Parliamentary Party.

Widely reputed to be the Congress' man for all seasons, the former Union Minister is the party's chief whip in the Rajya Sabha besides being a senior CWC member. His multifarious organisational responsibilities at the Centre also include chairmanships of the AICC's media and training departments, the newly established economic group, the Kashmir group, the small states' review group and the in-house co-ordina-

tion committee for Rajasthan. After a long meeting here today

with Congress president Sonia Gandhi, Mr Mukherjee told newsmen that his association with all AICC panels, barring the media and the training departments, would remain undisturbed. He would also continue as the Congress chief whip in the Upper House.

Recalling that Subhash Chandra Bose and Pandit Nehru had served as PCC chiefs after stints as AICC presidents, Mr

Mukherjee argued that a leader being assigned to a State cannot be construed to be demoted. As for his role as the Bengal PCC chief, he admitted that he wasn't a mass leader and had, in fact, wanted the task to be assigned to a younger leader.

"But each time I was sent to the State in the past, the party did well in elections," Mr Mukherjee said, recalling his 1985

stint as PCC chief when the Congress won 68 seats in the Calcutta Municipal elections.



likewise, the party bagged 16 Lok Sabha seats when he was election incharge in the State in 1984.

The Rajya Sabha MP was also frank enough to admit the possibility of some leaders joining Ms Mamata Banerjee on account of her popularity and the growing reputation that she was the Left's most formidable adversary in the State.

On the possibility of a Congress-Trinamool alliance to defeat the CPI-M led Front, Mr Mukherjee reaffirmed the party's known opposition to the Left's adventurism and the BJP's communalism and sectarianism. He said the "Mahajot" idea might sound nice in theory: "The practical reality is that we cannot go with a party (read BJP) which does not believe in secularism."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

24 AUG 2000

Pranab takes charge of PCC with unity call

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, August 28

PRANAB MUKHERJEE, who took over as WBPCCC president today, will focus on uniting the party and stopping any further desertions from the ranks.

The new PCC chief sought the cooperation of his partymen and said this was necessary to ensure that the Congress worked like a well-knit team in the State.

The Congress can regain its lost glory in Bengal, he said in his first address to partymen. "We must give it a try. Let us take the plunge and try to swim. If we sink, we sink together. I believe in cooperation and not liquidation. I do not believe that the party would split. Yes, few might leave, but that will not affect us," Mukherjee said.

On his first day as WBPCCC president, he attended the 47th foundation day of the Chhatra Parishad, met MLAs in the Assembly and also went to the State Congress headquarters to meet party office-bearers.

But it was the presence of 46 of the 58 party MLAs at the CLP meeting and the welcome given to

him by both pro-Ghani and pro-Das Munshi office-bearers that sent a clear signal that the new PCC head was in no mood to play factional politics in the troubled waters of Bengal. He would instead strive to bring together all the factions to bolster the party unit.

"All 58 MLAs would have attended the meeting had they not been tied up elsewhere. For that matter, Khan Chowdhury and Das Munshi too would have come had they not been out of town. With leaders such as Chowdhury, Das Munshi, Saugata Roy, Atish Sinha and Somen Mitra beside me, there should no reason to doubt that the Congress would again establish itself as a force to reckon with in Bengal," said Mukherjee.

"In the next few days, I will sit with the district and PCC leaders to chalk out the party programme." The new PCC president would kick off his party's anti-Left programme in mid-September from Midnapore.

He said the Left Front Government had failed to restore the rule of law in Bengal. The democratic rights of the people

were being stifled and every other day, people were getting killed in Midnapore, Bankura, Hooghly and other districts. "A consolidation of the anti-Left vote is the need of the hour, but before that the anti-Left parties should work on a common programme. Without that there can't be any such forum," he added.

However, he ducked a question on whether Bengal was a fit case for President's rule. "This is a constitutional issue I am not in a position to say anything on this. It is for the President and the Centre to decide. I would want to know from Mr Advani two things. First why did he, as a minister in the Janata Dal Government, decide to wipe out Article 356 through the proposed 44th draft amendment. Second, how does he interpret the Supreme Court's judgment on imposition of Article 356? It is the BJP, which says that the Congress has misused Article 356. So only if they can come up with a valid argument we will think about passing their demand for Article 356 in Tripura and Bengal in the Rajya Sabha, where we have the majority," said Mukherjee.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 AUG 7m

A NEW PRESIDENT FOR WBPCC(I)

BY EFFECTING A change of guard in the West Bengal unit of her party — the appointment of Mr. Pranab Mukherjee as chief — the Congress (I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, has, at long last, conveyed her disapproval of the line of the incumbent chief, Mr. A. B. A. Ghani Khan Chowdhary, that the party must align with the Trinamool Congress in the State. Notwithstanding the political correctness of the move, given the fact that it came so late, it cannot but be seen as just another formality. The sheer procrastination by the Congress(I) high command in even conveying to its State unit leaders that they must not be seen together with the Trinamool Congress as long as Ms. Mamata Banerjee remained part of the BJP-led NDA had even otherwise eroded its credibility. The delay had not just emboldened Mr. Chowdhary and his supporters in the Pradesh Congress(I) Committee to persist with the idea of a 'mahajot' but had also paved the way for several of the party's MLAs in West Bengal to formally cross over to the Trinamool fold. Even while all these were taking place with Mr. Chowdhary as PCC(I) president virtually blessing such an exodus, Ms. Sonia Gandhi and her aides were seen convincing themselves and others that all was well in their party in West Bengal. All that they did was to send an emissary to Calcutta to reason things out with the State unit leaders or "summon" Mr. Chowdhary to Delhi for counselling.

Be that as it may, the state of the Congress (I) organisation in West Bengal now demands a lot more than a new leader in place of Mr. Chowdhary. The party organisation in the State, even otherwise a shambles ever since the Left Front wrested power in 1977, was virtually destroyed after Ms. Manata Banerjee floated the Trinamool Congress a couple of years ago. Indeed, the party had to be rebuilt from scratch. The appointment of Mr. Mukherjee, hand-picked by the party president and with an an-

nouncement on her behalf to that effect, is hardly any indication that the party high command is conscious of the enormity of this task. Add to this the factor that Mr. Mukherjee is not known for his organisational ability notwithstanding the fact that his role in managing the internal affairs of the party was never in doubt. Mr. Mukherjee is among the few leaders in the Congress(I) who could remain in the inner circle of successive party presidents. But then, all these qualities can hardly help in reviving the fortunes of the party and that too from the state in which they are in West Bengal. And add to this the fact that Mr. Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, until now the working president of the West Bengal unit and among those handful of party-men who can lay claim to some popular support base in the State, has now been stripped of his post.

Given all these, it remains to be seen if the Congress(I) unit in West Bengal, now under Mr. Mukherjee, will at all be built into an organisation strong enough to take on the two major forces in the State — the ruling Left combine and the Trinamool Congress along with the BJP — in the coming elections to the State Assembly. That Mr. Mukherjee has very little time before the poll campaign is initiated formally — elections are due before May 2001 — and that he will have to manage dissent within whatever is left of the party organisation in the State are another aspect of the task. The high command along with the attitude of the State leaders has made the revival of the Congress(I) as difficult as it is today. To begin with, the party refrained from taking the hard decision — putting Mr. Chowdhary and others in the State unit in their place when they began talking of the 'mahajot' — for so long. And now the appointment of Mr. Mukherjee may not be the magic potion that the party needs in the State.

The Congress(I), secularism & minorities

By Ashgar Ali Engineer

The Congress(I) needs to strengthen its image as a party uncompromisingly upholding secularism and the interests of the weaker sections.

19-12

Today the minorities are looking at the BJP-led NDA rule with great apprehension. The attacks on minorities are no mere crime-pre-meditated and politically-motivated. It is unfortunate that the newly-constituted National Minorities Commission also described these attacks in Agra and Mathura as ordinary criminal acts, which is precisely the BJP line. Most of these incidents are taking place in States ruled by the BJP or its allies. The first attacks against Christians took place in Gujarat — a BJP-ruled State. Several churches were demolished in the Dangs. Muslims too were not spared. In several villages they were harassed as some Muslim boys had married Hindu girls. Muslims had to flee from many villages in South Gujarat. Again it was the BJP Government of Gujarat which allowed its employees to join the RSS. It was quite scary for minorities.

During the Eighties, particularly during its later part, the BJP had launched its most aggressive campaign against the Muslims. It accused the Congress(I) of "pseudo-secularism" and "appeasement of Muslims". The BJP sought to create a strong sense of hostility against Muslims projecting them as a 'pampered' minority and alleging that the Congress(I) was doing it for their votes. This propaganda proved quite effective. The BJP encashed it in terms of votes in the elections during the Nineties. It would not have been able to come to power but for its anti-minority propaganda.

But what is more painful is the attitude of the Congress(I) throughout this period. Not only could that party not rebut this propaganda, it almost developed a safe front hue. Many people felt that the Congress(I) was the 'B team' of the BJP. Rajiv Gandhi either did not comprehend the situation properly or was wrongly advised. He laid the foundation stone for a Ram temple at Ayodhya to placate the Hindus and alienated the Muslims. Consequently the Congress(I) lost the subsequent elections. What was worse was the total inaction on the part of the Narasimha Rao Government when Babri Masjid

was demolished. If he had the will he could have certainly prevented the demolition. This attitude naturally angered the Muslims. Not only this, the Rao Government remained a spectator during the Mumbai riots.

Thus the Congress(I) discredited itself thoroughly in the eyes of the minorities who began to feel terribly alienated. No wonder then that the party suffered heavy losses in subsequent elections and lost power. The Congress(I)'s main strength lay in its doctrine of socialism and secularism. The appeal of these doctrines attracted the weaker sections and the minorities. Along with minorities it also alienated itself from weaker sections of society by initiating the policy of liberalisation in 1991. The BJP has taken liberalisation to its logical conclusion causing a great deal of hardship to the poor and the working classes. In this respect the BJP has become the Congress(I)'s 'B team'. Even the RSS is opposed to the BJP's policy of intensive liberalisation.

Thus the BJP is fast losing ground among the people today by vigorously following the policy of anti-minorityism on one hand, and that of liberalisation, on the other. The reasons are exactly those for which the Congress(I) lost its voters. The BJP is mainly catering today to the upper caste upper class voters. The Congress(I) is trying to regain lost ground but the efforts are far from take off. There are many reasons for this. It does not have a charismatic leader like Jawaharlal Nehru. Whether one likes it or not, a charismatic leader exercises far more influence than others. Charisma does not drop out of heaven, it is acquired through sincere commitment to ideals and values and their practice.

Nehru stood unflinchingly for secularism and socialism and inspired confidence among the weaker sections and the minorities. It was not that the minorities,

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particularly Muslims, had no grievances during his stewardship of the party and the Government. Still he exercised tremendous influence over the minorities because they saw his sincere commitment to secularism. The minorities and the weaker sections were also attracted to Indira Gandhi because she initially continued Nehru's policies. But, unlike Nehru, she did not remain steadfast in her policies. She had greater attraction for power than the ideals she was supposed to be committed to. She declared the Emergency and allowed her son, Sanjay Gandhi, to interfere in Government matters. His policies of forced family planning and demolition of structures belonging to minorities and weaker sections of society alienated them from Indira Gandhi.

She could never recover the lost political ground. She did come back to power in 1980 but could never convince the minorities to support her massively as they had done in the late Sixties when she was fighting against all odds. She also began to feel terribly insecure and thus began to woo Hindus for her political survival. She went to the extent of supporting, in a subtle manner of course, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and its campaign against conversion to Islam. Because of all this she completely lost the confidence of the minorities. The Congress(I) swept the election in 1984 mainly because of the sympathy wave generated by the assassination of Indira Gandhi. This sympathy wave influenced even Muslims who were in fact alienated from her. Rajiv Gandhi hardly enjoyed the charisma her mother did. He even soon lost his credibility and Muslims hardly could be attracted towards him. He bungled when he changed the Shah Bano judgment of the Supreme Court by enacting a new law of maintenance for the Muslim women. He further angered the Muslims by laying the founda-

tion stone for a Ram temple at Ayodhya. And then Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao drove the last nail in the coffin of the Congress(I) by remaining a spectator during the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

The Congress(I) is trying hard to revive itself under the leadership of Ms. Sonia Gandhi. She had to bear the cross of being foreigner and some senior Congress(I) leaders such as Mr. Sharad Pawar, Mr. P. A. Sangma and Mr. Tariq Anwar deserted her and formed a new party. Like her mother-in-law she too has realised the importance of secularism. And, again like Indira Gandhi, she is also re-thinking on liberalisation and is constituting a committee to review the policy which has brought nothing but hardship to the weaker sections. If the Congress(I) is to revitalise itself it has to woo the minorities and the weaker sections back to its fold as the upper castes and upper classes are likely to stick with the BJP which is, in the given circumstances, the best bet for them.

In view of these new developments, the Congress(I) desperately needs the support of the weaker sections and the minorities. For this, it needs to strengthen its image as a party uncompromisingly upholding secularism and the interests of the weaker sections. Though the party realises this it is not doing enough to re-instil confidence among the minorities. Ms. Sonia Gandhi, to retain her leadership of the Congress(I), will have to create a charisma of her own in addition to what she has inherited from the Nehru family. This she can do only if she vigorously fights the menace of communalism and liberalisation. Unlike Indira Gandhi she has some limitations being Italian-born on the one hand, and a Christian, on the other. But the "stigma" of being a foreigner has been diluted to a great extent and her limitations as a Christian can also be overcome if she vigorously fights for secularism and wins decisively the confidence of the minorities. After all this country has a tradition of tolerance, pluralism and multiplicity of faiths. It will be difficult for sectarian forces to govern for long.

Manmohan not in Cong.(I) review panel

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI JULY 7. After weeks of procrastination, the Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today set up a 44-member "economic group" under the chairmanship of the former Finance Minister, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, to form an overview of the current economic policies and suggest "areas where a course correction was necessary".

Significantly, Dr. Manmohan Singh is not a member of the group, but is expected to have a final look at whatever the group comes up with. "Dr. Singh has chosen to stay out to allow a dispassionate discussion but he will join us later," said Mr. Oscar Fernandes, AICC(I) general secretary.

Critics find a place: Page 13

THE HINDU

- 8 JUL 2000

Manmohan out of Cong economy review panel

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 7. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi rode roughshod over Dr Manmohan Singh today to set up a jumbo party committee to review the BJP government's economic reforms programme. Dr Singh, the Congress's reforms author, reportedly opted out of the panel.

A Congress leader said Dr Singh opposed the formation of the panel, that was expected to "review the liberalisation process initiated by him when he was finance minister".

He had apparently managed to get the party to hold its hand thus far — "How can they review policies that were initiated by me," Dr Singh is learnt to have pleaded.

But other CWC members had kept the pressure on Mrs Gandhi, telling her that the Congress's failure to act as an Opposition and attack the Centre for its "anti-poor approach" was sending wrong signals to the people. She gave in today.

The Congress made a feeble attempt to cover the humiliation suffered by India's reforms guru by juggling words: "The committee won't review, but would (only) take an overview of the policies, and suggest changes if required."

The Congress leader, Mr Oscar Fernandes, insisted the former finance minister had been taken "into confidence and he wants a dispassionate study of the issue".



Dr Manmohan Singh
Mrs Sonia Gandhi



Mr Fernandes said Dr Singh would join the panel in "due course".

A major reason for throwing out Dr Singh's objections was

his tacit endorsement of the Centre's economic policies, particularly on subsidies and price rise.

A Congress leader said the party, trying desperately to make an issue of the Centre's economic policies, had been embarrassed by Dr Singh's stand.

Mr Pranab Mukherjee, CWC member, will head the 44-member panel, described by the Congress as an "introspection workshop". Mr AK Antony, Mr Arjun Singh, Mr K Karunakaran, Mr ND Tiwari, Mr CK Jaffer Sharief, Mr K Natwar Singh, Mr Madhavrao Scindia, Mr Mani Shankar Aiyer, Mrs Margaret Alva, Mr Prithviraj Chauhan, Mr K Vijaya Bhaskar Reddy, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and Mr Vayalar Ravi are some of the members.

