

Meet fails, but govt to go ahead with POTO

NEW DELHI: Despite failing to reach a consensus on the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) at an all-party meeting here on Tuesday night, the government said it would go ahead with its efforts to turn the ordinance into law and introduce it in the Lok Sabha next week and the Rajya Sabha later.

"There is no question of withdrawing the ordinance, and government intends to turn it into law," Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said in his concluding remarks at the two-hour-long meeting. The government would consider seriously the amendments suggested by various political parties and come before parliament, parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan quoted Mr Vajpayee as saying in the meeting.

Mr Mahajan said there were four kinds of views among political parties with the Samajwadi Party and the RJD saying there was no need at all for such a law.

While the Congress and some other parties wanted the bill to be brought after due process and were against turning the ordinance into law, some parties came out in total support. Some others like the TDP and the NCP wanted suitable modifications.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi said, "We feel there is (a) lot of deficiencies in the ordinance and we do not agree with the position of the government." Ms Gandhi said the Congress had asked the government to start afresh by discussing with legal luminaries and chief ministers, and formulate a new law. "We are disappointed because (the) government is not prepared to listen to our views," she said. Congress deputy leader in the Lok Sabha Shivraj Patil said the ordinance would infringe upon civil liberties and therefore it was not acceptable.

CPI(M) leader Somnath Chatterjee said all the Left parties strongly opposed the ordinance

and questioned the urgency behind rushing with the ordinance. "Let it be withdrawn, discuss the issue with chief ministers and, if necessary, a law can be framed through consensus," he said.

Seeking to allay apprehensions that the anti-terrorism law would be misused, the PM said there were courts, the media, human rights organisations and political parties which would be working as a watchdog and "therefore there is no question of its misuse, nor will we allow it". Mr Vajpayee said instances of misuse of laws that were being cited were nearly 25 to 30 years old and those conditions were not relevant now.

Home minister L.K. Advani dismissed the opposition charge that the government had brought the anti-terrorism law in a haste. He said police as well as army officials were advocating the need for a law to tackle terrorism as they were finding it difficult to deal with the situation following the scrapping of TADA. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

5 DEC 2001

Opp counsel for diplomacy

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 30

AT AN all-party meeting convened by the Prime Minister today, major Opposition parties shunned the option of a military initiative against Pakistan and urged the Government to step up its diplomatic offensive to pressure it for curbing terrorism.

The emphasis was clearly on making the full use of diplomatic measures to build up a favourable opinion for India in the international community and expose Pakistan's charade of cosmetic steps against terrorist outfits operating from its soil.

While none of the parties made any suggestion for military action, they did, however, make it clear that if war is "thrust" upon India, they would support the Government in facing it unitedly.

Mannohan Singh told reporters after the meeting that none of the leaders sought any information from Atal Bihari Vajpayee about military preparations. The decision of a military intervention was left entirely to the Government's discretion, he said.

In a presentation before the Opposition leaders, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh emphasised that India's current military build-up on the borders was "purely a defensive deployment... The world must understand that we are not the aggressive party, but the aggrieved party", he said at the meeting.

He said the Government was preparing a list of terrorists and criminals who had taken refuge in Pakistan and would forward it to Islamabad for their extradition. Officials said the list, apart from Masood Azhar, Dawood Ibrahim, Chhota Shakeel, Tiger Memon and the five hijackers of IC-814, would also include nine commanders of Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, three of Harkat-ul-Jihad-e-Islami, and one each of Lashkar-e-Tayyeba, Harkat-ul-

Mujahideen and Khalistan Liberation Front.

The conclave was attended by Congress leaders Sonia Gandhi and Mannohan Singh, Harkishan Singh Surjeet of the CPI(M), A B Bardhan of CPI, P A Sangma of NCP, Mamata Banerjee of Trinamool Congress, Ramgopal Yadav of Samajwadi Party, Raghuvansh Prasad Singh of RJD, P H Pandeyan of AIADMK and Sushil Indora of the INLD. TDP leader K Yerramaidu and BSP's Mayawati were conspicuous by their absence.

Another prominent absentee was Defence Minister George Fernandes, whom the PM apparently decided to keep away from the gathering to avoid any confrontation with the Opposition. Vajpayee even told as much to Sangma and Mamata when they asked why Fernandes was missing. He said he did not press for his presence as he did not want the Opposition to create an issue at a time when the country would have to put up a united front.

A significant decision taken at the two-hour meeting was that the Government would send delegations comprising its members and Opposition representatives to major world capitals to mobilise opinion in favour of India in its battle against cross-border terrorism.

Briefing reporters after the meeting, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan said this was decided on the suggestion of some Opposition leaders. These joint delegations would leave by the second half of January and some of them would be led by the Opposition leaders.

To a suggestion by Mamata that Sonia should accompany Vajpayee to the summit, Mahajan said: "We don't have any objection, but the convention and the system does not allow us to take the Leader of the Opposition."

Describing the Opposition's approach at the meeting as



National Human Rights Council members pledge to fight against Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in New Delhi on Sunday.

"cooperative and highly constructive", he said the leaders fully supported the Government's actions since the Parliament attack. They also praised the diplomatic offensive unveiled by Jaswant Singh, he said.

On the issue of the coming Saarc summit at Kathmandu, the Opposition leaders did not proffer any suggestion on whether or not the Prime Minister should hold talks with President Pervez

Musharrarf on the sidelines of the conclave. "The decision rests entirely with Mr Vajpayee," said Mannohan Singh later. Mahajan said it was still undecided if Jaswant should meet his Pakistani opposite number Abdul Sattar on the Saarc sidelines.

Pakistani troops, meanwhile, continued "moderately heavy" mortar shelling and firing on Indian positions in Siachen and Kargil since last night.

Advani warning: Describing Islamabad's steps against terrorist outfits as "a joke", Home Minister L K Advani said Pakistan can even now give "firm assurance" to the world community and India that it would stop abetting terrorism to prevent New Delhi from taking any measure at the "non-diplomatic level".

Stat-ing that terrorism had crossed the "Lakshman rekha" with the Parliament strike, Advani told a

TV channel: "While terrorism is dangerous, the most dangerous is the state which sponsors terrorism, arms and finances terrorist groups."

Jaish chief in prison

Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Maulana Masood Azhar was today remanded to 90 days in custody and shifted from his home town of Bahawalpur to Mianwali prison in Sargodha Range.

AP PHOTO

Advani to spell out Govt. stand in Parliament today

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, DEC. 17. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, is expected to spell out in Parliament tomorrow the Vajpayee Government's response to the December 13 terrorist attack. This will be the first detailed statement of facts and intent from the Government and would be read carefully at home and abroad.

The outline of the Advani statement was discussed today at the Cabinet Committee of Security, which met at the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's residence in the morning. Mr. Vajpayee, who presided over the meeting, was briefed on the latest in the investigations carried out so far in connection with the attack. He was also apprised of the situation on the border with Pakistan.