Mr Jairam Ramesh, secretary of the AICC economic affairs department, and Mr Arjun Sengupta, former member of the Planning Commission, too are part of the committee.

Mr Fernandes said the need today was for policies that would have a "direct effect on our poverty levels, ultimately leading to elimination of poverty". The Congress president "wanted an exercise to be undertaken to identify areas where correction in economic policy, if any, is required".

■ BJP plans status papers on economy: page 8

THE STATESMAN

8 JUL 2000

Ghani threatens to resign

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, July 16



PRADESH
Congress Com-
mittee (PCC)
president A B
A Ghani Khan
Chowdhury
today threat-
ened to step
down in protest

against the alleged "high-handedness" of the party high command, putting in turmoil the already-upset machinery of the party. Chowdhury's threat comes close on the heels of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) reversing his decision to change the four District Congress Committee (DCC) presidents.

The PCC chief, who apparently felt slighted by the AICC's action, told *The Hindustan Times* over the telephone from Malda that he

would go to Delhi on July 21 to discuss "all the issues involved" with the party high command, or, in other words, with Sonia Gandhi.

Chowdhury confided to his aides that he would step down if he was not allowed to have his way in the reconstitution of the DCCs. He had replaced the district presidents of Midnapore, Bankura, Purulia and Jalpaiguri with leaders who are known to be keen on an alliance with the Trinamool Congress.

The PCC chief is reported to have told a meeting of party workers at Malda today that he was unhappy over the statements and action of some State party leaders who were out to denigrate him. While he did not name them, the reference to PCC working president Priya Ranjan Das Munshi was obvious.

Observers feel Das Munshi had played a key role in stalling

Chowdhury's recent move to change the district presidents on the plea that such replacements on the eve of organisational elections would send wrong signals to the workers.

It is understood that the Das Munshi camp had also questioned how a leader like Manas Bhuniya, who had overtly helped the Trinamool in Sabong in the Panskura parliamentary by-poll, could be entrusted with the responsibilities of the president of a sensitive district like Midnapore.

Sources close to Chowdhury said that the PCC chief was actually mounting pressure on the high command with his resignation threat. "In case he fails to make his point, he may step down," they said. A senior leader, now camping in Delhi, however, would prefer a wait-and-watch approach. "Things will be sorted out once Barkatda comes to Delhi," he said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

JUL 2000

Ghani to stay on as PCC chief, says Pranab

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, July 17

A B A GHANI Khan Chowdhury will continue as the PCC president, Pranab Mukherjee, Congress Working Committee member said here today.

"His resignation is out of the question. I have spoken to him. He is upset, but his grievances will be redressed at the New Delhi AICC session later this month," Mukherjee said.

"The high command has no intention of humiliating him. His proposal for changing four district presidents has been kept in abeyance, not cancelled. It is his advisers who are to be blamed for this impasse.

"The party constitution says that the AICC must be consulted before office-bearers are changed. Barkat was not aware of that. Nevertheless, I will convey his feelings to AICC president Sonia Gandhi," Mukherjee told *The Hindustan Times* here today.

The Rajya Sabha member said Chowdhury was upset because the AICC had not cleared his plan for a *Mahajot* with the Trinamool Congress.

"It's wrong of Barkat to think we don't know the ground realities in Bengal or don't want an understanding with Mamata Banerjee. We need her as much as he needs her in Bengal," said Mukherjee.

Detailed report on Page 8

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 A 200 200

Ghani stays out of Cong meet

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 22. — The West Bengal PCC chief, Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury, today stayed out of the meeting between PCC office-bearers and AICC general secretary in charge of West Bengal, Mrs Prabha Rao.

PCC leaders and senior Congress functionaries, including Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and Mr Kamal Nath, were present at the meeting.

Speaking to reporters, Mr Khan Chowdhury said he "does not attend" meetings held by general secretaries.

"I attend meetings called by the party president," he remarked, adding, however, that one of the reasons for his absence was "ill health".

THE STATESMAN

23 JUL 2000

Ghani-Priya bickering had better stop: Prabha

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Kolkata, July 26: AICC general secretary in charge of West Bengal Prabha Rao hinted on Wednesday the central leadership's experiment with two PCC leaders in West Bengal has backfired. Ms Rao noted the high command is a little peeved by the continuous bickering between president A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury and working president Priya Ranjan Das Munshi.

She said Mrs Sonia Gandhi will soon take a clear-cut decision to end this contentious issue of dual leadership. Ms Rao also said AICC present Sonia Gandhi will tour the state in the third week of September. She may make an earlier trip to Keshpur at the request of state leaders.

Ms Rao also announced there was no question of aligning with the Trinamul here "unless Ms Mamata Banerjee severs her links with the BJP." She added the Congress would go it alone in the 2001 Assembly elections. "The idea is to strengthen the party in West Bengal. Anyone in favour of a tie-up with the Trinamul-BJP combine is free to leave the party," Ms Rao said.

She said Congress MLAs who had defected to the Trinamul "will not remain in the party for long." The CLP has already asked the Speaker to terminate mayor Subrata Mukherjee's membership of the House for defection.

Ms Rao concentrated more on the shameless infighting between the two camps in the Congress. "These internecine quarrels have to stop now," she said. She hinted at a revamp in the state hierarchy much before the Assembly polls.

□ Turn to Page 10

Ghani-Priya bickering

□ Continued from Page 9

Ms Rao met the party rank and file throughout the day and will communicate their views to Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

Belligerent scenes were witnessed after Ms Rao finished talking to the media. A few Congress workers from North 24 Parganas barged in and demanded she speak to them. They had heated exchanges with Congress MLA Saugata Roy.

Mr Roy said Ms Rao's visit was part of a continuing exercise to assess the mood of the Bengal Congress.

Two views were expressed in Delhi when state leaders met her there last weekend. One: The AICC should give the PCC freedom to negotiate with the Trinamul minus the BJP. Two: The Congress should strengthen itself. Two groups within the fold met Mrs Gandhi. Mr Khan Chowdhury and Mr Atish Sinha were in favour of a dialogue with the Trinamul. The other group led by Mr Roy and Mr Abdul Gaffar felt the AICC should have enforced discipline especially after the Rajya Sabha polls, where many Congress MLAs ensured a Trinamul victory.

Mrs Gandhi's message was clear. She reportedly said there should be no talk of alliance with the Trinamul as long as it was a part of the National Democratic Alliance. The state unit ought to strengthen itself on its own steam.

CMC poll debacle on politburo agenda

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Kolkata, July 26: The top brass of the state CPI(M) left for New Delhi on Wednesday to attend the party's politburo and central committee meetings.

Among those who left were chief minister Jyoti Basu and his politburo colleagues Biman Bose and Anil Biswas. Others including Buddhadev Bhattacharya, Sailen Dasgupta and Niren Sen will leave on Thursday morning. The politburo meets on Thursday and the central committee on the following two days.

Sources said the party's setback in the CMC polls was likely to figure in the discussions, as would the upcoming 2001 Assembly elections in five states. The party's performance in the UP panchayat polls vis-à-vis the Samajwadi Party and the BJP will also be discussed.

Mr Basu is expected to clarify his stand on campaigning for the Assembly elections. The veteran chief minister left home around 5 pm on Wednesday, minutes after hosting his Jammu and Kashmir counterpart Farooq Abdullah at home.

The last time the politburo met, the meet was postponed by a few days.

THE ASIAN AGE

27 JUL 2000

Congress to oppose J&K autonomy package

'Farooq raking up autonomy issue to shift people's attention from corruption'

BY SHAHID FARUQ

New Delhi, June 16: The Congress has decided to oppose the greater autonomy package for Jammu and Kashmir prepared by the Farooq Abdullah government, which is likely to be discussed in a special six-day session of the state Assembly beginning June 19.

The Congress leadership has taken this decision after a two-day discussion on the subject.

Prominent party leaders from Jammu and Kashmir, including newly-appointed state party chief Shafi Qureshi, MLAs, former MPs and senior central leaders like Ahmad Patel, who is the All-India Congress Committee general secretary in charge of Jammu and Kashmir, Dr

Karan Singh, Dr Manmohan Singh, Mr Pranab Mukherjee attended the meeting. Congress president Sonia Gandhi presided over the meeting.

The party is of the view that "the Kashmir problem can be solved by implementation of the Indira Gandhi-Sheikh Abdullah Accord of 1975, effective devolution under Article 370 of the Constitution, and good governance."

The Congress party feels that the Farooq Abdullah government is raking up the autonomy issue "merely to deviate people's attention from rampant corruption in the state and increase in Pakistan-backed militancy during its rule."

A senior party leader said that after the 1996 Lok Sabha and Assembly elections, when peace prevailed in the Valley and

militancy was on the wane, it was expected that the Farooq Abdullah government, which had assumed power in the state, would carry out developmental work, which in turn would have reduced the financial woes of the people.

"But Farooq's non-governance and complete disregard to the people's aspirations has resulted in the resurfacing of militancy in the state. And now to deviate people's attention, Farooq has become more vocal about autonomy," the Congress leader said.

He said the people of Ladakh and Jammu regions of the state have already rejected the autonomy package.

"Even in the Kashmir Valley, not more than 10 per cent of the population is in favour of the National Conference pack-

age," he said.

The need of the hour is a government which tries to solve the problems of the people, especially the financial problems, he said.

"The Farooq Abdullah government has frittered away an important opportunity to bring in lasting peace in the state. What is being done now is just a coverup," the Congress leader said.

Dr Farooq Abdullah's National Conference government has convened a special session to discuss the recommendation of a committee set up by it to evolve an autonomy package for the state.

The recommendation of the committee would be introduced in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly either as a government resolution or a private member bill.

THE ASIAN AGE

17 JUN 2000

Speaker asks Subrata to answer defection charge

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, June 21

HT 3/2/6

SPEAKER OF the State Assembly H A Halim today asked Trinamool's mayoral candidate Subrata Mukherjee to explain to the Congress the charge that he had flouted anti-defection laws by contesting on the Trinamool Congress ticket in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) election.

Leader of the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) Atis Sinha had earlier lodged a formal complaint to the Speaker against Mukherjee. The CLP leader claimed that Mukherjee being still a Congress MLA had gone against the provisions of the anti-defection law by deciding to contest on the

Trinamool symbol in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) election.

The Speaker's letter was written with the intention of finding out Mukherjee's stand on the issue. He had been asked to reply in a week's time. Mukherjee, who is the tipped to be the city Mayor, was not too perturbed over the development. "The Congress, in league with the CPI(M), has been conspiring against me and the charge against me is an indication of that. But I am too focused on the election now to pay attention to this," Mukherjee said.

He pointed out that despite his open support to the Trinamool, he had not resigned from the Congress on simple political grounds.

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"My resignation from the Congress would have meant a by-election and since it is difficult to defeat the CPI(M) in a by-election, I preferred not to allow that party a chance to win." He had already talked with lawyers and was confident he would be able to answer the Speaker's queries adequately.

The incident again brings into the open the rapidly-souring relations between the Congress and the Trinamool. It is also indicative of the strong reservations maintained against Mukherjee by a section of Congress leaders, especially Somen Mitra and his followers. Four other Trinamool-sympathiser Congress MLAs had earlier been put on the dock on similar charges.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 JUN 2000

State Congress divided over Panskura by-poll nominee

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, May 9

THE REVOLT in the West Bengal Congress over the AICC decision to put up a Congress candidate in the Panskura by-election has now spread to the grassroots level.

According to party sources, at least two Congress units in the Panskura constituency - Sabang and Keshpur - have decided to support the Trinamool candidate, Bikram Sarkar. A majority of the Congress-ruled panchayat bodies in the Panskura constituency are also said to have opted for Sarkar.

For the second time in one-and-a-half months, the State Congress has plunged into a serious crisis after Congress president Sonia Gandhi overrode the WBPCC to announce a Congress candidate for the Panskura Lok Sabha seat. On March 29, it was to mark their protest over the Congress Rajya Sabha nominee that a broad chunk

of Congress legislators cross-voted in favour of the Trinamool candidate to ensure a shock win for Jayanta Bhattacharya.

Upset over the Congress president's move, State Congress leaders have this time decided to keep themselves away from the party campaign in Panskura.

Former WBPCC president Somen Mitra made it clear that the decision would cost the Congress dear in political terms and would lead to further marginalisation of the party in the State. He explained that their request to support the Trinamool candidate was only meant to honour the anti-CPI(M) sentiments of the people in a district "where CPI(M) cadres have let loose a reign of terror in collusion with the police". Talking to *The Hindustan Times*, Mitra said that though as a loyal party worker, he would have no option but to abide by the high command's decision, he would prefer to stay away

from party campaigns in Panskura.

Mitra's close aide and Congress Chief Whip Abdul Mannan was no less dismayed over the way the AICC rode roughshod over their sentiments. "The Congress remains a non-entity in Panskura and past election results proved that. By putting up a Congress candidate, we have only paved the way for CPI candidate Gurudas Dasgupta's win," a bitter Mannan said.

PCC leaders spewed venom on WBPCC working president PR Das Munshi for the embarrassment. "Das Munshi is a weathercock and a peddler of disharmony. Let him take charge of the Congress campaign in Panskura and lead the party to victory," said Mitra. "During the last 10 years, Das Munshi has not bothered to campaign for the Congress in any elections. The onus is on him to orchestrate the campaign and also to arrange election funds."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 MAY 2008

10 MAY 2008

Panskura was a mistake, AICC told

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, May 12. — Senior PCC leaders belonging to the ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury-Somen Mitra camp today made it clear to Mr Vayalar Ravi, AICC general secretary that the party high command was not right in fielding a Congress candidate in the Panskura Lok Sabha seat in Midnapore.

Mr Ravi, who came to the city today, met the leaders of the both the factions. Congress insiders say that some of the leaders of the Khan Chowdhury-Mitra group went to the extent of telling Mr Ravi that they would not campaign for the Congress candidate for the Panskura seat.

A senior leader of the camp is learnt to have told Mr Ravi that he would even campaign for the Trinamul Congress can-

didate for the seat. The camp leaders said that as the CPI-M was the main enemy of the Congress in West Bengal, it would have been prudent on the part of the Congress not to field any candidate in this parliamentary constituency. The people of the state are in favour of a combined Opposition unitedly fighting the CPI-M-led Left Front in the coming polls, these leaders were learnt to have told Mr Ravi.

The party would have to regret fielding a candidate in Panskura, they reportedly stated. In an obvious reference to Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, Mr Abdul Mannan, a Somen Mitra loyalist told Mr Ravi that the AICC chief should not be misled by such people.

The followers of Mr Das Munshi, the PCC working pres-

ident, who was instrumental in fielding a party candidate in Panskura, on the contrary, pressed for a probe into the alleged cross voting by a section of the party MLAs during the last Rajya Sabha elections from West Bengal in which a Trinamul Congress-backed Independent candidate scored a surprise victory.

Mr Ravi later admitted that there are differences in the state Congress over fielding a party candidate for the Panskura seat, but hoped that the problem would be resolved soon.

The entire development indicated that the dominant section of the PCC is unlikely to back the party nominee for the Panskura seat. On the contrary, they may even consider working for the Trinamul candidate either directly or covertly.

THE STATESMAN

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13 MAY 2000

49-12 PANSKURA SEAT AND THE 'MAHAJOT'

BY DECIDING TO field its own nominee, Mr. Subhankar Sarkar, in the by-election for the Panskura Lok Sabha seat, the Congress(I) high command may have succeeded in registering its opposition to the "mahajot" idea mooted by influential sections in the party's West Bengal unit. But the reluctance shown by the enthusiasts of the grand-alliance-against-the-CPI(M) idea in the State unit of the party to take the contest in real earnest is something that the high command cannot gloss over. Apart from the fact of the Pradesh Congress(I) Committee president, Mr. A. B. A. Ghani Khan Choudhury's "inability" to show himself up with Mr. Sarkar when he went to file his nomination, the other important leader in the State unit, Mr. Somen Mitra, has declared that he will not be campaigning for the party nominee. Hence, Ms. Sonia Gandhi had to rely on the working president of the State unit, Mr. P. R. Das Munshi, to ensure that Mr. Sarkar filed his papers. There is no way that the Congress(I) high command can rest assured that the party ranks will be mobilised in strength for the campaign. All that the Congress(I) president could do is to avert a showdown with the recalcitrant sections in the State unit in the immediate context.

Indeed, the Congress(I) was hardly in a position to put up a serious fight in Panskura; apart from the fact that Geetha Mukherjee of the CPI had been winning the seat continuously from 1980, the Congress(I) has virtually been pushed out of the contest — like in several other West Bengal constituencies — ever since Ms. Mamata Banerjee teamed up with the BJP in 1998. It is Ms. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress and not the Congress(I) that has emerged as the rallying force against the Left parties. The birth of Trinamool Congress just a few months before the 1998 general elections (by itself an expression of Ms. Banerjee's opposition to the Congress(I)'s support to the United Front at the

Centre in which the Left parties played a major role) and the ease with which the fledgling outfit tied up with the BJP provided for the consolidation of an anti-Left platform in West Bengal. It is in this context that the Panskura by-election and the Congress(I)'s dilemma assume significance.

The Congress(I) high command may now have postponed a showdown with the influential sections in the State unit. And by doing so, Ms. Gandhi and her aides in New Delhi may have saved themselves and the party from the charge of teaming up with communal and sectarian forces. But the fact that the high command continues to remain a mute spectator when the leaders in one of its State units are showing no compunctions about advocating an alliance with the Trinamool Congress, an important constituent of the BJP-led coalition, is something that is too jarring to be ignored. Such moves that are innocent of ideology and displaying of crass opportunism led to the decimation of the Congress (I) in various other States — Bihar and Uttar Pradesh, for instance — in the past. And the high command now wants to wish away any confrontation with such leaders in West Bengal — whose only objective seems to be self-preservation — who are for a grand alliance with the Trinamool Congress, the BJP and any other platform opposed to the Left parties. Be that as it may, the Panskura by-election assumes significance in another context too. The CPI's nominee, Mr. Gurudas Dasgupta, after having established his worth as a member in the Rajya Sabha, has a tough battle ahead. The ill-feelings generated within the Left Front — when the CPI(M) refused to give Mr. Dasgupta another term in the Rajya Sabha — have added a new dimension to the by-election in that it remains to be seen whether the Left parties can manage complete unity of their ranks in Panskura.

1155 ARMY 22000

1155 ARMY 22000

15 MAY 2000

End of confusion: Cong wants minimum N-deterrent

Swaraj Thapa
NEW DELHI, 19 MAY

SEEKING TO put an end to the confusion over its nuclear policy, the Congress leadership, for the first time on Friday, came out with a firm assertion that it favoured keeping the option open for further enhancement of India's nuclear capabilities.

While reaffirming faith in the Rajiv Gandhi action plan to work towards a nuclear weapon-free world, Congress president Sonia Gandhi indicated that her party subscribed to the viewpoint that upgradation of India's nuclear programme was necessary in the

post Pokhran-II era. At the same time, however, she maintained that an arms race would have to be avoided in the subcontinent.

"Our nuclear policy is to strive for total nuclear disarmament, which alone can provide security to the world community from nuclear disaster. We do recognise the need to upgrade nuclear technology but at the same time we cannot allow unintended arms race in the subcontinent," Ms Gandhi said in an informal inter-action today.

The party had run into controversy on the nuclear issue during US President Bill Clinton's visit in

March when senior party leader Pranab Mukherjee asserted that the Congress president, in discussions with Mr Clinton, had supported the need for minimum credible nuclear deterrent for India. Mr Mukherjee's statement, however, was denied two days later by the party spokesperson Ajit Jogi, who maintained that Ms Gandhi "never used those words" (of minimum credible nuclear deterrent).

What had subsequently followed was confusion over the issue with the party unable to come out with a clear articulation

of its views. Ms Gandhi subsequently set up an informal group within the party who discussed the issue and submitted a draft of its conclusions to the leadership.

According to party circles, inherent in Ms Gandhi's fresh assertion — of recognising the need for upgrading the country's nuclear technology — is the implication that the Congress leadership is inclined to side with the government on having a minimum credible nuclear deterrent. (However, it now appears to be a case of semantics, with the party disinclined to use

POKHRAN FILES

the same terminology which the BJP government had used.

Party circles point that the Congress manifesto in fact had all along professed the same line where it stressed on ensuring that nuclear weapons in the immediate vicinity were never used but at the same time, India could not afford to relax its vigil.

Ms Gandhi also reiterated the party position on Sri Lanka by stating that a solution was required which kept in mind the interests of the ethnic groups as well as safeguarded the integrity of the island nation. "We want a peaceful resolution of the conflict, a resolu-

tion that will fully protect the legitimate interests of all ethnic groups including the Tamils. A solution must be found, safeguarding the territorial unity and integrity of Sri Lanka," she said.

The Congress president also added that her party favoured dialogue with the various outfits in Jammu and Kashmir within the constitutional framework. "The government should not hesitate to initiate a dialogue with various groups but it must not compromise on the basic constitutional framework of our country. The Congress party welcomes a dialogue with the Hurriyat leaders.

The Economic Times

20 MAY 2000

PM DEFENDS ECONOMIC POLICIES

Sonia, Basu fail to convince Vajpayee on rollback

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, MAY 16. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today unambiguously told his two major political rivals — Ms. Sonia Gandhi and Mr. Jyoti Basu — that his government was not going to give in to the Opposition demand for a rollback of price hikes and subsidy cuts. Thrice during the course of the day, he defended his government's willingness to take "certain hard decisions" in the long-term interests of the economy.

The first opportunity Mr. Vajpayee got to reiterate his government's resolve was in the morning when the Leader of the Opposition and Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, led a "protest march" of her party MPs to the Prime Minister's House. Fully aware of the political nature of her mission, the Prime Minister did not feel the need to give the Congress(I) leaders the benefit of the doubt.

He pointed out that the process of economic reforms was in fact started by a Congress(I) regime, and that while he was not exactly happy at having to take harsh measures there were no other options. He pointedly refused to give any assurance of any "reconsideration", despite entreaties from some members of the Congress Working Committee who had accompanied Ms. Gandhi.

Since the nature of Ms. Gandhi's mission was known, the Prime Minister had asked Mr. Shanta Kumar, Minister for Consumer Affairs and Public Distribution, to be at hand; and, Mr. Shanta Kumar dutifully read out



The Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, at his residence in New Delhi on Tuesday before submitting a memorandum on the price rise issue. Also seen are Dr. Manmohan Singh and Mr. S. Jaipal Reddy (second from left). — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

excerpts from the Congress(I) manifestoes and Dr. Manmohan Singh's budget speeches to provide a rationale for the seemingly harsh decisions, similar to those taken by the BJP Government.

In fact, the tone and tenor of Mr. Vajpayee's responses to the Congress(I) leaders' arguments and interruptions was clear: if the Government did not give in to its own allies, there was no political compulsion to oblige Ms. Sonia

Gandhi. In any case, with the Union Budget voted and out of the way, the Prime Minister has no inclination to humour the Leader of the Opposition.

Later in the evening, the Prime Minister chose to write a detailed response to Ms. Sonia Gandhi. The opening line of the letter sums up the substance. It reads: "I have received your letter on the aforesaid subject this morning. We have considered the matter

carefully and would reiterate our response which we have articulated at length both in Parliament and outside."

The second occasion for Mr. Vajpayee to do some plain talking was when the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, called on him.

The Prime Minister told the visitor that his government had already adopted the best feature of the West Bengal policy — a reference to doubling the PDS quota for those below the poverty line. Mr. Vajpayee did not feel apologetic about his government's economic policies.

And the third occasion for the Prime Minister to defend the Budget was the end-of-the-session meeting of the BJP parliamentary party. To the merriment of his captive audience, Mr. Vajpayee described the memorandum submitted by the Congress(I) as a "mere repetition of Congress(I) slogans", and dismissed the Congress(I) arguments as "loud but hollow". The Prime Minister told his party MPs to confidently go out and spread the good word about a "bold and sound" budget.

In a similar vein, the BJP sought to occupy the high "responsible" ground by publicly patting Dr. Manmohan Singh on the back for his "balanced" speech earlier in the Rajya Sabha on the 89th Constitutional amendment bill. As if it was part of a well-rehearsed script, the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, also complimented Dr. Singh and Mr. Pranab Mukherjee for their "brilliance" and thoughtfulness.

17 MAY 2000

Leadership, policy issues stump Cong.

By Smita Gupta
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: On Tuesday morning Congress president Sonia Gandhi marched to the Prime Minister's residence to demand the restoration of food and fertiliser subsidies; a few hours later, Manmohan Singh—former Congress finance minister—pleaded passionately in the Rajya Sabha that it “was obligatory...to take measures to bring subsidies down within the limits of prudence”.

Call it a crisis of leadership or one of identity. Either way, the Congress seems to be in a state of flux.

For, close on the heels of party functionary Jairam Ramesh apologising unconditionally for casting aspersions on Sonia's ability to lead the party has come another bombshell: Senior leader Vasant Sathe's editorial in the latest issue of the party organ *Sandesh* lists his leader's many shortcomings, and stresses she was a compromise choice.

The official reaction to Mr Sathe's editorial was that inner-party democracy “is alive and kicking”. Others laughed, admitting it was more candid than Mr Ramesh's interview. The screening committee—set up recently after an interview

with Ajit Pawar, Sharad Pawar's nephew and a minister in the Maharashtra government, appeared in *Sandesh* party sources pointed out, could hardly vet the editor's copy.

The Sathe editorial not only refers to the Congress “facing a crisis of confidence” and “mental depression amongst the senior members”, but the passages on Sonia are patronising: “Soniaji has been and continues to be aware of her own limitations...She has never made any claim to having the charismatic capacity to single-handedly get the masses...to vote the Congress to power.. Her natural reserve...was a great handicap with the media and intellectual elite. Language was one of the major hurdles.”

Mr Sathe then covers his tracks by praising Sonia's efforts to overcome her shortcomings: acquiring a “good command over Hindi,” communicating “effectively in huge public meetings” and “making effective interventions in the Lok Sabha”. But he immediately says, “Not that there are no other more brilliant and seasoned leaders in the Congress...” But because of the “great handicap” of having a “crab culture”, all leaders find “a uniting point in the Nehru-Gandhi family”.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

17 APR 2000

17 MAY 2000

Sonia go-ahead for talks with Trinamool

By Angana Parekh

NEW DELHI, APRIL 4. The Congress (I)'s West Bengal leaders are understood to have begun discussing with the Trinamool Congress tonight the possibility of seat-sharing in the civic elections in the State, even though the latter made it clear that its alliance with the BJP would continue.

Only this morning, the Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, told the state PCC(I) chief, Mr. A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chaudhary, and his predecessor, Mr. Somen Mitra, to go ahead with the talks with the Trinamool Congress but added the proviso that nothing should be done which would compromise the party's ideology and its fight against communal forces. Mr.

Chaudhary and Mr. Mitra had a 45-minute meeting with the Trinamool Congress chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, tonight — the second in two days — and discussed an understanding for the coming civic elections.

The stage is now set for a battle of nerves which is unlikely to be resolved in a hurry. Though Ms. Banerjee categorically ruled out the possibility of her party leaving the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance, Mr. Chaudhary and Mr. Mitra maintained that they were "talking only to Ms. Banerjee" and "would not have anything to do with the BJP".

With its top State leadership taking a blinkered view — "The reality is West Bengal. The State's salvation lies in driving the CPI

(M) out of power and I sincerely believe we should follow Mamata's footsteps," being Mr. Chaudhary's view — it will be the task of the Congress(I)'s central leadership to strike a balance between local and national imperatives.

From the comments of some Congress(I) West Bengal leaders, it is clear that they do not share their high command's allergy to the BJP. They pointed out that even the CPI(M) had an alliance with the BJP in 1989. The same argument was put forward by Ms. Banerjee at a separate press conference today.

Mr. Chaudhary and Mr. Mitra met Ms. Gandhi this morning to brief her about Mr. Chaudhary's talks last night with Ms. Banerjee.

To repeated questioning on

how an alliance could be possible while the Trinamool Congress continued to be a BJP ally, Mr. Mitra responded that "politics was fluid" and that discussions were still on.

The BJP welcomed the proposal of an anti-marxist "grand alliance" being floated by Trinamool Congress but said the Congress(I) should first iron out its internal differences on the issue.

Ms. Banerjee said she was happy that senior Congress(I) leaders like Mr. Chaudhary had responded to her call for the grand alliance. She rejected the CPI(M)'s charge that her proposal was opportunistic and said at one time even the CPI(M) had joined hands with the BJP in its bid for ouster of Congress(I).

THE HINDU

- 5 APR 2008

meeting of "developmental activities and the law and order situation."

Shah's controversial decision to visit this district came shortly after a delegation of Trinamool and BJP leaders urged him to see for himself how the local administration had "collapsed."

Ever since the last Panchayat election in 1998, when the ruling Marxists lost substantial ground to the Trinamool here, clashes have been frequent and fierce in several pockets of the district like Keshpur

the BJP.

Sensing the reaction, Raj Bhavan did some damage control, claiming that Shah's visit was not to review law and order but development. And Chief Minister Jyoti Basu himself said yesterday that Shah had a right to go anywhere in the state.

But behind this public truce, resentment is building. Said a senior district officer: "To tell you frankly, there is nothing in the district's development sector which should have prompted the Governor to

HD-1 Congress(I) elections put off

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 8. Amid signs of growing restiveness against the Congress(I) president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi's leadership, the party has decided to postpone its internal organisational elections by about 10 weeks, according to Mr. Ram Niwas Mirdha, chairman of the party's Central Election Authority.

Earlier, the enrollment of membership was to end on April 10, but it has now been extended up to May 31. Mr. Mirdha said a fresh schedule for the election would be announced soon.

In another significant development, four senior members of the Congress Working Committee — Mr. Arjun Singh, Mr. Ahmed Patel, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia and Mrs. Prabha Rao — asserted that the party would have nothing to do, directly or indirectly, with the Bharatiya Janata Party. This statement comes in the wake of the on-going debate within the party over the West Bengal Congressmen's preference for Ms. Mamata Banerjee's 'Mahajot' — grand alliance — against the CPI(M), an arrangement that would not exclude the BJP.

The leaders, reflecting the establishment's view, have asserted that while it was possible to "explore the possibilities of having an alliance with like-minded secular parties in the forthcoming elections to the West Bengal Assembly, with the objective of defeating the Marxists, we shall ensure that there is no direct or indirect linkage with the BJP."

The 'mahajot' idea has caught the imagination of the dominant section of the West Bengal Congressmen; this section reportedly wants to go ahead with the 'mahajot' idea, even the central leadership was not excited about it. The AICC establishment has not been amused over Mr. Advani's endorsement of the idea.

The four leaders, therefore, felt it necessary to assert the Congress' basic opposition to the BJP: "The protection and preservation of the secular, democratic, multi-racial and multicultural polity of India is an article of faith for the Congress party and it has been committed to it since its very inception. Any step, which dilutes this commitment in any manner, whatsoever shall not be acceptable to the Congress party."

The statement by the CWC members suggests that the pro-Sonia Gandhi leaders are inclined to give an ideological twist to the internal restiveness. The postponement of the organisational elections is seen as an indirect acknowledgement of this restiveness.

However, Mr. Mirdha, has observed that he had received representation from Bihar, West Bengal, Haryana, Andhra Pradesh for extending the enrollment period as these States were busy local elections. Mr. Mirdha also conceded that there was slow progress in enrollment of women members, who are supposed to get 33 per cent of all organisational posts.

Mr. Rajesh Pilot, a CWC member who a few days ago opted to take a stand different from the party president on the demand of the Bihar Chief Minister's resignation, reacted cautiously to the postponement of the elections. He said, "the central election authority is an independent body, and we all hope that it has taken this decision in the party's interest."