It is believed that Mr. Advani would, by and large, "recap" the incidents of December 13 and the subsequent breakthrough in the Delhi Police's investigations.

Most of the facts have already been detailed by the Delhi Police Commissioner, Mr. Ajay Raj Sharma, in his press conference on December 16.

However, more than the facts and information it may contain, the statement would be heard for its tone. The Prime Minister and his advisers are believed to have taken a "deadly serious" view of December 13, which is not being treated as any other terrorist attack.

It is learnt that while the Government is determined to tell the country and the world at large that the attack on the Parliament House would not go unanswered, the inclination for now is to let diplomacy produce tangible results. Authoritative sources suggest that the American, the British as well as the European diplomats have been quite active and have been talking to officials in New Delhi and Islamabad.

Before the Government opts for "other options," the expectation is that Washington and London

would be able to prevail upon the authorities in Islamabad to act in a demonstrative manner against the terrorist groups based in Pakistan. The Vajpayee Government believes it has produced convincing proof of the involvement of Pakistan-based groups and individuals in the attack, and that the onus is now on the Musharraf regime to meet the Indian expectations. The Government has not taken kindly to the suggestion from various Pakistani quarters that the December 13 attack could have been masterminded by elements within the Indian Government.

The Vajpayee Government is finding itself under pressure to "act." For example, Mr. Ramdas Aggarwal, a national vice-president of the BJP, has, in a statement, demanded that "we march on the PoK and attack the terrorists' training camps." The same demand, more or less, is likely to be made when the BJP Parliamentary Party meets tomorrow. A number of ruling party MPs have

already met Mr. Vajpayee, asking for "action." However, the Vajpayee establishment may find itself better prepared to "handle" the pressure from within its own

Army heightens vigilance

By Atul Aneja

NEW DELHI, DEC. 17. The Army is exercising heightened vigilance in the wake of Thursday's attack on the Parliament House. Highly-placed Government sources said leave sanctioned for senior officers had been curtailed. Personnel already on leave, however, had not been recalled. The armed forces, while engaged in making in-house contingency plans, had so far not received any clear-cut political directive on the future course of action, the sources said.

These developments come amid reports of Pakistani troop mobilisation along the International Border (IB) and the Line of Control (LoC).

The Vice-Chief of Army Staff, Lt. Gen. N. C. Vij, and the Vice-Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal S. Krishnaswamy, attended today's meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security as both the Chief of Army Staff, General S. Padmanabhan, and the Chief of Air Staff, Air Chief Marshal A. Y. Tipnis, were out of station.

UNI reports from Jammu:

Indian and Pakistani troops exchanged heavy firing at various border outposts in Jammu and Kathua districts overnight. Official sources said the firing took place at old Kana Chak, new Kana Chak, Gole Pattan, Panjour and Chinor farm in Jammu district.

ranks, now that the Congress has publicly said it would support whatever action the Government may decide to take.

The suggestion from the Left that India ought to take its case to the United Nations has not been dismissed out of hand; for all practical purposes, the Government is indeed sharing its concern and evidence with the "international community."

War drummers at work: Page 11

Cong. backs Govt.; CPI(M) sounds a note of caution

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 17. The Congress today came out strongly in support of the Government in dealing with the situation emerging after last week's terrorist strike on Parliament, even as the CPI(M) warned that any military action across the border could lead to a full-scale war and shift the focus from India's strong case against terrorist activities.

The Congress pledged its support to "any well-considered step" the Government might contemplate and take to counter terrorism, the party spokesman, Mr. S. Jaipal Reddy, said at the AICC briefing here. He said there cannot be two views on this and it was for the Government to take a "strategic decision" on whether terrorist camps running across the LoC should be attacked or not. "Whatever decision the Government takes, we lend our support."

On the U.S. Secretary of State, Gen. Colin Powell's statement, urging restraint, the Congress felt that a sovereign country such as India would have to take its own decisions, while major powers such as the U.S., Russia and European Union would express their views. The party said it was satisfied with the evidence gathered by police on the involvement of the Jaish-e-Mohammed and the Lashkar-e-Taiba in last week's attack.

The Congress also backed the Government saying Pakistan should respond to India's

legitimate request for action against the two terrorist outfits that were given "birth and nurtured" by the Pakistani agencies. He charged Pakistan with trying to skirt the issue by suggesting that the country be made part of an impartial probe into the dastardly attack. Pakistan should realise the gravity of the vicious attack on the supreme symbol of Indian democracy, the Parliament House.

Reacting to the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani's criticism about the attitude of the Opposition, which raised questions soon after the incident, Mr. Reddy said it was Mr. Advani who should have exercised restraint. He said Mr. Advani had launched a "unilateral propaganda barrage" the same afternoon claiming there was no breach of security.

The CPI(M), on the other hand, said the Government should place the evidence gathered during investigations before the U.N. and the world community as this would strengthen the demand that Pakistan must act against the two terrorist organisations. "The demand for an across-the-border military strike is irresponsible and will not serve the purpose of eliminating the terrorist organisations. Instead, any military action, however limited, will spark off a full-scale war," the CPI(M) politburo warned, stating this would shift the focus away from India's strong case against terrorist activities and need for firm action.

THE HINDU

18 DEC 2001

Terror war in last phase: PM

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 13: Guns spat. Grenades exploded with a dull thud. Lawmakers stuck inside thought crackers were going off.

Outside, on the rim of the nation's seat of power, a battle raged between a group of militants and guards. India was shaken to its foundations by a suicide attack on the red-and-buff sandstone edifice where freedom came at midnight.

A handful of militants stormed the gates of Parliament, turning the precincts into a battlefield for close to an hour.

Four militants — said to be carrying AK-47s and grenades — were killed in the gunbattle with the guards and one was blown off by explosives strapped around his body. There might have been a sixth militant who escaped. Six guards and a gardener died in the exchange of fire and at least 14 were injured.

First sounds of gunfire around 11.45 am tore through the nation's sense of security and as news spread of the audacious attack on the heart of the world's largest democracy, the chilling realisation dawned that nothing is safe from terrorist attacks.

Three hundred members of Parliament were inside the building as gunshots reverberated and explosives went off. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Vice-President Krishan Kant escaped being caught in the attack as in the normal course both might have been at the spot of the strikes.

Vajpayee was to come to the

Rajya Sabha, which is entered through Gate No. 11, but did not because Parliament was adjourned. Kant, Rajya Sabha chairman, was about to leave through the same gate, but had delayed his departure. One of the cars in his convoy was hit by the militants' white Ambassador.

In a televised address to the nation, Vajpayee said the battle against terrorism had entered its last phase and would be fought in a decisive manner. "For the past two decades, we have been fighting terrorism, now the battle has reached its final phase."

After a similar suicide attack on the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly on October 1, Delhi had issued warnings of taking the fight against terrorism into Pakistan, citing Washington's decision to launch a war in Afghanistan.

Home minister L.K. Advani, responsible for internal security, said after an emergency meeting of the Cabinet committee on security: "We will liquidate the terrorists and their sponsors wherever they are." Echoes of President George W. Bush there.