THE HINDU

9 APR 2008

BJP rebuts Sonia's charge on Constitution review

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: On a day when Sonia Gandhi thundered against "any change in the Constitution" and the "malintentions" behind the Vajpayee government's constitutional review exercise, the BJP carried the controversy back to the Congress by issuing a pamphlet highlighting Indira Gandhi's track record in constitutional matters.

Earlier in the day, while addressing a rally on the occasion of B.R. Ambedkar's 109th birth anniversary, Ms Gandhi had said the Union government's decision about reviewing the Constitution was a "conspiracy" to "finish" democracy and "impose a communal and fascist government on the country".

"While the nation is celebrating the golden jubilee of the Constitution, they (the BJP) are attacking it. It's an insult to Babasaheb and other framers of our constitution," she said, adding, "We will never compromise with the fundamental principles of the Constitution —sarva, dharma and sadbhav."

She alleged that the BJP was trying to create an atmosphere of confusion and lawlessness to get political mileage. "But we will not

tolerate any attempt to destroy the constitution framed under the aegis of Mahatma Gandhi," she declared.

In its riposte, the BJP 'fact-sheet' predictably contrasted the government's review exercise with the "dark days" of the Emergency when the first constitutional review was undertaken to perpetuate Indira Gandhi's rule. "We want to strengthen fundamental rights, the independence of the judiciary, electoral reforms and the rights of Dalits," BJP general secretary Venkaiiah Naidu said. He said that the Congress review produced by the Swaran Singh commission in 1976 had dismantled the democratic structure, suspending all fundamental rights, including the right to life.

He termed as "blatant lies" the Congress contention that the NDA government was trying "to curtail the rights of Dalits and Adivasis" by setting up the Constitution Review Commission. BJP senior vice-president Jana Krishnamurthy, who is tipped to be the next party president, said the pamphlet was being issued "to remind the Congress that it is living in a glass house".

BJP cadres would "go to every

basti" to explain to the people what the fact-sheet contained, Mr Krishnamurthy said, and warned that by the time West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Uttar Pradesh go to the polls in a year's time, "the Congress will find it has lost its Dalit votes".

Denying a "hidden agenda" behind the constitutional review, Mr Naidu said the review commission had been tasked only to study and review the working of the Constitution and to recommend changes if any. The commission's report would be tabled in parliament and debated. Only those suggestions that were voted in by two-thirds of parliament would be incorporated in the constitution. "There is complete transparency. Why does the Congress oppose it?" Mr Naidu asked.

Referring to Sonia Gandhi's stand on "no changes in the basic structure", Mr Naidu cited Indira Gandhi as saying, "We do not accept the dogma of the basic structure—the courts have invented it." He also noted that of the 79 amendments so far, 69 were carried out by Congress regimes at the Centre—and of these 58 were by Jawaharlal Nehru, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

15 APR 2001

'Cong has nothing to do with BJP'

HT Correspondent
Calcutta, April 17

1874
AICC PRESIDENT Sonia Gandhi this morning spoke to ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury over the telephone.

9 p.m. - cont.
"During their conversation, lasting 20 minutes, Barkatda told Sonia that some party leaders, hand-in-glove with the CPI(M), were hatching a conspiracy to scuttle the grand alliance. Sonia asked the PCC chief to ensure that the Congress remained intact," a Ghani Khan aide later said.

Party insiders here said some CWC leaders were trying to convince the AICC chief that the Bengal Congress was working on an undercover deal with the BJP. But others in the policy-making

body, such as Madhavrao Scindia, Ahmed Patel, Rajesh Pilot and Ghulam Nabi Azad, are telling her that the Congress was talking only to Mamata Banerjee and would have nothing to do with the BJP.

Hours after he talked to the AICC president, Chowdhury told *The Hindustan Times* the machina-

Ghani-Sonia Talks

tions of State working-president Priya Ranjan Das Munshi would never work. "He will never succeed in unsettling the grand alliance."

"They are playing up the BJP bogey to upset the alliance," the PCC president said.

In a show of loyalty to the AICC, Chowdhury has asked his party-

men not to participate in an April 19 Trinamool Youth Congress meeting, where State BJP leaders too have been invited. "I am repeating that the Congress will have nothing to do with the BJP and Mamata has accepted my condition," he said.

Reiterating the State unit's resolve to stand by the high command, PCC vice-president Pradip Bhattacharyya said: "The Congress will never deviate from the high command's directive. For no reason, the BJP's name is cropping up repeatedly. This is being done to split the State Congress.. CPI(M) leaders are misleading the Congress leaders. Who is H S Surjeet to advise Sonia Gandhi? Is he our headmaster?"

See also report on Page 3

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 APR 2000

Cong plans panels to monitor its State Govts

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 19

IN A step that is a tacit admission of the need to streamline party affairs in Delhi, the Congress high command has set up a high-powered panel to co-ordinate action between the Sheila Dikshit Government and the Pradesh Congress Committee.

Constituted in the wake of a protracted dissident campaign aimed at the Chief Minister's removal, the institution of the co-ordination panel has obviated, at least for the present, the possibility of a leadership change in Delhi. Apart from Central leaders Prabha Rau and Madhavrao Scindia, the panel includes Ms Dixit and Messrs Jag Parvesh Chandra, Subhash Chopra and Deep Chand Sharma.

Talking to reporters in her capacity as AICC general secretary in-charge of Delhi, Ms Rau said that in consonance with past Congress practice, similar co-ordination panels would be set up for each State where the party is in power. Ms Rau explained that the co-

ordination panels' main task would be to monitor implementation of the party manifesto.

These committees would also provide a forum for sorting out differences having a bearing on the functioning of party regimes, including demands for leadership change.

On their part, the AICC spokespersons, Mrs Margaret Alva and Mr Anil Shastri, said that co-ordination committees would also be established in States such as Pondicherry, Maharashtra and Bihar where the Congress is sharing power with other parties.

The spokespersons also announced the appointment of former Karnataka MP B K Hari Prasad as the chairman of the Congress Seva Dal in place of Mr Suresh Pachouri.

The latter had expressed his desire to step down from the post sometime back to concentrate on Parliament work as the Congress deputy chief whip in the Rajya Sabha.

Mr Prahlad Yadav, a party leader from UP, would be the Seva Dal's chief organiser.



Sheila Dixit

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 APR 2000

Mahajot continues to worry Sonia

Cong chief directs aides to keep tab on Ghani

Grand alliance shows first sign of working

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 20

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Sonia Gandhi has directed AICC officials in-charge of West Bengal to ensure implementation of her decision to field candidates against the BJP in the forthcoming local bodies' elections in the Left-ruled State.

Well-placed party sources here said that either of the CWC members — Ms Prabha Rau or Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad (who had earlier held charge of West Bengal) or AICC secretary Pawan Bansal would be rushing to Calcutta in the event of PCC chief A. B. A. Ghani Khan Chaudhary not being able to make it to Delhi.

The last date for filing nominations for the civic polls is April 26.

Mr Azad is also part of a three-member AICC team the Congress president has assigned to West Bengal to probe cross-voting in the recently-held Rajya Sabha elections. To some extent, the task of these observers, including Messrs R. K. Dhawan and Kamal Nath, would overlap with the mission of the second team.

The decision to set up candidates against the BJP was formalised at a meeting Mrs Gandhi had with senior party colleagues yesterday.

Among those present on the occasion were Mr Pranab Mukherjee, Mr Priyaranjan Dasmunshi, Ms Rau, Mr Azad and Mr Bansal.

Before the meeting, Mr Ghani Khan had told Ms Rau in a telephonic chat that his strategy was to share seats with Ms Mamata Banerjee's Trinamool Congress alone.

However, the leadership's decision to dispatch central office-bearers to the State betrays an element of circumspection about the PCC boss' inclination and ability to enforce the party line in the face of overwhelming support for the 'Mahajot' idea.

Significantly, a section of the local Congress legislators joined a Trinamool-BJP delegation which called on the West Bengal Governor in Calcutta today to convey apprehensions about a CPI-M rein of terror during the polls. The development points to an exceedingly fluid situation in the State where, only yesterday, the PCC had refused to join the NDA partners' stir against the deteriorating law and order situation.

On her part, Mrs Gandhi also assured partymen from UP and Bihar, who called on her today, that nothing would be done in West Bengal at the expense of the party's commitment to secularism.

Arindam Sarkar
Calcutta, April 20

FOR THE first time, the 'Mahajot' solidarity surfaced in West Bengal with a delegation comprising MLAs and an MP of the Trinamool Congress, the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party presented a joint deputation to Governor Viren Shah here today at Raj Bhavan.

"We will fight against the CPI (M) perpetrated reign of terror in Bengal together. And the Mahajot partners have made the first move in that direction," said chairman of the Trinamool policy-making body Pankaj Banerjee.

Congress leaders denied that the all-party deputation was a deviation from its earlier political stand of not having any truck with the BJP in the 'Mahajot'. "Parliamentary and Assembly politics should not be mixed up. In the past, the CPI (M), the BJP and other Opposition parties have unitedly attacked the Congress on issues such as the Bofors scam, the share scam and the Maruti scandal," Congress chief whip Abdul Mannan said.

Mr Banerjee said that they had drawn the Governor's attention towards the deteriorating law and order situation, rising political

murders in the districts and the lathi-charge by the police against the Trinamool workers at the party's Trinamool Youth Congress meeting yesterday.

"We have demanded the resignation of State Home Minister Buddhadev Bhattacharya. The democratic rights of the people are being openly flouted by the CPI (M) and its administration," Trinamool MP Jayanta Bhattacharya said. "We have requested the Governor to personally look into the maladministration of the CPI (M)," added Congress MLA Shanker Singh.

Governor Viren Shah was said to have given a patient hearing to the delegation and reportedly expressed shock when a blood-soaked shirt of a Trinamool worker wounded by the police lathi-charge at the Trinamool Youth Congress meeting yesterday was shown to him.

"He also said that his sources confirmed that Trinamool leader Bikash Basu, who was recently killed, was a good man and did not have any enemies within the party. It proves the Trinamool contention that the CPI (M) is fabricating the case and unnecessarily implicating Trinamool workers in the murder," claimed State Youth Congress chief Paresh Pal.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 APR 2000

Manmohan declines to be part of economic reforms panel

Swaraj Thapa
NEW DELHI 26 APRIL

THE PROPOSAL within the Congress to review its stand on economic reforms by setting up a high-powered committee, has hit a roadblock with the chief architect of liberalisation, Dr Manmohan Singh, declining to be a part of the panel.

Dr Singh has been the original architect of the reforms process in India and the party's waffling on the issue is evidently distasteful. In the early years of reforms, when faced with similar objections from the anti-reformists, Dr Manmohan Singh had persevered. But most importantly, it was due to the unqualified support he received from the then Prime Minister, Mr Narasimha Rao.



Manmohan

In the current situation, Dr Singh is unsure of getting the support of the top leadership of the party, which may have influenced his decision. Moreover, he is not convinced by the argument of the party vocalists that reforms are against the poor. This will automatically mean a tacit acknowledgement of the opposite argument, that the pre-reforms era was beneficial. Since public records point to the contrary, the economist cannot possibly be equated with the new stand.

In the new atmosphere of populism too, Dr Singh, finds himself strangely isolated. He

believes that difficult decisions have to be taken for the greater good of the economy, but the Congress party's obsession with short-term populist measures finds no echo within Dr Manmohan Singh. He has also been reportedly miffed by the current exercise which, he believes, is another way of criticising his measures.

Sections in the party, thought to be gunning for Dr Singh, believe that fast pace reforms was responsible for the steady decline of the party's fortunes over the past decade. With the NDA government swearing by second generation reforms, party leaders said there is a need to formulate a definite pro-poor line on economic reforms, different from the BJP.

The Economic Times

27 APR 2000

Cong, RJD close to clinching deal

Vinod Sharma
New Delhi, March 2

THE CONGRESS and the Rashtriya Janata Dal appeared closer tonight to reaching an accord on Government formation in Bihar, the exact contours of which might become clearer tomorrow, after Mrs Sonia Gandhi's return here from Madhya Pradesh.

"There is agreement by and large on issues outlined in our party manifesto," a Congress interlocutor remarked following two rounds of discussions, lasting three hours, with Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav. The four-member negotiating team's mandate, he pointed out, was to undertake a subject-specific dialogue, including the demand for Jharkhand State.

During the bitterly-fought elections, the RJD had opposed the Congress' and other Opposition parties' concept of Jharkhand by mooted the idea of a "greater Jharkhand", encompassing tribal-dominated areas in adjacent States.

However, the Congress, while remaining steadfast in its support for a smaller, relatively easily achievable Jharkhand, isn't unduly worried about the RJD stand. It was pointed out that the majority in the just composed House favoured carving out the new State from within Bihar alone: "Any central legislation on the subject will find the Assembly's endorsement even without the RJD support..."

Out of compulsion or political expediency, Mr Laloo Yadav is understood to have responded positively to most of the issues raised by his Congress counterparts. The ball, therefore, is now in the court

of Mrs Gandhi, who has to put her seal of approval on the question of supporting the RJD. In her capacity as the party chief or through the collective CWC forum, she also has to determine, if at all, the nature of the Congress support.

The formula which eventually finds favour with the High Command would have to reconcile the three divergent views within the Congress at the Centre and at the State-level. While a section of partymen remain strongly opposed to any kind of truck with the RJD, the perceptions of the remaining range from conditional support to participation in the Government.

The Congress leadership's exceedingly cautious approach in the matter isn't as much a reflection of its trust in decentralised decision-making as of the fears of a split in the Bihar CLP. Perhaps for this reason, it has been decided to consult — before formalising the party's stand — other State leaders who are expected to reach Delhi tomorrow. Among them is Mr Ram Ashrey Prasad Singh, the outgoing CLP leader who had publicly opposed any support for the

RJD soon after being defeated in the recent polls.

On his part, BPCC chief Sadanand Singh, whose delayed arrival here allowed him to attend only the second rounds of talks, appeared reconciled to backing Mr Laloo Yadav's party. "We are determined to fight against corruption and misrule in Bihar. But communalism is a bigger poison," he said. The Congress' negotiating team included Dr Manmohan Singh, Mr Madhavrao Scindia, Mr Pranab Mukherjee and Ms Mohsina Kidwai. Significantly, the RJD chief was assisted in the parleys by close friend and Janata Dal (Secular) leader S.R. Bommai.



Laloo Yadav

Congress leaders blame Sonia

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 3. — Senior Congress leaders — “disgusted” with the party leadership’s style of functioning — have started blaming the Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, and Congress Working Committee leaders for the situation in Bihar.

Party leaders feel the central leadership’s “inordinate delay” in announcing support to RJD, despite having committed itself to supporting the government, led to the present situation.

“When the decision needed to be taken swiftly before the NDA could react, the leaders chose to react in their own laid-back style, which resulted in this mess,” a senior party leader remarked.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi is being blamed for this. She



The last straw?

had gone to Khajuraho to watch a cultural programme yesterday “when she was needed in Delhi to finalise the negotiations that the CWC members had with Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav”. The announcement of Congress support to RJD, decided last night, was delayed because central leaders awaited Mrs Gandhi’s return to Delhi.

‘Attitude problem’: Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav is “upset” with the Congress’ attitude. Mrs Sonia Gandhi did not meet the RJD chief and the party top brass failed to come up with a concrete decision. Mr Laloo Yadav, sources disclosed, left Delhi “perturbed” over the Congress high command’s “attitude”.

Blunder call: Senior party leaders say the decision to call Mr Yadav to Delhi for negotiations was a strategic blunder. “It was necessary that

■ See SONIA: page 6

SONIA: style of functioning questioned

(Continued from page 1)

Mr Yadav stayed put in Patna so the NDA could not arrange defections,” a senior party leader remarked. “Mr Yadav’s absence from Patna made all the difference and instead of him being summoned here, senior Congress leaders should have gone to Patna to negotiate.”

Style of functioning: Congress leaders have started questioning in private the party leaders’ style of functioning. That many leaders were not prepared to take the “failure” of the party lying down was evident today as the Deputy leader of the Congress party in Lok Sabha, Mr

Madhavrao Scindia, and the chief whip, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, were seen arguing over the issue.