Mumbai police said they had warned the home ministry about a possible attack on Parliament after the arrest of a suspected al Qaida operative. Advani acknowledged receiving a warning but said there was no specific information.

QUOTE

The attack was not only on Parliament but the entire nation

AB VAJPAYEE



Police in action outside Parliament. (APF)

from him, promised a "hard-hitting response". No one has claimed responsibility for the attack.

President Pervez Musharraf condemned the attack in a message to Vajpayee. "I was shocked to learn about the attack by armed intruders on the Indian Parliament building."

The militants' car entered the complex with red light flashing atop and bearing a home ministry sticker, later described

as fake. Laden with explosives, the vehicle was being sanitised by bomb disposal squad experts. The car stopped outside gate No. 11 and the militants jumped out, opening fire.

A meeting convened by the Speaker decided that Parliament would meet tomorrow as scheduled. Later, a meeting will be held to decide if the session should continue until December 21. The Cabinet is also slated to meet tomorrow.

US speaks Sept. 11 language

FROM K.P. NAVAR

Washington, Dec. 13: The US today went well beyond any previous condemnations of terrorist attacks against India when state department spokesman Richard Boucher said "those responsible (for the attack on Parliament) should be identified and quickly brought to justice".

Previous American statements on incidents of terrorism were confined to criticism of such acts. There was speculation here following today's statement whether the US would approve of or at least condone any retaliation by India against the perpetrators or sponsors of terrorism.

Indians outside the government have criticised American double standards on India when the US has gone half way round the world to Afghanistan to retaliate against the September 11 attacks.

President George W. Bush spoke to Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, condemning terrorism.

Boucher said: "This brutal assault on the heart of Indian democracy is an attack on all democracies."

Secretary of state Colin Powell, who spoke to foreign minister Jaswant Singh, said the US was determined "to cooperate with India in its fight against terrorism".

Allies force Centre to soften Poto

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HT Correspondent & PTI
New Delhi, December 6

BOWING TO pressure from major NDA partners like the Telugu Desam and the Opposition, the Union Cabinet tonight decided to amend the controversial anti-terrorism ordinance by curtailing its operational period from five to three years and deleting a provision affecting freedom of Press.

The Cabinet also decided to set up a judicial mechanism for forfeiture of properties of terrorists, but left the power to attach such properties to a designated authority, officials said.

The decision to bring in the major amendments in Poto, on which the Opposition and some NDA partners had expressed serious reservations, was taken by the Cabinet at its meeting presided over by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee just hours before he embarked on his five-day tour of Japan.

The reduction in the sunset clause on the operational period of the proposed law had been suggested by the TDP while the section relating to forfeiture of property was put forward by NCP leader Sharad Pawar during the all-party meeting on Poto convened by the Prime Minister on Tuesday.

The Cabinet reduced the operational period of the proposed legislation to three years keeping in view the remaining term of the present Lok Sabha, which expires in October 2004, said sources. They said a decision on the continuance of the sunset

clause should be left to the new Lok Sabha when it takes over from the present House.

On deletion of Section 3(8), dealing with disclosure of journalists' sources of information regarding terrorist activities, the sources said many political parties — including NDA partners like the TDP and the Trinamool Congress — objected to it, saying media persons, political opponents and innocent citizens would fall victim to this clause. Since there was a general displeasure over this clause, the Cabinet decided to delete it totally.

The Cabinet decided to work out a judicial mechanism on the issue of forfeiture of terrorist properties, leaving the attachment of such properties to the designated authorities, which would generally be an officer of the Joint Secretary rank. The sources said three sections of the proposed legislation would have to be amended for this purpose.

Other sections of Poto, including the provision of bail and the period by when the accused would have to be produced before the designated court, would remain unchanged.

The amended version of the proposed legislation is likely to be circulated to the MPs by Sunday so that the law can be introduced in the Lok Sabha on Monday or Tuesday, insiders said.

Asked whether the Cabinet discussed the possibility of a joint session of both Houses of Parliament to get the legislation passed, the sources said the matter was not discussed.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 7 DEC 2001

Govt may call joint sitting over Poto

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 10

A DAY before the amended Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (Poto) is to be introduced in the Lok Sabha, the Government today provided enough indication that it would hold a joint sitting of the two Houses if the Rajya Sabha rejects the Bill next week.

The Bill is expected to be passed by the Lower House this week.

"I would bet on a joint sitting," a BJP Cabinet Minister said. The most likely dates for the conclave are December 22 and 24.

The BJP has been advocating a joint sitting to push the Bill

through. But today, in a signal contrary to the one sent out by the Government and the BJP, a section within the ruling party started to argue against the immediate enactment of the legislation.

This group — essentially from Uttar Pradesh — feels that it would pay well if the BJP makes the Opposition's blocking of the legislation as an election plank in UP.

But BJP spokesperson V K Malhotra dismissed the idea, reiterating the party's keenness to hold a joint sitting, if necessary, to pass the Bill.

The Government, which had suddenly become tight-lipped after its initial reaction, too is

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talking about the possibility of a joint conclave.

The final decision would be taken by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, once the Bill falls in the Rajya Sabha.

However, feelers are being sent out to political parties to stand by on December 22 or 24.

As a BJP leader pointed out, if the Government would take the Bill all the way to the Rajya Sabha, despite its likely defeat there, it may as well take it to its logical conclusion by ensuring its passage in a joint sitting. Otherwise, it need not even bring it to the Upper House.

At a joint sitting, the NDA's overall tally and the AIADMK and NCP's support would give

POTO the backing of about 433 of the 782 members.

Though the Government can revalidate the Ordinance even after the Rajya Sabha rejects the bill, it is wary of the President's reaction.

Under the Constitution, a joint sitting can be held if a Bill is rejected by one House after being passed by the other, or if the Houses disagree on the amendments to be made in the bill.

Joint sittings were held in 1959 and 1978 to pass the Dowry Prohibition and Banking Service Commission (Repeal) Bills.

The President can call for a joint session of both the Houses at a few hours notice when Parliament is in session.

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PM agrees to Poto amendment

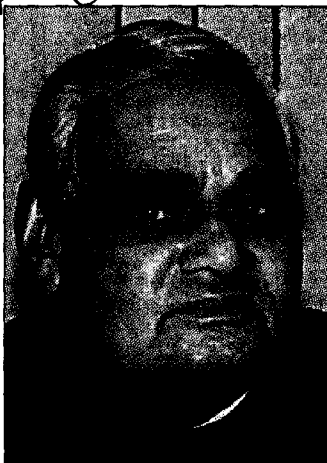
HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 3

BOWING TO pressure from the Opposition and some NDA allies, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee told the Lok Sabha today that the Government is willing to consider amendments to the proposed anti-terrorism law and announced a meeting of Opposition leaders tomorrow to discuss the issue.

Responding to an hour-long impromptu debate during Zero Hour on certain remarks reportedly made by him yesterday at Hyderabad, Vajpayee conceded that it would have been better if the Government had consulted Opposition leaders before promulgating the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (Poto).

He said the Telugu Desam, while supporting the measure at the recent Chief Ministers' conference, had expressed reservations on certain provisions. "The Government is willing to consider some amendments to Poto," he said.

Speaking on behalf of the Treasury, BJP member V K Mal-



ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE

hotra said the PM in his Hyderabad speech had meant that the ISI was fomenting trouble within the country. "With an eye on the elections in Uttar Pradesh, it is the Opposition which is indulging in politics." Asking the Opposition not to play politics on an issue that threatens the country's unity, Vajpayee said the Congress should tell the Government about its specific

objections to the ordinance. He said the meeting of Opposition leaders has been convened at 6.30 pm tomorrow, expressing the hope that a consensus would emerge in the discussions.

The Opposition was incensed by Samata Party member Prabhunath Singh's allegation that "somehow it appears that the Opposition is linked to terrorists and the ISI". This led to a furore, particularly from Samajwadi Party members. Order was restored when Speaker Balayogi said the objectionable portion of Singh's statement would be expunged.

Denying that during his speech yesterday at Hyderabad, he had doubted the patriotism of Muslims or any other community, Vajpayee said: "There's no question of doubting patriotism of any section." What he said was that if the minority community had any apprehension on the Poto, this could be removed, he said, adding, "The new measure is not aimed at minorities or any other section, but meant to target only terrorists."

Enron files for bankruptcy, sues Dynegy

Houston, December 3

SHATTERED ENERGY trader Enron Corp filed for bankruptcy on Sunday and hit rival and one time suitor Dynegy Inc. with a \$10-billion lawsuit for pulling out of a last-ditch rescue merger.

The filing sought protection from creditors while Enron, burdened with at least \$16.8 billion in debt and obligations, tries to reorganise its ruined finances.

The lawsuit, filed in the federal bankruptcy court in New York, accuses Dynegy of wrongfully terminating a \$9 billion merger deal. The suit also seeks to stop Dynegy from exercising its option to obtain Enron's Northern Natural Gas Pipeline. "We are taking the steps to stabilise our businesses and enhance our ability to pay our creditors," Enron Chairman and CEO Ken Lay said.

Detailed report on Page 12

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

4 DEC 2001

'Centre will abide by court orders on Ayodhya'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 3. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, today assured the Lok Sabha that the Government would fulfil its prime responsibility to ensure the compliance of all court directives on the Ayodhya dispute.

Asserting that the Government would not allow any violation of the status quo at the disputed site in Ayodhya, Mr. Advani said the Centre was duty-bound to ensure the implementation of all court orders. Citing the 1993 Supreme Court order on maintenance of the status quo at the disputed site, he said only normal maintenance work would be allowed there as per the court directions.

In his reply to the five-hour-long discussion on the Ayodhya issue, particularly referring to the October 17 incident when the Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader, Mr. Ashok Singhal, and others had stormed into the makeshift temple at the disputed site, Mr. Advani said: "I am not defending any offender. The State Government is taking action."

He said the U.P. Government had clamped prohibitory orders at the site and tightened security to prevent recurrence of such incidents. Mr. Advani likened the Ayodhya movement to Mahatma Gandhi's "Dandi March" and claimed that the movement had strengthened "cultural national-

ism". While terming the December 6, 1992 demolition of the Babri Masjid as the "saddest day" in his life, he admitted that the demolition had "been harmful to the prestige and dignity of the country."

Though the Home Minister sought to distance himself from the demolition, he maintained that the Ayodhya movement had influenced the Indian polity and thought like no other movement since Independence. "It was never a communal movement; it was a mere national and cultural movement," he said.

When the Congress leader, Mr. Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, reminded him about the U.P. Chief Minister's insistence that nothing had happened, Mr. Advani said, "He must be speaking with reference to the Supreme Court order." The Home Minister cited the Allahabad High Court order which had referred to "meaningful darshan" at the makeshift temple.

The discussion, initiated by Mr. Dasmunshi, saw the NDA members and the Opposition — particularly the Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav — accuse each other of politicising the issue in view of the coming Assembly elections in U.P. He demanded convening of a meeting of the National Integration Council to discuss the issue.

Conceding that the Ayodhya

dispute had diverted attention from the socio-economic problems facing the country — a point made by the Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, — the CPI(M) leader, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, said the issue came up in every session because the secular fabric of the country was dependent on the way it is handled.

Mr. Devendra Prasad Yadav (JD-U) said the NDA partners would not allow the BJP to bring the contentious issues into the national agenda for governance. Mr. G.M. Banatwalla (TUMML) de-

scribed the present situation as the outcome of "sheer deceit and outright crime; and an example of defiance of the rule of law, mockery of democracy, and denigration of the judiciary".

Mr. K. Yerran Naidu (TDP) said the NDA Government was functioning on the basis of the Common Minimum Agenda on which it was elected, and the construction of the Ram temple was not part of its mandate.

'Temple construction on'

Meanwhile, the VHP leaders maintained that their decision to

construct the Ram mandir at Ayodhya was on. However, they said no major programme was being organised on December six, the day the Babri Masjid was demolished. "Our State-level units will be organising functions at the local level. There are no plans from the central leadership of the party to organise any such event at the national level so far," the VHP leader, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, told presspersons.

He said the senior leaders of the party were preparing for the final stage for constructing the temple.

GOVT READY TO CONSIDER SUGGESTIONS: PM

Vajpayee urges Opp to change stand on Poto

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A. D. N. Srinivas
Statesman News Service

HYDERABAD, Dec. 2. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today hinted that the Centre was willing to bring changes in Poto and asked the Opposition to reconsider its stand on the Ordinance.

Mr N Chandrababu Naidu, he said, had made some suggestions on the Ordinance at the recent chief ministers' conference in Delhi, and "we're ready to accept them."

If there were more suggestions on how to prevent misuse of the law, they were welcome, the Prime Minister said. "Our intention is not to allow misuse of the law." He hoped the government would be able to enact the legislation, for it's time for unity among political parties to face the threat of terrorism.

Mr Vajpayee was speaking at Lal Bahadur Stadium after launching the Rs 2,000-crore Valmiki Ambedkar Awas Yojana, a central housing scheme in urban slums.

The Prime Minister alleged the Opposition was protesting against Poto because of "political considerations". He said: "I'm surprised that some parties, who in their long tenure have brought laws that damaged freedom and democracy, are now opposing a new law... No attention is being paid to national security. We too have been in the Opposition for 40 years, but never did we allow political considerations to come in the way of national security."

The Ordinance was meant for those who were trying to create anarchy in the country, he said. "Is

it not the Opposition's responsibility to strengthen the government's hands to fight terrorism? There could be one government or another, but this government will fulfil its responsibilities."

"We're determined to protect democracy and not let terrorism rule. I'm confident political parties and the Opposition will reconsider their views."

He assured the people that Poto would not curb their freedom, nor was it targeted against any section of the society.