Mr Das Munshi told Mr Scindia that “whatever political momentum the Congress has gathered over the RSS issue during the past few days, you have managed to lose all of it”.

Officially, however, the Congress claimed the Bihar PCC president, Mr Sadanand Singh, had conveyed the party’s decision to support RJD to the Governor over telephone late last night. The party faxed its letter of support to the Governor at 1.30 p.m. today, about two hours after the Governor called Mr Nitish Kumar to form the govern-

ment.

The Congress denied the party leadership was waiting for Mrs Sonia Gandhi to arrive before announcing the decision. The CWC member, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, who — along with Mr Scindia, Dr Manmohan Singh and Mrs Mohsina Kidwai — negotiated with Mr Yadav yesterday, said: “We were waiting for Bihar leaders to come so that we could convince them of our decision. Mr Sadanand Singh came last night and others arrived today morning.”

Mr Mukherjee claimed the RJD and Congress combination was numerically stronger than that of the NDA and alleged that “in a great hurry, the

Governor called the NDA to form the government facilitating horsetrading”.

Asked why the Congress delayed announcing its support, Mr Mukherjee explained that the party had to wait till Mr Yadav formally asked for support. Besides, as the Congress and the RJD fought each other in the elections, a common minimum programme had to be arrived at before deciding to support RJD.

Asked about claims by NDA that the Congress split in Bihar with around 10 MLAs agreeing to support a government led by NDA, Mr Mukherjee said, “We don’t have any information that anyone is defecting.”

THE STATESMAN

- 4 MAR 2000

Sonia slams NDA's economic policies

'Cong won't tolerate RSS cultural terrorism'

Vinod Sharma
New Delhi, March 6

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Sonia Gandhi has widened the scope of her party's battle against the BJP and its ideological fountain-head, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), by mounting a scathing attack on the NDA's economic policies which, according to her, have come to pose a grave challenge to India's economic sovereignty.

In her prepared speech at a huge anti-RSS rally at the Ramlila Maidan here today, Mrs Gandhi devoted as much attention to economic issues as to the Sangh's "fascist" agenda, so manifest in the "cultural terrorism" the latter has unleashed on "progressive" writers and filmmakers. In the backdrop of the withdrawal in (BJP-ruled) Gujarat of the ban on civil servants' membership of the Sangh, she maintained that the move was aimed at enslaving the bureaucracy to the RSS mindset. "One cannot expect justice from such Government servants," she declared, simultaneously accusing the Vajpayee dispensation of alterations in school and college curricula towards fulfilment of the Sangh's objective of spreading hate and causing disaffection among the younger generation.

Upon briefly tracing the RSS' 75-year-old track-record, notably its "negative and destructive" role during the freedom struggle, Mrs Gandhi said the Union Cabinet of the day included ministers who are hard-core RSS members: "Before taking oath under the Constitution, they had sworn allegiance to the Sangh's communal ideology. The country has a right to know, whether they accept the RSS' agenda of terror; whether they want to continue committing atrocities on the minorities?"

Equally blunt was the Congress president's poser to the BJP's allies in the NDA. "Do they accept the saffron party's communal agenda," she asked, adding: "Its

more than obvious that their sole motivation is to cling on to power." However, from the crowd response to Mrs Gandhi's address, it was evident that the NDA's Budget 2000-2001 had greater potential for unleashing public forces the ruling alliance might find difficult to contain.

"Their budgetary proposals are an attack on the poor, the farm sector and the middle-classes. They will convert our country into a marketplace for foreign goods. Can there be a greater economic slavery?" quizzed Mrs Gandhi, flaying the Government's decision to lift quantitative restrictions on import of 1,500 items, including agricultural produce.

Clearly anxious to impart an economic dimension to the Congress' fight against the BJP-RSS, she alleged: "All this is the handiwork of those who talk about swadeshi and claim to be better nationalists than others."

A mix of both urban and rural population, the audience lauded Mrs Gandhi as she spoke of the urea price hike, reduced interest on provident fund, sugar imports (since discontinued) from Pakistan and the post-LS poll increase in diesel price.

Conscious of the Sangh Parivar's tactics of bringing about religious polarisation by misrepresenting the secularists' concerns for minorities, she made it a point to clarify that the

Congress' battle was against the politics of discrimination, against social injustice and atrocities of all kind. "Our concerns for other sections of the society are no less than our concerns for the minorities," she said.

"The world knows that the man who killed the Mahatma was a member of the RSS," she observed, adding: "The BJP and its precursor, the Jana Sangh, were established by the Sangh. They are wearing masks to hide the truth... They have even started questioning the Constitution which Gandhi inspired and Ambedkar authored."

Sonia-speak

- Hardcore RSS members in the Union Cabinet should clarify stand on the Sangh's terror tactics.
- BJP allies more concerned about retaining power than fighting communalism.
- Government policies would convert India into a marketplace for foreign goods, push the country towards economic colonisation.
- Gujarat Government order meant to co-opt civil servants onto the RSS.

CWC defers decision

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 11. The Congress(I) Working Committee today deferred for a few days a decision on whether or not to participate in the Rabri Devi Government in Bihar, though the indications are that eventually the party would decide to be "inside Laloo Prasad's tent" in the hope of using its presence in the State Government as a leverage in favour of "development". Mrs. Sonia Gandhi is said to have had a telephonic chat with Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav last night.

The party's highest decision-making body heard in detail from Mrs. Mohsina Kidwai, general secretary in charge of Bihar, and who had been camping in Patna for the last few days. Mrs. Kidwai reported the efforts needed to be made to keep the Congress(I) legislative flock together, and expressed satisfaction that even Mrs. Veena Sahi, a die-hard opponent of Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, joined yesterday's walk-out in the Bihar Assembly. Mrs. Kidwai, in turn, was complimented by many members for a job well done.

The inclination in the AICC establishment is that it would be worthwhile for the party to insist on a sincere and vigorous imple-

mentation of the Congress(I)-RJD common minimum programme; however, the absence today of two most technically-competent members, Dr. Manmohan Singh and Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, prevented a detailed discussion on mechanics of the Congress insistence on development. One idea before the leadership is to constitute a high-powered task force of technocrats/administrators to help the Bihar Government steer its energy towards the much-neglected task of development.

Otherwise, there was a general sense of satisfaction that the party had done well on Bihar as well as on the RSS issue; the refrain in various presentations, began as usual by Mr. R. K. Dhawan, was to compliment Mrs. Sonia Gandhi on her political sagacity, as evident in her remarks at the March 6 rally in Delhi. In her opening remarks, Mrs. Gandhi herself was more expansive than usual.

It was also decided that the Congress should also take up the question of price rise, and in particular launch an agitation, if necessary, to force the Vajpayee Government to roll back the hike in urea prices. Many a CWC member wanted the party to link the anti-RSS secular line with concerns of the poor.

1401 Cong. to join Bihar Govt. 14/3

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 13. The Congress(I) has decided to join the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) Government in Bihar, arguing that it could "try to provide better governance" by doing so. The Common Minimum Programme (CMP), agreed upon earlier, would be the basis of cooperation. A coordination committee would monitor the implementation of the CMP.

The Congress(I) Working Committee met this evening and took these decision. Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, CWC member, said later that the decision was unanimous. Mrs. Mohsina Kidwai, AICC general secretary in charge of Bihar, and Mr. Ajit Jogi have been authorised to discuss the issue of portfolios with the RJD.

Mr. Mukherjee was asked if today's decision meant that the Congress(I) was changing the party line set out in the Pachmarhi Declaration. Denying this, he said that coalitions sometimes became "inevitable", as in this case, when the people's verdict was fractured. The Congress(I)

had already formed a coalition government in Maharashtra.

At a previous CWC meeting, a number of members had expressed reservations on even supporting the RJD, arguing that it was more important to stand alone and build the party. Mr. Mukherjee justified the decision to join the government. "By supporting from outside, we would get the flak and would not be able to influence the decision-making process. We would be at the receiving end."

The CMP, drawn up on March 2 by the RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, and senior Congress(I) leaders, has eight points, seven of which are directed towards good administration and governance. The eighth is on the controversial Jharkhand issue and states that the Congress(I) will continue to agitate for the creation of Jharkhand and to "persuade" the RJD to find an amicable solution to the matter.

The Congress(I)'s election manifesto had promised an inquiry into allegations of corruption against the former RJD

Government. Saying that the party had not got the mandate to rule and so could not implement its programmes in totality, Mr. Mukherjee pointed out that the very first point in the CMP was to take steps to provide a corruption-free administration.

Congress plans cut motions on subsidies

PTI reports:

The Congress(I) today decided to propose cut motions on the subsidies proposed in the budget on rice sold through ration shops, an issue on which the Government has come under pressure from allies. The Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP), which met here this morning, decided to bring cut motions on reduction in subsidies on PDS rice, the Congress Chief Whip, Mr. Priyaranjan Dasmunshi, told reporters here.

The CWC at its meeting here on Saturday decided to take on the Government on the issue outside Parliament by launching a nationwide agitation against the decision on subsidies cut in "larger interests" of the common people.

THE HINDU
14 MAR 2000

Shammugham awaits CM crown

Pondicherry, March 19 (PTI): P. Shammugham was today unanimously elected leader of the Congress legislature party, paving the way for his becoming the next chief minister of Pondicherry.

His name was proposed by former chief minister Vaithilingam and seconded by former agriculture minister N. Rangasamy, who were earlier in the race for the top post.

The 73-year-old leader, who is also the Congress unit president, will be the eighth chief minister of the Union Territory.

Shammugham emerged as a surprise consensus candidate as both Vaithilingam and Rangasamy agreed to

the high command's choice.

Congress high command observer P.J. Kurien, who conducted the election this afternoon, said Shammugham would be formally elected leader of the Congress-TMC-ADMK-CPI joint legislature party later in the day.

In the evening, the leaders would jointly call on Lt Governor Rajani Rai. She would be given the letter informing about Shammugham's election so that she could extend a formal invitation to the Congress for forming the ministry at the earliest, Kurien added. He said the date of swearing in would also be intimated to the Governor.

The high command observer said Shammugham was elected

for the chief minister's post since he was a senior leader.

After his election, Shammugham told reporters that he would consult the leaders of the supporting parties — TMC, CPI and ADMK — on the composition of his ministry.

Shammugham, who is not a member of the Territorial Assembly, has to seek election to the Assembly within six months. His constituency will be decided soon, Kurien said.

Asked whether he would resign as the party unit chief as per the Congress' "one man one post norm", he said it was for the high command to decide.

Congress sources said the eight-member legislature party

was evenly divided among the two contenders — Vaithilingam and Rangasamy — and Kurien had to consult the party leaders frequently to end the stalemate.

When one of the MLAs suggested the name of Shammugham, both the contenders agreed to his name. AICC general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad today described the alliance in Pondicherry as a "milestone" and said a beginning had been made for greater co-operation with friendly parties before the next elections in Tamil Nadu.

Azad, in charge of party affairs in four southern states, including Pondicherry, said the Congress had now gained its second territory in the south.

Cong suffers shock defeat in W Bengal

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 29. — Rampant cross-voting marked the Rajya Sabha elections in seven states today, with the Congress suffering a shock defeat in West Bengal despite a sufficient strength in the state Assembly to elect one candidate.

Congress candidates lost in Orissa and Uttar Pradesh, where the voting results showed that the party MLAs did not bother to back the official candidates. In Karnataka, the Congress candidates had some anxious moments because of cross-voting in favour of liquor baron, Vijay Mallya, who finally lost.

It was only in Rajasthan that the Congress managed to keep its flock together with three official candidates of the party emerging triumphant over the

Independent rebel candidate. The most pathetic display for the Congress came in West Bengal, where the MLAs in a virtual revolt turned against the official candidate, Mr D P Ray, and voted for the Trinamul Congress candidate, Mr Jayanta Bhattacharya.

Despite the Congress' official strength of 69 in the Assembly, Mr Roy could secure only 36, indicating that the central leadership's decision to impose a candidate from Delhi despite the MLAs vouching for the PCC former president, Mr Somen Mitra, had not gone down well within the party. The three CPI-M candidates from the state, Mr Nilotpal Basu, Mr Dipankar Mukherjee and Mr Manoj Bhattacharya, got renominated, while the fourth seat went to RSP candidate Mr Manoj Bhattacharya.

The Union surface transport minister, Mr

Rajnath Singh, the former Union minister, Mrs Sushma Swaraj, and television personality and journalist, Mr Rajiv Shukla (Loktantrik Congress), were the prominent winners from UP. Mr Ghanashyam Kherwar won on the lone BSP ticket.

(There were 16 candidates for 11 vacancies in Uttar Pradesh. The BJP won five seats with three going to Samajwadi Party, the second largest group in the Assembly, one each to BSP, LCP and JSP, adds PTI. The other successful BJP candidates are Mr Balbir Singh Punj, Mr Ramnath Govind and Mr Ram Baksh Vermaw.

The former Union Minister, Mr Gyaneswar Mishra, Sakshi Majaraj who was expelled from BJP, and Mr Dara Singh Chauhan were the SP nominees.)

■ See DEFEAT: page 8

THE STATESMAN

30 MAR 2000

Frightened Sonia postpones CWC meet

By VENKATESH KESARI

New Delhi, March 30: Congress president Sonia Gandhi, shocked by the party's debacle in the biennial elections to the Rajya Sabha in West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh, is not prepared to face the Congress Working Committee so soon because she fears the growing dissent among senior CWC members.

Party spokesperson Ajit Jogi on Thursday remained non-committal over a proposed date of either a formal or informal meeting of the CWC. "We are aware of the results and are awaiting reports from AICC general secretaries of the concerned states, Pradesh

Congress Committee presidents as also from the candidates," he said, indicating that the CWC will meet only after the reports have been submitted.

A section of party leaders feel the delay in convening the CWC could be deliberate since Mrs Gandhi fears attempts to question her decisions in the meeting because she alone had decided party nominees and chalked out strategy.

At least seven CWC members are not happy with the way she handled the Rajya Sabha elections, right from the point of selection of candidates. Mr K. Vijaya Bhaskara Reddy, who is also the chairman of the Congress' central

disciplinary action committee, is sulking because Mrs Gandhi did not keep her promise to nominate him. The same is the case with Mr Sitaram Kesri. Mr Madhvasinh Solanki is said to have decided to question her under the pretext of ideological issues while Mr Rajesh Pilot, Mr Jitendra Prasad and even Mr Pranab Mukherjee have reason to be unhappy. "Except Mr Arjun Singh and party office-bearers, no one will come to defend her," a party insider said.

The Congress leadership is surprised by the victory of Mr Jayanta Bhattacharya, an independent candidate supported by the Trinamul Cong-
 Turn to Page 2



Maja Kamath

CWC meeting

Continued from Page 1

99) appear to have voted for him," said a Congress functionary.

According to him, there are two views in the party. One is to take disciplinary action against these MLAs since the party has to face Assembly elections early next year. The other sees Ms Mamata Banerjee as the natural leader of the party. Only the Congress could make her a chief minister," he said.

But the general feeling in the party is that the central leadership grossly miscalculated the Rajya Sabha elections by imposing the candidature of D.P. Roy in West Bengal.

Asked to comment on the reported statement of West Bengal PCC president A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chaudhary that the party's central leadership had "messed up" the Rajya Sabha elections in the state, Mr Jogi said, "We are awaiting detailed reports from all concerned."

He replied in similar fashion when asked whether the massive cross-voting by party MLAs in West Bengal amounted to a revolt against the Congress high command, dissatisfaction against the leadership or the shape of things to come in the state, which goes to the polls early next year.

He, however, sought to dismiss suggestions that the outcome of the Rajya Sabha elections could lead to a challenge to Mrs Gandhi's leadership. "The whole party is solidly behind her, like the Himalayas," he said.

CWC member Pranab Mukherjee met Mrs Gandhi on Wednesday in the wake of reports that he had resigned from the chairmanship of the AICC media department. He is said to be angry with Mr Mani Shankar Aiyar for fuelling a controversy over Mrs Gandhi's remarks on the CTBT during her meeting with US President Bill Clinton.