On the PWG menace, Mr Vajpayee said youths were being mis-

freedom was lost. They all had to come back to democracy."

Mr Vajpayee praised the Andhra Pradesh government for taking firm steps to tackle the PWG which, he said, was responsible for creating disturbances in the neighbouring states too.

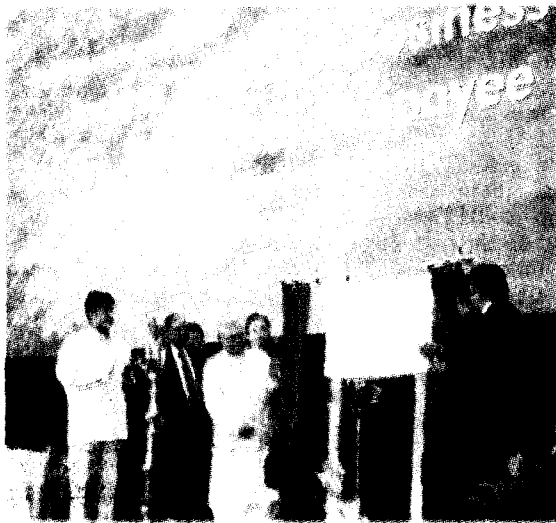
The Prime Minister today laid a string of foundation stones: for the Rs 295-crore River Musi Conservation Project, for the state's financial district (100 acres have been allotted for it) and for the Insurance Regulatory and Development Authority headquarters.

At another function in the city,

Mr Vajpayee had a good message for the youths. India, he said, was becoming a "young nation"; 45 per cent of the people will be in their twenties 20 years hence. Several advanced countries will be loaded with senior citizens by that time.

"This means that young Indians, well-educated in diverse professions, will be in great demand as knowledge workers all over the world. They will also contribute to India's all-round national renewal," the Prime Minister said, while inaugurating the International School of Business here.

This evolving demographic situation is yet another compelling reason for the nation to expand and improve its education infrastructure. "I'd like the educational system in India, both in the government and private sectors, to gear itself up to tap this great demographic opportunity," he said. He referred to the panel's recent document on how to make India a "knowledge superpower".



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee inaugurates the Indian School of Business in Hyderabad on Sunday in the presence of Mr Chandrababu Naidu. — AP/PTI

led to believe that positive changes could be brought about through violence. "Violence begets violence. They are committing murders and looting properties... It's a myth that a new establishment can be brought about through violence."

Several countries, he said, had ushered in changes through violence. But "we've seen that revolution paves way to slavery. The problems were not solved and

THE STATESMAN

7 3 DEC 2001

Centre bans PWG, MCC under Poto

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 5

A DAY after the Opposition trashed the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (Poto), the Vajpayee Government banned two radical Left wing groupings today under the provisions of the controversial ordinance it is seeking to translate into an Act of Parliament.

The ultra-Left outfits that have been banned and declared "terrorist organisations" under Poto are the People's War Group (PWG) and the Maoist Communist Centre (MCC).

"The Communist Party of India — Marxist-Leninist (People's War) and all its formations and front organisations, and the MCC and all its formations and front organisations have been declared as terrorist organisations under the provisions of Clause (a) sub-section (2) of Section 18 of Poto, 2001 with immediate effect," an official release said. The PWG is just another name for the CPI-ML (People's War).

The two banned organisations can, however, challenge the Government's action by petitioning the Centre, failing which the ban would come up for review before a tribunal or any other "designated authority" headed by a sitting or retired judge of a High Court.

Condemning the ban, the Central Secretariat of the CPI-ML (Liberation) said: "This is the real face of Poto. It echoes the real intention of the fascist, autocratic Government. Our

apprehension that Poto will be used as a political weapon against the Left and democratic movement has come true.

The Centre's "expected" action brings the total number of organisations banned under Poto to 25. Among these are the Jaish-e-Mohammad, Lashkar-e-Tayyeba, Harkat-ul-Mujahideen, Deendar Anjuman, the Students' Islamic Movement of India and several insurgent groups from the North-east.

The PWG, which is active in Andhra Pradesh, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh, was banned last year by the Chandrababu Naidu Government in Andhra. The MCC operates in Bihar and Jharkhand, though over the past year, it has become noticeably active in certain parts of West Bengal.

There have been persistent demands from some of the States affected by ultra Left extremism for a nationwide ban on PWG and MCC. Home Ministry officials, however, claim that States like Orissa and Bihar have "done virtually nothing to tackle the menace on their own though law and order is a State subject".

The immediate provocation for the Centre's action is the serial attacks by the PWG in Andhra Pradesh and Orissa. Home Ministry sources link this spiral of violence to the Maoist rebellion in Nepal.

Besides Andhra, MP, Chhattisgarh, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa, the other States affected by Left extremism are Maharashtra, UP and West Bengal.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

06 DEC 2001

- 6 DEC 2001

'MAJOR ROLE FOR INDIA IN AFGHAN GOVT. FORMATION'

Country fully united on Kashmir, says Vajpayee

9-vaj sm
HD-1

By K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, NOV. 27. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today rejected Pakistan's charge that India is divided in its approach on Kashmir, and reaffirmed the Government's commitment to peaceful relations with Islamabad. There was no question of accepting another Partition and handing over Jammu and Kashmir to Pakistan. The people of the State had opted to be with India, he said.

"The country is fully united on the Kashmir issue. It will never accept another Partition," Mr. Vajpayee said winding up the two-day discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the September 11 terrorist attacks in the U.S. and its impact on India.

The Prime Minister's observations came a day after the Pakistan President, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, spoke of a "division" within the Government on the Kashmir issue.

In his 50-minute speech, Mr. Vajpayee expanded on India's policy towards Pakistan, the ap-

proach to the current situation in Afghanistan and support to the war against terrorism.

While pointing to the "consistent and positive approach of his Government" towards improving relations with Pakistan, Mr. Vajpayee said the peace process cannot be narrowly focussed on the dispute over Jammu and Kashmir. India wanted improvement in all aspects of bilateral relations, including trade and culture.

Referring to his visit to the Minar-e-Pakistan in Lahore, the Prime Minister recalled his wish of "peace and prosperity" for the neighbour. "We can change friends, but not neighbours," he said.

Barring an odd-comment, missing today was Mr. Vajpayee's wit. He expressed a feeling of hurt over the charges levelled by the Opposition that his Government had put India's self-respect at stake while dealing with the U.S. after September 11.

The Prime Minister took serious objection to the Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Janeswar Misra's

comment that he (Mr. Vajpayee) had pleaded with the U.S. President, Mr. George Bush, "with folded hands", complaining about Pakistan's role in the attack on the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly. "No one talks of a Prime Minister of a country of 100 crores in that fashion," he said.

"We have dealt with the U.S. on equal terms. After I wrote to the

When PM forgot Jaswant's portfolio: Page 13

U.S., warning that our patience was being tested, the situation changed rapidly. There is no ground to doubt the patriotism of any party," he said and urged the country to present a united face.

Meeting with Musharraf

On the prospect of a dialogue with Gen. Musharraf on the margins of the SAARC meeting in Kathmandu in early January, Mr. Vajpayee said a chance meeting between the two could take place. "If the SAARC meeting is held at Kathmandu, and if I go there and

if General Musharraf comes, then we could meet casually (*chalt-chalte*)," Mr. Vajpayee said.

On Afghanistan, the Prime Minister denied that he ever supported any move to accommodate the "moderate" Taliban elements, but said efforts could be there to help those whose voice was stifled by the Taliban. He agreed with the Leader of the Opposition, Dr. Manmohan Singh, that the future government in Afghanistan must be broadbased, neutral and non-aligned and one that did not allow use of its soil for carrying out terrorist acts against India.

India would have a major say in the formation of a new set-up in Afghanistan while maintaining that any move to split that country would not be a solution to the problem. The Government had condemned the killing of innocents in the bombings. Terrorists could have prevented the suffering of women and children of Afghanistan if they had owned up their acts. Now the Taliban is on the run, he said.

THE HINDU

30 NOV 2001

9. 11/2004
HDI

Amendments if necessary, says PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 20. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today strongly defended his own decision to re-induct Mr. George Fernandes into the Union Cabinet without waiting for the Venkataswami Commission to complete its inquiry into the Tehelka affair, the scandal that had earlier led to Mr. Fernandes' exit from the Government.

In fact, it seems that Mr. Vajpayee went out of his way to give Mr. Fernandes a "totally clean chit" saying his decision was taken after "deep thinking" (*soch samajh ke*). The defence came 'suo motu' when he addressed the Parliamentary Party meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Party this morning although no member raised the matter.

He also defended the Government decision to promulgate the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO), charging that the Opposition's motives in countering the proposed legislation were "purely political." He signalled that he would be calling an all-party meeting to discuss the controversial ordinance later and also stated that the Government was willing to consider amendments, if necessary.

At the same time, the BJP spokesperson, Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra, later made it clear to reporters that the party was itself trying to see POTO in a political way. "If POTO falls, it will bring political advantage to us, for the BJP will say that the Government wanted to crush terrorism, but the opposition parties prevented us," Mr. Malhotra said. His remarks were in line with the earlier party posture — opposi-



The Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, (second from left), and his party MPs, protesting against the POTO outside Parliament in New Delhi on Tuesday. — AFP

tion to POTO was equal to appeasement of terrorists. Mr. Malhotra, who briefed the press about the Parliamentary Party meeting was asked whether the National Human Rights Commission's objections to the draconian law were also political in nature. He dismissed this

by saying that "the Commission was not a political party" and that "the Commission's word is not the last word." Government sources later indicated that an all-party meeting on POTO will be called at during the end of November or early December after the National Democratic Alliance arrives at a decision on amendments to be made to POTO. Now, the thinking is veering round making it compulsory to present a person arrested under POTO before a magistrate within 24 hours, instead of the 48 hours in the current ordinance.

A second amendment could delete a controversial clause under which it was feared action could also be taken against journalists for withholding information they may gather during the course of their professional work. It seems that several allies and supporting parties, including the Telugu Desam Party and the MDMK, are insisting on these changes.

The Prime Minister is also reported to have briefed the Parliamentary Party about his recent three-nation tour. He claimed that after September 11, Indian diplomacy had been a "big success" while Pakistan, which was facing serious difficulties, had failed. Mr. Vajpayee claimed that India was very much a part of the global fight against terrorism.

The issue which agitated members, and it as raised, was the condition of the minority community in Bangladesh. Members talked about the raping of women and the feeling of families, and they were assured that protests had been lodged with the Bangladesh Government as well as with the country's High Commissioner here.

THE HINDU

21 NOV 2004

Maneka sulks: 'I don't know where to go'

■ I am happy to get it back, says Jagmohan, Tourism and Culture have always gone together

VRINDA GOPINATH
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 19

A day after Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee took away the Culture portfolio from her and handed it over to Tourism Minister Jagmohan, Maneka Gandhi said she had no idea why she had been divested of the charge. She also appeared bitter about her new portfolio of statistics and programme implementation, complaining that it lacked staff, funds and even an office.

"Programme implementation and statistics never existed as a ministry. Although it has a

secretary, it has always been an appendage of a main ministry. I have no idea where to go and what to do," said Maneka who, as Environment Minister in the National Front government, had the portfolio as an additional charge even then.

Jagmohan, who had always maintained that Tourism and Culture were inseparable departments, appeared pleased with the turn of events. "I am happy to get the Culture department back. After all, tourism and culture have always been together," he told *The Indian Express*.

His first public appearance

after being given charge of Culture was at this evening's inauguration of the new Kala Nidhi and Kala Kosha complex of the Indira Gandhi National Centre for Arts (IGNCA).

Jagmohan said his first priority would be to clean monuments and their surroundings. "I want to rid our heritage spots of beggars and touts so that they do not drive away the tourists."

To add to the political buzz, Prime Minister Vajpayee today joined Maneka's estranged sister-in-law and Congress president Sonia Gandhi in inaugurating the new IGNCA complex. In the Lok Sabha,

too, Vajpayee made that extra effort to walk across and exchange pleasantries with Sonia soon after the winter session got underway.

Still smarting from her ouster last year as lifetime president of the IGNCA, Sonia reminded Vajpayee that "if this centre is run in the true spirit of autonomy, if this centre functions professionally, if this centre does not fall victim to partisan politics, I believe we would all have done justice to Rajiv's vision and Indira Gandhi's bequest. It is so very easy in our country to destroy but very difficult to create and sustain."

INDIAN EXPRESS

20 NOV 2001

Vajpayee announces projects for Punjab

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AMRITSAR, Nov. 18. — The Prime Minister today announced major developmental projects for Punjab. He was addressing a huge rally to mark the bicentenary celebrations of the coronation of Maharaja Ranjit Singh.

Union ministers Mr SS Dhindsa, Mr Anant Kumar, Maj Gen D C Khanduri and Mr Vijay Goel were present. Dr Farooq Abdullah and Mr OP Chautala also attended the rally.

Senior BJP and Akali Dal leaders were also present.

Major projects for the state include : Rs 450 crore for the four-laning of the Jalandhar-Amritsar highway and the Jalandhar-Pathankot highway.

The Jalandhar-Amritsar highway is to be renamed as Maharaja Ranjit Singh Marg.

Another Rs 201 crore has been allotted for development of water supply in towns in the state. Separate grants have been made under the Valmiki-Ambedkar Housing scheme for dalits and a software technology park for Jalandhar city.

CM FRACTURES LEG

AMRITSAR, Nov. 18. — The Punjab chief minister, Mr Parkash Singh Badal, fell in the bathroom and fractured his left leg today. He was flown to New Delhi for treatment.

Mr Badal had to cancel all his engagements, including his participation in the bicentenary celebrations of coronation of Maharaja Ranjit Singh. — PTI

Mr Parkash Singh Badal was absent from the function because of an injury. His son, Rajya Sabha member and former Union minister Mr Sukhbir Singh, read out his address to the audience.