Mr Mukherjee, who was virtually number two in Indira Gandhi's Cabinet and headed important ministries in the P.V. Narasimha Rao government, is critical of the Sonia coterie. However, he denied reports of his resignation when contacted by The Asian Age on Thursday and did not react to the West Bengal Rajya Sabha election results.

AICC general secretary in charge of Uttar Pradesh Sushil Kumar Shinde briefed Mrs Gandhi over the defeat of party nominee Inder Khosla.

Saugata quits post, turns heat on Atish

SF-1 9 p.m. 2000
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CALCUTTA, March 30.—
Mr Saugata Roy today
resigned as the deputy leader
of the Congress Legislature
Party, owning "partial moral
responsibility" for the defeat
of the party's nominee in yes-
terday's Rajya Sabha polls.

Cross-voting by at least 26
Congress MLAs caused the
defeat and helped the
Trinamul-backed Independ-
ent candidate to bag the
seat.

Following the revolt against
the high command by the
Somen Mitra faction, the
CLP has become the vortex
of intrigues.

Mr Roy's resignation is seen
as a move to armtwist the
CLP leader, Mr Atish Sinha,
to resign.

Mr Roy said some party
MLAs felt Mr Sinha should
resign owning moral respon-
sibility "as Mr Somen Mitra
did as PCC chief after the
party's debacle in 1998". He
said there was a definite lack
of effort on part of the CLP
leader to motivate party
MLAs to vote for the official
candidate.

"Why should I?" retorted
Mr Sinha. "I was elected by a
majority of party MLAs. If
they want me to step down, I
would definitely do so."

Mr Sultan Ahmed, a Somen
Mitra loyalist, said those
who had misguided Mrs
Sonia Gandhi and ignored
the ground reality should
resign, not the CLP leader.

Mr Siddhartha Shankar
Ray said yesterday's develop-
ment had saddened him. "If
Mrs Sonia Gandhi's advisers
are rootless and clueless, her
decisions are bound to be
controversial."

He welcomed Miss Mamata
Banerjee's call for a "grand
alliance" and felt Mr Priya
Ranjan Das Munshi and Mr
Somen Mitra should sit
together and hail the new
development.

"I want Sonia Gandhi to
succeed. But a party in a
democracy can function prop-
erly only if its internal
processes are democratic," he
said, adding that the central
leadership should let the
state unit decide its own
course of action.

THE STATESMAN

31 MAR 2000

Cong under Sonia directionless: Meira

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 4 FEBRUARY

MOUNTING A scathing attack on the Congress leadership, senior leader Meira Kumar, who quit the party on Wednesday, maintained on Friday that the Congress under Sonia Gandhi had lost its sense of direction "with merit and commitment taking a backseat to sycophancy and darbari politics".

Charging that the party was only paying lip service to social justice — which had led to erosion of its support base among the people — Ms Kumar did not mince words while speaking her mind on what had gone wrong with the party. She said many of her suggestions over the last one year went unheeded which left her with the feeling that she was increasingly becoming irrelevant in the party hierarchy. "It was becoming claustrophobic. So I decided to make a clean break and quit from the party," she said, addressing a press conference for the first time after resigning from the Congress.

Stating that the Congress was a "monolith" party with the president enjoying overriding powers, she said the party chief was responsible for everything right or wrong.

Quick to come to the aid of Ms Gandhi, party leaders were prompt in brushing aside the charges levelled by Ms Kumar by counter-questioning her rather late awakening by hinting that non-political considerations might have motivated her to take the extreme step. The reference was to the government's decision to allot the huge 6, Krishna Menon Marg residence to Ms Kumar's mother, Indrani Devi, by converting it into a permanent memorial in the name of Jagjivan Ram. "As far as I know, Meira Kumar was always given preference in all CWC meetings to voice her opinion. We also never heard her speak against the alliance in Tamil Nadu," Ambika Soni, party general secretary in charge of the Congress president's office, said on Friday.

Notwithstanding the claims

propping up the Bansi Lal government in Haryana were faulty — are shared by a number of CWC members in private.

During the Bihar decision, CWC member Sushil Kumar Shinde had almost openly voiced his apprehensions, maintaining that it would backfire with Dalits moving away from the Congress in the state.

In Haryana too, the state unit had strongly opposed allying with the HVP but had to fall in line after the central leadership decided to lend support to Bansi Lal. Senior leader Pranab Mukherjee, who played a key role in the parleys, had to concede, following the Congress rout in the state, that he had erred in taking the decision and even tendered his resignation

owning moral responsibility.

Ms Kumar, on Friday, further said that she had also advised the leadership, during CWC meetings, against having any truck with Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu and not cause the downfall of the Vajpayee government last year. "All my suggestions were over-looked although, in hindsight, they have all been proved correct," she said.

However, despite the elaborate high-sounding reasons, there is no doubt that Ms Kumar's exit was prompted primarily by her continuous sidelining by the leadership. She was dropped as general secretary in charge by Ms Gandhi last year. Hopes for a Rajya Sabha seat from Delhi, after her defeat in the Lok Sabha elections from Karol Bagh, also ended when Ms Gandhi ignored her as a choice.

Suddenly, after a year and after she quit the party, she also seemed to realise that the foreign origin issue was relevant and needed a close look, accompanied by action.



Meira: Finding a new voice

and counter-claims, Ms Kumar's appraisal of the party in the last one year and Sonia Gandhi's style of functioning merits attention, since she was a member of the CWC and closely associated with all major decisions in the party. Ms Kumar's assertion on Friday, that a majority of the decisions taken by the leadership — such as supporting the Rabri Devi government in Bihar against imposition of President's Rule by the Vajpayee establishment and

Second generation Cong leaders drift away from party

Kalyani Shanker
New Delhi, February 5

HT- 6/2

the Congress Working Committee is packed with people who have absolutely no political experience at the grassroots level. Anybody

reason is the dynasty factor. No Congressman is interested in any other person other than the Gandhi-Nehru family. Also the way we were treated."

Sunday Special

ON FEBRUARY 2, 1977, Meira Kumar was posted in Madrid as a young diplomat when her father Jagjivan Ram called her and said "I have resigned".

Meira Kumar thought, so what, he had done it earlier during the Kamraj Plan. But her father's next sentence jolted her. "I have resigned from the Congress".

On February 2, 2000, history was repeated. Meira Kumar herself resigned from the Congress Working Committee.

"Now I realise what my father must have felt when he left the party. I was feeling absolutely stifled. I decided that even if I have to remain in political wilderness, I have to leave the party. It was a very difficult decision", she said.

Meira Kumar was critical of Mrs Sonia Gandhi's way of functioning. According to her, if Mrs Sonia Gandhi takes credit for all good things that are happening to the party, she must also take the blame for its sagging image.

When Mr K.C. Pant's wife fought

the Lok Sabha elections on a BJP ticket from Nainital in 1998, eyebrows were raised that a family member of a tall Congress leader like Govind Vallabh Pant had crossed over to the BJP.

Ms Pant won that election defeating senior Congress leader N.D. Tiwari.

Soon her husband also followed her and the suave Mr K.C. Pant, who had held such important portfolios like Defence in Rajiv Gandhi's Cabinet, joined the BJP. He was rewarded with the position of Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission.

Mr Pant and Mr Tiwari were always contenders for the Nainital seat.

In 1998, another member of a Congress family Rangarajan Kumaramangalam chose to join the BJP.

Mr Kumaramangalam has remained an important minister in the Vajpayee Cabinet since then.

Mr Sunil Shastri, son of former Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri left the Congress in 1998, and chose the BJP.

Mr Sunil Shastri's sister-in-law Neera Shastri is the Mahila BJP



Meira Kumar

the recent Lok Sabha elections in Uttar Pradesh.

Why are the children of tall Congress leaders seeking a slot in other parties, particularly the BJP?

Mr Kumaramangalam recalls his decision to leave the Congress party. "It was because the party had become a set-up where sycophants were calling the shots. Even



K C Pant

with some self respect cannot remain in the Congress, the minister explained.

"There were only two options before me. Either give up politics or join the BJP, which is the only alternative to the Congress in the national mainstream", Mr Kumaramangalam said.

Says Mr Sunil Shastri: "The main

Mr Shastri adds: "In the national mainstream there are only two parties—the Congress and the BJP. Going over to a smaller or regional party is not the solution. Also our supporters feel enthused if we remain in the mainstream".

Interestingly enough, it was Manibhen, daughter of Sardar Patel, who more or less started this trend when she left the Congress and joined hands with former Prime Minister Morarji Desai.

There are of course leaders like Ajit Singh, son of Chaudhury Charan Singh, who joined the Congress but soon quit to revive the Lok Dal

Then there is V.C. Shukla, who left the Congress, became a minister in the National Front Government, came back to the Congress, became a minister again and is currently out in the cold.

The basic problem appears to be that despite their family connections with the Congress these people get frustrated soon because they find they have no future in the party. The basic charges against the party are sycophancy, dynastic rule and rudderless leadership.

Sonia begins damage control

■ Cong president wishes to avoid more setbacks after Meira Kumar's resignation

NEERJA CHOWDHURY
NEW DELHI, FEB 11

GETTING a whiff of a larger plan to challenge her after the Assembly elections in the resignation of Meira Kumar, Sonia Gandhi launched a damage control exercise on Thursday to salvage the situation in the party.

She despatched Natwar Singh as her trouble-shooter to members of the Congress Working Committee, some of whom are understood to be dissatisfied with the way things have been going. Natwar urged them to talk to the Congress president about what they felt and wanted. Among others, he met Jitendra Prasada and Pranab Mukherjee today.

Meanwhile, Meira's chances of returning to the party receded, even though she has been giving contradictory signals in the last two days. She expressed her loyalty to the Congress president in her talks with R.L. Bhatia and Sushil Kumar Shinde when they met her to dissuade her from leaving the party. Publicly, she criticised the party for its "directionlessness"



Sonia Gandhi

and the durbat culture of sycophancy which is prevalent today.

George Fernandes reportedly met Meira twice at her 6, Krishna Menon Road residence, which was allotted to the trust in her father, Jagjivan Ram's name, allowing the family to stay there permanently. Meira's resignation coincided with the decision of the Government in her favour regarding the house.

Fernandes, who has brought around Meira's husband, is believed to have promised her a Rajya Sabha seat and a berth in the NDA ministry. Defeated in the recent Lok Sabha elections, Meira had wanted a Rajya Sabha seat from Delhi. As another wheel within the



Meira Kumar

wheel, the Fernandes offer is seen as a move to checkmate Ram Vilas Paswan, also a Dalit leader from Bihar like Meira. Paswan is vehemently opposed to the entry of Meira. Both Paswan and Nitish Kumar of the Samata Party are contenders for the chief ministership of the state.

Meira's case is the first salvo fired by the dissidents in the Congress as part of their post-poll strategy to make the going rough for Sonia.

As things stand, the Congress is not expected to do well in any of the four states — Bihar, Orissa, Haryana and Manipur — going to the polls this month. There is a growing feeling in the party that

she is not able to deliver votes to the Congress, or move the party towards revival.

While Sonia would hope to ride the storm which may follow the Assembly polls, waiting for the tide to turn against the Vajpayee ministry and towards the Congress again, her detractors want to create a situation in which she is forced to leave. To begin with, half-a-dozen members of the CWC might ask for the enforcement of the one-person-one-post principle, so that she is compelled to quit either as Congress president or as Leader of the Opposition.

Ironically, this is what happened in 1996 with P.V. Narasimha Rao to prevent him from coming to power again at the head of a coalition, as the Congress had emerged as the second largest party and no one was prepared to touch the BJP at the time.

It seems the Congress high command is more worried today about the exit of Kamaluddin Ahmed, former PCC chief of Andhra Pradesh, who has joined the BJP, than even Meira though the brand name she carries of Jagjivan Ram may affect Dalit votes.

5-19/2 Just unlike her father

SHE quit Congress, like father did but unlike Jagjivan Ram, Meira Kumar seems to have no obvious next step. Jagjivan Ram left Congress almost 33 years ago, on the eve of the 1977 general elections. He formed a new party, Congress for Democracy, which contributed handsomely to Indira Gandhi's defeat in the 1977 elections.

But even if Indira's daughter-in-law is not distraught at Jagjivan's daughter leaving the party, Sonia should be aware that Meira's departure means the the Congress has lost a Dalit face in the caste-ridden body politic of northern India.

This stands despite the fact that Meira Kumar's contribution to the Congress during her 14 years association with it is not significant. For one, she has abandoned her home state Bihar for all practical purposes - the one commonality between father and daughter.

Jagjivan Ram, a minister in three governments, did little for his home state or even central Bihar. During Ram's funeral, in 1986 in his native village Chandwa, VVIPs, including the then president Zail Singh and the then prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, paid their respects in an archetypal poor Indian village. That rainy Sunday in July, the contrast between Ram's magnificent white building in his village and the surrounding muddy squalor had taken on a special meaning -- here was a leader of the poor who had totally abandoned them.

Not surprisingly, daughter Meira insisted on, and succeeded in, building a memorial in far off Delhi. The samadhi stands near Raj Ghat, known, with gross political correctness, as a Samta Sthal.

9-8-8
cont
Meira Kumar may yet rue her decision to leave the Congress, writes MOHAN SAHAY



said to be ahead of Dushads in education, employment and social mobility.

That description would fit Meira perfectly. But a Western education never guaranteed anyone a place under the Indian political sun. Jagjivan Ram's daughter may yet be rueing her decision to leave Congress.

The author is on the staff of The Statesman, New Delhi

Meira herself had joined politics only months before her father's death. She quit a career in Indian Foreign Service at Ram's insistence. His son, Suresh Ram, had died young and in circumstances less-than-savoury. The political legacy had to fall on the daughter.

She joined the Congress as her father had rejoined the party after the post-1977 experiment and its clone, Congress (J), was thrown aside by a resurgent Congress. But she never did become a leader.

Still, as political calculations stand now, she could be useful to parties seeking a Dalit stamp with a bit of history. In theory at any rate, the BJP can use her in Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Delhi. Samata could use her to counter Paswan in Bihar and Mulayam Singh Yadav, to do the same to Mayawati in UP.

Meira's sub-caste identity is that of a Chamar, the same as Mayawati, but different from Dushads, the clan Paswan hails from. Chamars are generally

THE STATESMAN
14 FEB 2000

LOSING GRIP

Meira Kumar quits party leadership

CONGRESS continues to find itself beyond the pale of political thought in the country — caste, religion, region. It has no alternative to offer, except a name whose efficacy and political judgement are in serious question among sections of the party rank and file. This is confirmed with the departure of Meira Kumar, chairman of the party's SC/ST cell and one of the few prominent Dalits with a mass support base in the party. She cites sycophancy as the principal reason for her action, clearly referring to the preponderant influence that a group of people exercise over the actions of the leader. As a phenomenon, this is not new in the party. Everyone remembers DK Barooah, and ND Tewari and Arjun Singh are still around. Only, things were different before. Indira Gandhi had an independent relationship with the masses and a shrewd understanding of political realities — she did not need intermediaries to point her. Meira is right when she says that Sonia Gandhi has been pointed in the wrong direction on several occasions, notably during the no-confidence motion that brought down the last Vajpayee government and which even the Antony Committee report cited as one of the main reasons for the party's debacle in the general elections which ensued.

There is an impression that the party lacks stalwarts, that the organisation is being run by lightweights, that the only visible leader is Sonia herself and that she is no leader. Even under Rajiv Gandhi there was a second rung of leadership who could work their constituencies effectively. Ambika Soni says the Congress is in power in nine states. True. But four of them were won in a moment of mass disenchantment with the Central Government and also because Sonia Gandhi still retained some appeal as an apolitical person. SM Krishna is chief minister of Karnataka almost by default. It is only in Maharashtra that the Congress can say it stood its ground against Sharad Pawar and the BJP-Shiv Sena combine. In Orissa, the party is in a shambles, not only because of post-cyclone ineptitude, but also because of rampant factionalism, while in Bihar the party makes confident noises but is sidelined in the confrontation between the RJD and the NDA, with the CPI-CPI-ML positioning itself for a chunk of the leftovers. Ambika says the party is better off than it was in December 1997. Sonia Gandhi is better than Sitaram Kesri; it should make party workers feel good to know that.

Meira seems to suggest the party is losing its grip over mass politics and she squarely blames the party president and her greenhorn advisors for the state of affairs. One notices that Sonia is trying to restructure the organisation and introduce a professional tone into political thinking within the party — all sorts of experts keep producing working policy documents — but she cannot synthesise "modernisation", with the way power is acquired in the field. If the latter domain is left to "sycophants" and it shows, more people will leave.

THE STATESMAN

14 FEB 2000

Sangma determined to raise foreign origin issue

New Delhi, February 14

CONSTITUTION REVIEW committee member Purno A Sangma today made it clear that the newly-formed committee is free to discuss the issue of person of foreign origin holding high office as it did not come under the purview of the basic structure of the Constitution.

Mr Sangma, who is spearheading a campaign against persons of foreign origin holding high offices and quit the Congress on this issue, expressed his determination to raise this issue at the committee meetings. This would only strengthen the parliamentary democracy, he said.

Mr Sangma explained that he had been included in the committee as an individual and not as a person belonging to a political party. He said when Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee invited him to be on the committee, he accepted it as a national duty. His being a Christian tribal hailing from the North-East and former Lok Sabha Speaker were the main reasons cited by him for his induction in the committee.

Replying to a question, he said that a fixed term for Lok Sabha was not the sole criterion for stability. The experiment of coalition politics and other issues could be brought before the committee for

critical appraisal, he said in an interview.

To a question what other major areas were likely to come up before the commission, Sangma said powers under Article 356 for dismissal of a state government, devolution of financial powers to states, electoral reforms with special emphasis on anti-defection laws, uplift of Scheduled Castes and Tribes and more privileges to people's representatives could be on the agenda.

On the stability of a government, the former Lok Sabha Speaker said several Scandinavian countries had no provision in their constitutions for no-confidence motions and the government could be dislodged only after Parliament elected a new prime minister.

"We will study the constitutions of various countries before the commission finalises its recommendations", he said, adding "I will approach this issue with an open mind".

The commission's report will be placed before Parliament before the commission finalises its recommendations, he said, for a debate and only the highest legislative forum could decide about the possible changes in the Constitution, he said.

Asked what changes were needed to uplift the condition of tribals

of North-East, he said that his approach would not be "sectarian" and he would like special attention given to the people belonging to Scheduled Castes and Tribes.

Pointing out that of the total allocation of Rs 1.20 lakh crores for tribal sub-plan in the eighth Plan, a mere fraction of it was spent, he said somebody has to be accountable for such a big lapse.

Sangma said he would like the commission to make specific recommendation on the size of a ministry which he felt should not exceed more than 10 per cent of the strength of legislative bodies.

He pointed out that in some states particularly in the North-East, the size of ministry had been more than 50 per cent of the strength of the legislature.

"In such a situation, the legislature becomes accountable to executive when it should be the other way round", he remarked.

On the possibility of his return to Congress party, Sangma said, "There is no question of going back to that party".

"Congress has reached a saturation point. People are unhappy with the existing organisations and their leadership," Sangma said.

On the prospects of the Congress in the assembly polls in four states, he said that the Congress was likely to get a drubbing. (Agencies)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 FEB 2000

Cong, BJP war of words over agenda

Statute panel in Sonia storm

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Feb. 14: The Constitution review panel announced by the government yesterday has ignited a row between the BJP and the Congress, which alleged that the sole purpose of the exercise was to "target" its president Sonia Gandhi.

"Most members of the panel are known to be anti-Congress, they have no locus standi apart from the fact that they are eminently anti-Nehru-Gandhi family people," Congress leader P. Shiv Shankar said. Sonia, on the campaign trail in Bihar, also denounced the review proposal.

But BJP spokesman Venkaiah Naidu defended the composition of the panel, saying its members were "known for their balance, competence, erudition and integrity". He added: "We need a review committee and we have the best people for it."

The Congress' main objection stems from the fact that people known to be opposed to Sonia and those that want a clause against people of foreign origin inserted in the Constitution — P. A. Sangma for instance — have been included in the panel. They perceive it as a committee created essen-

tially to hit out at Sonia.

Besides Sangma, two members on the panel are known for their strong stand on the foreign origin issue. They had opposed the entry of Sonia into public life, her takeover of the party, her decision to contest elections and the move to position herself for the Prime Minister's post.

Though Naidu claimed that the review exercise was transparent and there was no "directive" to the committee, Sangma declared within hours of his appointment that he would take up the "foreigner" issue. "My views on this issue are well known. I am committed to it and I will take it up at the commission," he said.

Sangma recalled that he had quit the Congress last year on this question. But his party leader, Sharad Pawar, said he had reservations about Sangma's inclusion.

Another panel member, Sumitra Kulkarni, parted company with the Congress last year to protest against a "foreigner" heading the party and joined the BJP. She was welcomed with open arms for being Mahatma Gandhi's granddaughter, an attribute the party calculated would offset the charge of the RSS' hand in the assassination of Gandhi. Subhash Kashyap, former Lok Sabha secretary-general, has expressed

views on constitutional matters consistent with that of the BJP.

Attorney-general Soli Sorabjee had opposed the dismissal of the Madhya Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh governments after the Babri demolition.

Observers believe that while it is difficult for the BJP to translate the panel's recommendations into law, it would make the report the basis for a nation-wide debate on the need for revising the statute.

Naidu said there were two areas which would merit close examination: strengthening the panchayati system and ensuring stability through a fixed five-year term at the Centre and in states. Ironically, the BJP itself had resisted the Panchayati Raj Act introduced by Rajiv Gandhi on grounds that it would curtail the powers of the states.

Sorabjee priorities

The panel would consider enlargement of fundamental rights by including freedom of press, right to privacy, education and foreign travel, Sorabjee told PTI. Asserting that there were glaring shortcomings in the working of the Constitution, he said the review would cover the failure of the anti-defection law and misuse of Article 356.

■ More reports on Page 6

THE TELEGRAPH

15 FEB 2000

Lok Sabha strength frozen

Delimitation only after 25 years

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

NEW DELHI, FEB. 15. The Union Cabinet today decided to freeze for 25 more years — from 2001 to 2026 — the number of representatives in the Lok Sabha on the basis of the 1971 census. This would enable the State Governments to pursue the agenda of population stabilisation without any hesitation and protect the interests of the States that have done well in terms of population control, as against those that have lagged behind.

The decision would require further amendment to Article 84 of the Constitution and, if approved by Parliament, would mean the existing structure of the Lok Sabha will remain unaltered. Not only would the total strength of the Lok Sabha remain at 543 but the number of representatives in the Lower House from each State/Union Territory would be the same.

The NDA Government is seeking to postpone the sensitive and contentious agenda of delimitation on the ground that the exercise would defeat the objective of the newly-adopted 'National Population Policy, 2000'.

The contention is that States which are successful in implementing family planning programmes will be at the receiving end as less population would mean less number of seats in the Lok Sabha. As per the provisions of the Constitution, the number of seats of a State in the Lok Sabha is proportionate to its population.

But the moot point is how the

Government woke up suddenly to the fact that delimitation would act as a disincentive to the States to faithfully pursue the policy of 'population stabilisation' as the policy had been hanging fire since mid-1994. Moreover, the Government could have gone ahead with the delimitation exercise without affecting the number of seats of each State.

The Swaminathan Committee, which headed the panel on national population policy, submitted its policy in May 1994 and it was tabled in Parliament within a month. The Cabinet, headed by the then Prime Minister, Mr. I.K. Gujral, approved the policy in 1997. And on none of these occasions did the issue of clash between the interests of the States and the delimitation of constituencies vis-a-vis the population policy crop up.

The decision to put off the delimitation exercise by another quarter century comes when the Election Commission has been making desperate pleas for immediate completion of the exercise. The EC has not lost any opportunity to point out the 'imbalances and inequities' which have crept into the structure of the Lok Sabha constituencies in various States/Union Territories.

The case of National Capital Region of Delhi best illustrates the point. While the total electorate of Karol Bagh constituency is 5 lakhs, the electorate of another constituency, Outer Delhi, is nearly 20 lakhs. No State or Union Territory is exempt from these kind of anomalies.

Reward for small families in new population policy

By P. Sunderarajan

NEW DELHI, FEB. 15. The Centre today gave the nod to a new national population policy that seeks to hasten the process of population stabilisation through a series of socio-economic measures. The approval came at a meeting of the Union Cabinet this morning.

The promotional and motivational measures under the policy include linking of the disbursement of the cash awards under the Rural Development Department's maternity benefit scheme to compliance with the ante-natal check-up; institutional delivery by trained birth attendant; registration of birth and BCG immunisation; provision of a health insurance scheme for couples below the poverty line, who undergo sterilisation with not more than two living children; and a special reward for those who marry after the legal age of marriage, register their marriage, have the first child after the mother reaches the age of 21, accept the small family norm and adopt a terminal method after the birth of the second child.

The list of incentives includes strengthening of the facilities for safe abortion, rewards for panchayats and zila parishads for exemplary performance in universalising the small family norms, achieving reductions in infant mortality and the promotion of literacy with completion of primary schooling and provision of creches and child-care centres in rural areas and urban slums to promote participation of women in paid employment. The policy

further envisages stricter enforcement of the Child Marriage Restraint Act and the Pre-Natal Diagnostic Techniques Acts, a technology mission within the Department of Family Welfare to provide attention for accelerating performance in states which currently have below average socio-demographic indicators.

The policy envisages the setting up of a high-power 'national commission' on population, chaired by the Prime Minister, to monitor and guide planning and implementation of the policy. The panel would consist among others, the Chief Ministers as members. In addition, it envisages the setting up of a coordination cell within the Planning Commission for inter-sectoral coordination between ministries as also creation of state-level commissions on population chaired by the chief ministers.

The Union Health Minister, Mr. N.T. Shannugam, said the main philosophy behind the policy was that the population control could be better achieved by improving the lot of particularly those below the poverty line through greater focus on child-survival, empowerment of women, and increased participation of men in planned parenthood. The immediate objective was to address the needs for contraception, health-care infrastructure, health-personnel and integrated service delivery while the medium-term objective would be to bring the total fertility rate to replacement levels by 2010 and the long-term objective to achieve a stable population by 2045.

RSS row stalls Houses

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE 5/1

NEW DELHI, Feb. 24. — After the Congress's adjournment motion on the Gujarat-RSS controversy was denied admission, a combined Opposition stalled both Houses of parliament today and promised to resume the battle tomorrow.

The Opposition twice forced adjournments in the Lok Sabha demanding the Speaker accept the motion to discuss the Gujarat government order lifting the ban on state staff taking part in RSS activities.

As NDA members sat tight, agitated Opposition members demanded a ban on the RSS.

Later, when the matter was referred to a business advisory committee meeting in the Speaker's chamber, all Opposition MPs walked out of that

CONG ON RLY BUDGET

NEW DELHI, Feb. 24. — Opposition parties will disrupt Parliament's proceedings tomorrow. Will the Congress boycott the railway budget too? Mr Madhavrao Scindia said: "That will be decided at the CPP executive meeting tomorrow." — SNS

meeting alleging they weren't being heard.

The Rajya Sabha too was stalled and adjourned on the same issue; the Congress alleging non-cooperation from the Chair and protesting that democracy was being stifled.

In the Lok Sabha, the Speaker didn't give his ruling on the Opposition's notices asking that question hour be suspend-

ed and an adjournment motion on Gujarat's order be taken up.

RJD and Samajwadi Party members rushed to the well and forced adjournment of the House. In the afternoon session, though, the Speaker managed to get some business conducted, including the tabling of the Kargil report, before adjourning the House for the day.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi led a Congress team to the Speaker demanding why no ruling had come on the notices. Mr Balayogi said the matter would be taken up by the BAC. At the BAC meeting, the BJP members apparently stalled the move to admit the adjournment motion, leading to a walkout.

The Congress's deputy leader in Lok Sabha, Mr Madhavrao

■ See RSS: page 8

Stressing the role of the civil service in administering the country and implementing the Constitution, Dr Manmohan Singh recalled that debates in the Constituent Assembly and Sardar Patel had emphasised the importance of a service that was politically neutral.

Gujarat's move had "grave implications", the administration would not be able to function impartially," he said.

Rejecting this, the leader of the House, Mr Jaswant Singh, said the government was not shy of discussing the matter in an appropriate manner. There were methods by which constitutional and political issues could be raised. He maintained this was "a feeble attempt" by the Congress to pre-empt the embarrassment it would suffer when the results of the Assembly polls are declared.

The RSS issue isn't important enough to warrant suspension of Question Hour, Mr Singh contended. A question on the IC-814 hijack was being sacrificed, the Opposition was "holding the House to ransom on an amorphous issue pulled out of the air".

The chairman didn't allow Dr Singh to formally move the motion.

He recalled that a unanimous resolution of the House during the special session in August 1997 had held Question Hour inviolate.

RSS: 5/1 (Continued from page 1)

Scindia, said: "We don't even know what the ruling is. In a parliamentary democracy, the Opposition is always given an opportunity to express its views. We felt that our voice was being stifled.

"The atmosphere at the BAC meeting was not conducive to discussion. The ruling party was not relenting."

In the Rajya Sabha, the oath taken by Mrs Ambika Soni (Cong) was the only item on the agenda paper that was translated into activity.

Insisting that the House be informed of the format and schedule of a discussion on the Gujarat-RSS issue, the Opposition forced an early adjournment for the day after having earlier ensured that Question Hour gets scrapped despite the chairman's refusal to accept a formal move towards this.

The moment Mrs Soni completed her oath, the leader of the Opposition said he had given notice of a motion to suspend Question Hour for an immediate discussion on "the failure of the government to protect secularism by not prevailing upon Gujarat government to withdraw the circular".

Sonia leads Cong.(I) protest

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 24. The Congress(I) president and Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today led her party MPs in staging a dharna near the statue of the Mahatma in the Parliament House complex to protest the Gujarat order, lifting the ban on Government employees participating in RSS activities.

This is first time Ms. Gandhi has lent her presence to such a protest. She was joined by both senior and junior leaders, who raised slogans against the BJP-led Government, at the Centre and in Gujarat.

Among those who joined the protest were the Congress(I) deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Mr. Ahmed Patel, Mr. K. Karunakaran, Mr. Rajesh Pilot, Mr. Jitendra Prasad, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, Mr. Jitendra Prasad and Mr. N.D. Tiwari.

Earlier, addressing the customary general body meeting of the Congress(I) Parliamentary Party, Ms. Gandhi exhorted her MPs to raise their voice against the Vajpayee Government, which was pursuing "real agenda of the RSS". Citing the controversial Gujarat order, the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister's provocative statements on Ayodhya, "cultural terrorism unleashed in Varanasi" and the packaging of academic institutions with "persons of a particular persuasion", Ms. Gandhi observed that the Congress(I) was not surprised at the unraveling of this hidden agenda. Nonetheless, she addressed



The Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, along with party MPs staging a dharna inside Parliament House complex in New Delhi on Thursday, in protest against the Gujarat Government's decision on the RSS issue. — PTI

herself to the BJP's allies, saying, "Although it must come as a salutary lesson to those who seek to sanitise the role of the BJP in the NDA by promoting the pretense that it is the National Agenda for Governance which is at the heart of the BJP's objectives, not the agenda set in Nagpur, let those who wish to be misled be misled.

The Congress(I) will not be."

The Congress(I) president exhorted partymen to use Parliament to fight out and expose "the misdeeds of this Government". The protest within Parliament would be combined with struggle "out on the streets", she said.

Gujarat suspensions
revoked: Page 9

THE HINDU
25 FEB 2000

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Passions run high in Parliament over RSS issue

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 25. As passions continued to run high over the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh controversy, Parliament today witnessed noisy scenes for the second successive day with the Rajya Sabha adjourning without doing any business and the entire Opposition in the Lok Sabha walking out protesting the Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi's decision to disallow an adjournment motion.