Mr Sukhbir Singh Badal stressed that Maharaja Ranjit Singh's policies of tolerance and secularism were much needed these days. Referring to political opponents Congress and Panthic Morcha, he said these parties were out to destabilise hard-won peace and stability in the state.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee also spoke of the "true secularism" and amity prevalent in Maharaja Ranjit Singh's days.

Speakers stressed on "positive reporting" by journalists. BJP leaders reminded people of the peace and brotherhood in the state "after" the Akali-BJP alliance came to power.

The SGPC chief, Jathedar JS Talwandi, Mr OP Chautala and others directly appealed to the masses to vote for Akali-BJP alliance in the Assembly polls in the state despite the occasion being a state function.

THE STATESMAN

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HD 7

PM FOR ALL-PARTY MEETING

Bid for consensus on POTO suffers setback

18/11

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 17. The Centre was rebuffed today in its efforts to secure an unambiguous consensus on the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) as the Congress Chief Ministers made it clear that it was unacceptable to them in its proposed form.

The Chief Ministers' conference on Internal Security here failed to yield the kind of endorsement the Government was hoping for. In fact, the day was saved only by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, who promised to call an all-party meeting.

Later, sufficiently worried over the Congress Chief Ministers' opposition to the ordinance, Mr. Vajpayee invited the party president and Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, for a face-to-face discussion at his residence. He was assisted by Mr. Arun Jaitely, Union Law Minister, while Ms. Gandhi was helped by Dr. Manmohan Singh. The Government side was reportedly feeling much better after the meeting.

However, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, later told reporters that he was satisfied that a national consensus was in the making in favour of a special legal framework against ter-

rorism. Earlier, he had forcefully argued in favour of the proposed law and asserted that the country was determined to banish terrorism.

He was, he said, "pleasantly surprised" to find that there were not too many differences on POTO but the Chief Ministers did express their reservations on at least two counts. They were sore over the Centre's failure to have discussions before promulgating POTO and appeared cut up with the Government for not discussing it with the Opposition at any stage.

Pointing out that discussions had been held on various fora, Mr. Advani said even now the Government was contemplating discussions with political parties before the debate on POTO came up in Parliament.

POTO: Sonia's polite 'no' to PM

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, NOV. 17. A last-minute bid by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, failed to dissuade the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, from opposing the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO).

Sources said that on Friday, ahead of the crucial meeting of the Congress top brass, Ms. Gandhi was approached for a meeting with the Prime Minister on the issue.

While she agreed to the meeting, she made sure that it did not come in the way of her party's stand on the ordinance.

After a three-hour parley involving the Chief Ministers of the States where the party is ruling and other senior party leaders, the party decided to oppose the legislation.

Ms. Gandhi, accompanied by the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Dr. Manmohan Singh, had an hour-long meeting today with Mr. Vajpayee.

The Union Law Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitely, was the only other representative from the Government side. The meeting appeared to have done little to persuade Ms. Gandhi to change her mind.

According to a senior Congress leader, she politely told the Prime Minister that she could make no commitment and advised him to involve all the Opposition parties in the consultation process and to begin the exercise again.

She made it clear that the manner in which the Government had promulgated the ordinance was like presenting a fait accompli, which the Congress was not prepared to accept.

Briefing presspersons on the deliberations of the Chief Ministers' conference, he said the outstanding feature was the "uniformly constructive approach."

However, the Centre's proposal to set up a federal crime fighting agency had been rejected by the Chief Ministers. "There was no agreement on federal crime fighting agency earlier and there was no agreement today also," Mr. Advani said.

"Everybody agreed that there is a need to rise above party lines and we must meet challenges of the situation as one strong and united nation. Most of the Chief Ministers emphasised the threat of terrorism that the country is facing but the most impassioned plea was made by the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah," Mr. Advani said.

THE HINDU

19 NOV 2001

Atal's veiled attack on Pak at UN

S Rajagopalan
United Nations, November 10

IN AN oblique attack on Pakistan's duplicity on terrorism, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today asked the international community to firmly rebuff any ideological, political or religious justification for the menace.

All "self-serving arguments" to justify terrorist action in some places while condemning

it elsewhere should be rejected, Vajpayee said in his address to the 56th UN General Assembly session. Without naming Pakistan, he drew the world body's attention to "some States following a policy of sponsoring and sheltering terrorists".

The session got under way with a rallying call by US President George W Bush to pursue the ongoing global campaign against terrorism to its very end. "Every nation has a stake

in this cause. As we meet, the terrorists are planning more murder, perhaps in my country, perhaps in yours."

Despite the professed joint battle, the inherent contradictions were coming to the fore, raising questions of credibility.

Bush opted not to meet Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, the ostensible cause being Palestinian justification of the actions of anti-Israel organisations such as the Hezbollah.

THE STATESMAN

11 NOV 2002

Kalam quits office

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, Nov. 10. — Dr APJ Abdul Kalam has resigned as the principal scientific adviser to the government. The former Atomic Energy Commission chairman, Dr R Chidambaram, will succeed him.

The Prime Minister has accepted Dr Kalam's resignation and he will be demitting the office on 12 November, an official announcement said. Dr Chidambaram's appointment would take effect from the date he assumes the charge, it said.

Dr Kalam, regarded as the father of missile system in India, is presently out of Delhi. Sources close to him said he was keen on

pursuing academic interests and helping scientists across the country in developing their research capabilities.

In Bangalore, the director of the Indian Institute of Science, Mr Goverdhan Mehta, said Dr Kalam wanted to join the IISc as a professor emeritus. The Indian Space Research Organisation had communicated this in a formal letter of request to the institution.

Mr Mehta, however, added that no decision had yet been taken as there had been no direct communication or intimation to that effect from Dr Kalam himself. "We have to see the institutional mechanism as it has yet to be established whether he will be a

visiting or an institute professor," he said.

He explained that the Isro Distinguished Professor's Chair, named after Brahma Prakash, a noted scientist in the field of metallurgy who also played a vital role in developing the atomic energy programme in India, was instituted by the department of space and Isro.

As such, it's a totally different department and, in fact, Dr Kalam was the occupant of the chair for many years though he wasn't a "visible scientist", Mr Mehta said.

He said it wasn't yet known when Dr Kalam wanted to start with his new phase as there was no further development after receiving the letter from Isro.

THE STATESMAN

We will overcome terrorism, says Advani

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 7. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, today said the "dynamics" of world events after September 11 may well ensure the end of state funding of terrorist activities (by Pakistan in Kashmir) and "it will become difficult for any country to adopt terrorism as a state policy for achieving political ends against a neighbour." That would change the situation fundamentally, making it easier for India to fight terrorism and the proxy war that has been waged against it for over a decade.

At the same time, he asserted that India put no conditionalities for its support to the global fight against terrorism (unlike Pakistan) for, "we believe our terrorism is our problem and we will succeed."