He ruled that the issue was important enough to merit a discussion, which could be held on Monday, but not in the form of an adjournment motion. He did "not consider it appropriate to adjourn the entire business for this Purpose." On Thursday, too he had disallowed the motion triggering daylong protests. The ruling today came after an hour-long impromptu debate during which the Opposition condemned the Gujarat Government's decision to allow its staff to join the RSS saying it would "communalise" the civil service and destroy its "neutrality".

The adjournment motion, it said, was intended to "censure" the Vajpayee Government for its "failure" to check the Gujarat Government: a charge the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, denied contending that the Centre had nothing to do with the decision which was entirely a State matter.

The Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, argued that a State Government's decision could not become a subject of an adjournment motion in Parliament, as under the rules such a motion applied to a "specific subject involving the responsibility of the Government of India." In this case, the Government of India did not come into the picture. The issue related to a State government, and the Centre had no jurisdiction. The Government, however, was prepared for a discussion.

As soon as the House met this morning, the Deputy Leader of the Congress(I), Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, demanded the suspension of question hour and discussion on his party's adjournment motion. The Speaker said he was not allowing the adjournment motion but would allow members to speak.

RSS 'spreading poison'

Mr. Scindia accused the RSS of "spreading poison" and said the Vajpayee Government was abdicating its responsibility by choosing to be a "mute spectator" considering that it had the authority to intervene. This, he pointed out, showed that the Government had a "hidden agenda" and the Gujarat Government's action was only a "trial balloon."

Questioning the Government's stand that it could not intervene in a State matter, Mr. Scindia said that under Article 256 and 257 (1), the Centre could give directions to a State if it was found to be acting contrary to the constitutional mandate. The Gujarat Government's action in allowing its employees to

join the RSS was a fit case for Central intervention.

Mr. Advani, however, rejected the argument saying the Home Ministry had already examined the issue and found that according to the Sarkaria Commission's recommendations, these two Articles applied only to situations where the State executive impeded the enforcement of Central authority.

There were no chinks in the Opposition as it took on the Vajpayee Government. Mr. P. A. Sangma, setting aside his party's differences with the Congress (I), came out strongly in support the adjournment motion arguing that allowing Government employees to join the RSS was a "dangerous" step as it would politicise them. Others who wanted the Centre "censured" included Mr. Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M), Ms. Geeta Mukherjee (CPI), Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav (Samajwadi Party), Ms. Mayawati (BSP), Mr. Raghuvansh Prasad Singh (RJD) and Mr. G. M. Banatwala (Muslim League).

Up roar in Rajya Sabha

In the Rajya Sabha, the Leader of the Opposition Dr. Manmohan Singh, was on his feet immediately after the House met seeking suspension of the question hour.

The Chairman, Mr. Krishna Kant, reminded the Opposition benches the resolution adopted by special session of Parliament to coincide with the golden jubilee celebrations of the Independence about the inviolability of question hour.

However, the opposition members argued that the issue they had raised was very serious with repercussions on upholding of the Constitution and the rule of law and they were justified in demanding suspension of question hour. The External Affairs Minister and the Leader of the House, Mr. Jaswant Singh, sought to make light of the issue by stating that it was a feeble attempt by the Opposition to cover up for the imminent defeat in the Assembly elections to the four States where the results are expected tomorrow.

Countering the Minister's statement, Mr. Gurudas Das Gupta (CPI) said the permission accorded by the Gujarat Government to its employees to participate in RSS activities was not an election issue and there had been instances of parties with bigger majorities losing Assembly elections. As the wrangling continued, the Chairman adjourned the House till lunch. It was action replay in the post-lunch session. The only difference was the Opposition was insisting on an immediate ruling on their motion for a short-duration discussion. They refused to participate in the proceedings pending a ruling on the admissibility of the motion.

The Government and the Opposition were divided on the wording of the motion which read "RSS whose basic philosophy runs counter to the letter and spirit of the Indian Constitution". The Deputy Chairman, Mrs. Najma Heptullah, adjourned the House till tomorrow morning.

THE HINDU
26 FEB 2000

Opposition firm, Govt. unrelenting on RSS issue

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 28. The RSS issue is threatening to develop into a major confrontation between the Opposition and the Treasury Benches in the Lok Sabha. The entire Opposition insisted today that the issue of Gujarat allowing Government servants to participate in RSS activities be discussed in the House under a substantive motion — Rule 184 — so that parties could vote to make clear their stand.

An hour-long meeting held this evening — after the Lok Sabha was adjourned three times — with leaders of political parties in the Speaker's chamber failed to resolve the crisis. Another meeting could materialise tomorrow morning before the House meets. And if that does not happen, the Opposition leaders are expected to meet to finalise their strategy.

The Congress(I) Deputy Leader in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Madhav Rao Scindia, emphasised that the issue was related to the "basic features of the Constitution" and therefore, must be discussed under a substantive motion. He pointed out that the Opposition had already agreed to let go the adjournment motion it had first moved on the matter after the Speaker disallowed it. "What is the fear of the Treasury Benches? Under the rules a Government is forced to resign if an adjournment motion goes against it, but under rule 184, the Government does not fall even if the vote goes against it."

Emerging from the meeting in the Speaker's chamber, Mr. Scindia said that during the five-year tenure of the minority Narasimha Rao government, four adjournment motions were allowed despite the attendant risks of the Government falling. The issue was so important it was proper that through voting, which would follow the debate under rule 184, "par-

ties should let the 1,000 million Indians know where they stand on this issue."

Mr. Scindia said the rules of parliamentary procedure, allowing the Opposition certain rights, acted as "safety valves" but now the Treasury Benches were doing away with this safety valve.

There is also resentment in the Congress(I) and the Left parties that parliamentary rules were flouted today when the Speaker called some MPs to initiate a debate on the RSS under rule 193 "when those names were not listed under that motion in the agenda for that day". It was pointed out that there were only two names on the agenda — that of Mr. Indrajit Gupta (CPI), who was absent, and Mrs. Geeta Mukherjee (CPI), who wanted to withdraw the Speaker's office, it becomes the property of the House, and even if a member wishes to withdraw, the Speaker must seek the views of the House. This was not done," a CPI(M) MP said.

Worse followed, when names of those not listed were called out. In fact, according to one Opposition leader, when the Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulyam Singh Yadav's name was called, since he was not listed in the agenda, he thought the Speaker was asking for his views, and he gave it, saying he wanted a discussion under rule 184. And then, in a surprise move the name of Mr. Kirit Somaiya (BJP) was called out and he opened the debate amid confusion. The Opposition view was that all this flouted procedural rules.

Although it is not being openly stated by the Treasury Benches, they fear that if voting takes place on a debate related to the RSS, some of the BJP's allies in the NDA may vote with the Opposition. The Trinamul Congress, the DMK and the Telugu Desam have already expressed their view publicly. The BJP is nat-

usually anxious to avoid making public and putting on record the rift within the NDA on this subject.

Gujarat Cong-MLAs walkout

By Our Special Correspondent

GANDHINAGAR, FEB. 28. The Opposition, Congress(I), today walked out of the Gujarat Assembly here after the Chief Minister, Mr. Keshubhai Patel, refused to comply with their demand for the withdrawal of the notification permitting Government employees to participate in the RSS activities.

The demand was raised by the Congress members in the House, as soon as Mr. Patel was called by the Speaker, Mr. Dhirubhai Shah, to intervene during the debate on the motion of thanks to the Governor's address.

Congress members including the Leader of Opposition, Mr. Amarsinh Chaudhary, the party whip, Mr. Naresh Raval, and legislature party secretary, Mr. Udeysinh Baria, were on their feet demanding Mr. Patel to give an assurance that the Government would withdraw the controversial notification.

They raised anti-Government and anti-RSS slogans for 15 minutes. Repeated requests by the Speaker to resume their seats went unheeded. The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Suresh Mehta, threatened to move a motion against the Congress members, when they staged a walkout.

During the proceedings, the Chief Minister said he was "proud" to be a member of the RSS. "I learnt sincerity and discipline from the RSS," he said and even invited Mr. Chaudhary and other Congress

leaders to join the organisation "if you want to be sincere to your cause".

Later intervening during the debate, the Chief Minister repeated what the Finance Minister, Mr. Vajubhai Vala, had said during the debate about the RSS. Mr. Patel said at least 80 per cent 118 BJP members (in the Assembly) were in the House "because of the RSS and they are members of the RSS". He also had a "word of caution" to the Congress members, stating that it was because of the RSS that the Congress' strength in the State Assembly reduced to 59 from 159. "If you (Congress) continue to behave like this soon you will come down to mere nine," the Chief Minister said.

Earlier, Mr. Vala, in his usual style, made certain remarks against the Congress. "Like in Madhya Pradesh eunuchs are enough to defeat the Congress," he said. Earlier during the day, a privilege motion against Mr. Amarsinh Choudhary was admitted for making "objectionable remarks" against the Speaker in a media conference on February 23 immediately after the entire opposition was suspended for "insulting" the Governor, Mr. Sunder Singh Bhandari.

Moving the privilege motion, Mr. Suresh Mehta said Mr. Chaudhary reportedly made derogatory remarks against the Speaker describing him as "partisan" and acting under pressure from the BJP and the RSS while pressing the suspension motion without giving adequate hearing to the Opposition.

The Speaker referred the matter to the Privileges Committee after it was admitted with the support of the ruling party members. The Opposition though were present in the House when the motion was moved, refused to react to it.

Sonia stripped of Indira centre posts

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 8. — The Centre today reconstituted the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts and removed Mrs Sonia Gandhi as its life president and life trustee.

She will, however, remain an ordinary trustee and continue as president till a new replacement is elected by the reconstituted board of trustees.

By annulling the amendments to the original deed of trust, the Centre has once again made IGNC A a government trust.

The Vajpayee government decided to treat the amendments to the deed of trust, brought about by Mrs Gandhi in May 1995 which was approved by the Narasimha Rao government, as non-est describing the whole exercise as ultra vires since it changed the basic character of the trust and was as such "liable to be ignored".

Today's government decision restored the centre's original character, said Mr Ananth Kumar, culture and youth affairs minister. The President, removed as visitor to the centre by the amendments, now returns with the power to set up review committees to assess its functioning.

Mr Kumar also announced the nomination of 15 trustees that includes Mr R Venkataraman. The latter had resigned from the IGNC A in protest against its privatisation.

The IGNC A has provision for 19 trustees plus a member secretary. The four trustees retained are Mrs Sonia Gandhi whose term of 10 years ends on 31 October 2000, Mr Narasimha Rao, Prof Yash Pal and Mr Abid Hussain. Dr NR Shetty, former Bangalore University V-C, has been appointed member secretary for three years.

Mr Kumar said the government has taken this step to restore IGNC A's public character after obtaining legal opinion.

There was no reaction either from 10 Janpath or the Congress on the government's decision, adds PTI.

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A. R. Kidwai among Cong. nominees for RS

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 10. The Congress(I) leaders, Dr. Karan Singh, Mrs. Ambica Soni and Mr. A. R. Kidwai, are set to be elected unopposed to the Rajya Sabha from Delhi as no other nominations were filed on the last day today. The Congress (I) president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, cleared their candidatures this morning. Mr. K. C. Kondaiah, who gave up his Bellary Lok Sabha seat for Mrs. Gandhi, has also been nominated by the Congress(I).

The choice of Mr. Kidwai, a former Governor of Bihar, came as a surprise. But the names of Dr. Singh and Mrs. Soni were in circulation for some time. Dr. Singh vacated his Rajya Sabha seat to contest against the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, in Lucknow. At that time, he is said to have been assured a Rajya Sabha nomination by Mrs. Gandhi. Mrs. Soni, AICC general secretary and CWC member, is close to Mrs. Gandhi and her nomination fulfils the party's commitment to giving greater representation to women. The three seats have fallen vacant as the term of BJP leaders, Mr. V. K. Malhotra, Mr. K. R. Malkani and Mr. O. P. Kohli, has expired. The Congress(I) is in a comfortable position in the Delhi State Assembly to ensure the election of its candidates.

Five leaders of the Nationalist Congress Party, all from Delhi, rejoined the Congress(I) today, citing disillusionment with the former and accusing it of trying surreptitiously to strengthen parties such as the BJP.

The feud in the Congress(I)'s Delhi unit is getting worse. An Id function organised by the Delhi Haj Committee was marred by slogan-shouting for and against Mrs. Dikshit. The result was that Mrs. Gandhi, who was scheduled to spend an hour at the function, left within five minutes without speaking to anyone. Mrs. Dikshit stayed away from the function, but her opponent and DPCC president, Mr. Chopra, was present.

Partymen unhappy: Page 11

THE HINDU
11 JAN 2000

Sonia to launch 'justice or jail' stir against BJP

Cong. chief, 17 partymen arrested while protesting Gujarat govt.'s order on RSS

The Times of India News Service

AHMEDABAD: Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Sunday warned the Bharatiya Janata Party that the Congress would launch a nation-wide agitation and a jail bhara against the Gujarat government's decision to lift the ban on government employees' participation in RSS activities. She also declared that her party would oppose tooth and nail any attempt by the National Democratic Alliance to review the provisions of the Constitution. Terming the proposed agitation as 'jail ya insaaf' (jail or justice), she claimed that the Congress workers would not allow the RSS to infiltrate the administration.

Earlier in the day, the Congress president and 17 other senior party leaders were arrested for violating prohibitory orders while leading a march towards the prime minister's residence to present a memorandum protesting the controversial order of the Gujarat government. Ms Gandhi was held for a few minutes and then released.

She then proceeded to Ahmedabad where she addressed a public meeting to mark the conclusion of the party's 'Sankalp Yatra' on national unity. Ms Gandhi warned the BJP that Congressmen would continue to court arrest till the government cancelled its decision on the RSS.

The public meeting attended by senior party leaders, however, did not draw the expected numbers. The venue—with a capacity of over 80,000 persons—had hardly 20,000 persons attending the meet.

Ms Gandhi alleged that the plans outlined by the BJP for the golden jubilee celebrations of the Republic Day would violate the country's democratic traditions and also the Indian Constitution. "Our workers would even go to jail to fight the BJP's designs to change the Constitution." Blasting the Gujarat government over its order to lift the ban on the RSS, Ms Gandhi said that this sounded the end of just administration and

exposed the BJP's true colours. The move would create discrimination within different sections of employees, apart from violating the Constitution, she observed.

Among prominent leaders present at the meeting were deputy speaker of the Lok Sabha P.M. Sayeed, CWC members Manmohan Singh, Pranab Mukherjee, A.K. Antony, Rajesh Pilot, Ahmed Patel and three chief ministers—Vilasrao Deshmukh, Digvijay Singh and Ashok Gehlot.

Agencies add from New Delhi: Earlier in the day, Ms Gandhi and several senior party colleagues who were leading a morcha were arrested when they broke a police cordon. Joint commissioner of police R.K. Niyogi said the Congress leaders were arrested under the Delhi Police Act near Tees January Marg in downtown Delhi. The Congress chief was at the head of a procession when she was 'stopped' by the police at the Tughlak Road crossing close to the prime minister's residence and 'taken into custody by the police', party spokesman Ajit Jogi said.

Mr Niyogi said 'around 9.30 a.m., about 1,000 Congress workers marched from their 24, Akbar Road office towards the official residence of the prime minister'. Despite repeated warnings by the police, the protestors broke the first barricade and continued to march towards the PM's residence.

While Ms Gandhi was released immediately, the others—N.D. Tiwari, Arjun Singh, Manmohan Singh, Moti Lal Vora, A.K. Antony, S.K. Shinde, Mohsina Kidwai, K. Natwar Singh, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Jitendra Prasada, Madhav Rao Scindia, Ambika Soni, Rajesh Pilot, Bhajan Lal, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Oscar Fernandes, Pranab Mukherjee, Priyaranjan Das Munshi, Ajit Jogi, Anil Shastri—were taken to the Tughlaq Road police station where they were formally put under arrest and subsequently released.

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