Mr. Advani told the Social Editors' conference here this evening that some changes had occurred in the overall situation after September 11. Although in the initial phase of the global war against terrorism, the U.S. did not want to "clutter" its objective of getting at Osama bin Laden and the Al-Qaeda network in Afghanistan, more recently it was willing to look at the problem in totality and was not shy of mentioning terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. In fact, even the Pakistan President, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, was forced to condemn the October 1 attack on the State Assembly as an "act of terrorism."

India's message was able to go through. On September 11 the terrorists had chosen for attack the World Trade Center, symbol of America's commercial might, the Pentagon, the seat of its defence establishment, and had targeted (although missed) the White House, the office of the U.S. President. On October 1, the terrorists in Kashmir attacked the Jammu and Kashmir State As-

sembly, the seat of democracy.

If Pakistan were to change its stance towards support for terrorism as a result of events after September 11 India would welcome it, he added.

The Minister went over the problem of militancy, he defended the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO), and he pointed out that even before September 11, India had been trying to make everyone realise that terrorism would sooner or later pose a problem to the entire world. Even the U.S. was warned that distance would not make it secure against terrorist attacks. But only after

September 11 this had dawned on America. "September 11 made them see what we have been trying to make them see," Mr Advani said.

Even in the changed situation, Mr. Advani did not see the complete end of terrorism in India, especially Jammu and Kashmir. But certainly, without state funding, without its backing, terrorism would lose its fangs and could be easily tackled. That was Mr. Advani's view.

In response to a question, he said even in the north-east, the organisations there were trying to network with the ISI of Pakistan.

'POTO will protect policemen acting in good faith'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 7. The Union Home Minister, Mr L.K. Advani, today indicated that the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance would be taken up during the "second or third week" of the winter session of Parliament. "I will ask the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs to place it then," he said, adding that the consultative committee attached to the Home Ministry would discuss POTO in its meeting in the first week of the session starting November 19.

Mr. Advani confirmed that while speaking at the national executive committee of the Bharatiya Janata Party at Amritsar last week he had said that those who opposed POTO would be "wittingly or unwittingly" helping terrorists and making them happy. He was asked a question by reporters on the Law Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley, having quoted him as saying "wittingly or unwittingly those who oppose POTO were appeasing terrorists," and today Mr. Advani said what he did say amounted to the same thing.

However, at Amritsar, the party president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi, had denied that the Home Minister had said this (which amounted to blackmail of the opposition parties).

Mr. Advani today added — while speaking at the Social Editors' Conference — that POTO would "protect" policemen from being hauled for "technical violations of human rights," but he did not clarify what those "technical violations" were. His view was that just as in times of war armymen were protected and fundamental rights of citizens took a back seat, police needed that protection to fight a proxy war effectively. What was important was whether the actions of the police were mala fide or not. If some "mistakes" were committed while taking action in good faith, he felt that the judiciary should take a lenient view of the matter.

8 NOV 2001

Govt. bid to allay fears on POTO

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 6. In a bid to evolve its strategy to take on the Opposition in the coming winter session of Parliament during a debate on the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) and dispel misgivings, the Government today held a briefing for the partners of the ruling NDA coalition, a few Central Ministers and select BJP MPs.

The briefing and the meeting at the North Block was convened by the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani. The presentation at the meeting, lasting for two

hours, was accompanied by a slide show in which several provisions of POTO and the notions against it were explained by the senior Home Ministry officials.

Emerging out of the meeting, the Union Law Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley, sought to allay the apprehensions voiced by the Opposition parties, saying these were misplaced and based on "factually incorrect" information.

"Statements by political leaders in this regard are being made without reading the law. There are no such provisions in POTO

like disclosure of source by journalists or the onus of proof being on the accused," Mr. Jaitley told reporters.

Mr. Nitish Kumar, Railways Minister and senior Samata Party leader, a key ally of the NDA, said that several misplaced notions were dispelled at the meeting. Several of the provisions were entirely different than the lapsed-TADA and did not sound "very harsh." The Opposition's tirade against the ordinance was based on "non-existent issues" and the Law Commission had played a vi-

tal role in drafting the provisions. The meeting was attended by the BJP president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthy, and the Central Ministers, Mr. Omar Abdullah, Mr. Ravi Shankar Prasad, Mr. Chaman Lal Gupta, Mr. Ved Prakash Goel and Mr. O. Rajagopal. From the allies only Mr. Nitish Kumar and Mr. Omar Abdullah (National Conference) could attend the meeting as other leaders were said to be out of Delhi. From the BJP, Mr. Sunil Shastri, Mr. Vijay Kumar Mathotra, and Mr. Kirti Azad, attended.

More reports on Page 15

THE HINDU

7 NOV 2001

Atal Bihari Vajpayee inspects a guard of honour after his arrival in Moscow. (Reuters)

Vajpayee's courtship begins in northwest

FROM K.P. NAYAR

9-
23/11/01
9/11

St. Petersburg, Nov. 5: With the experience of hindsight of a quarter century, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is seeking to radically transform India's decade-old relations with Russia.

Recognising the post-Soviet era trend of devolving greater power to Russia's vast, resource-rich regions, Vajpayee, on the second-day of his visit here, made an all-round push for greater visibility for India in the northwest region of Russia.

This region, which includes St. Petersburg, six provinces and three republics, has become important with Putin, a native of this city, becoming Russia's President. Fifteen of Putin's Cabinet members are from St. Petersburg.

If India intends to strengthen its economic, cultural and defence relations with Russia, nurtured during the Soviet era, a deeper bond with this country's northwest is vital. A quarter of all of Russia's exports to India come from this region. As much as 12 per cent of India's exports to Russia are also absorbed by this region.

Russia's northwest is also crucial for India as New Delhi rebuilds its defence ties with Mos-

cow. Three frigates ordered by the Indian Navy as part of this process are now under construction in St. Petersburg. Similarly, two submarines for the navy have been refitted here. Sensitive parts for a nuclear power plant being built in Tamil Nadu with Russian collaboration are also manufactured in St. Petersburg.

The last time Vajpayee visited St. Petersburg was a quarter century ago. Russia was then a very different place. Everything was centralised and controlled from Moscow.

But in recognising the change and responding to it by visiting St. Petersburg, Vajpayee is setting in motion a change in India's Russia policy which will have a lasting impact on bilateral relations.

He broke a taboo of 74 years of the Kremlin's Communist rule when he opened an exhibition of Prince Dimitri Soltikov's water colours and lithographs on India at the Russian Museum here. Prince Soltikov, a relative of the Czar, made two visits to India between 1841 and 1847 and the lithographs and water colours are the results of those visits.

Although these works of art are anti-colonial, reflecting an unsympathetic attitude towards

British rulers in India, the communists in Moscow never allowed these to see the light of day because of Soltikov's princely descent.

When Vajpayee opened the exhibition today, Soltikov's works of art were seen by the Russian public for the first time.

On the occasion of his visit, the Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre, which is part of the Indian embassy in Moscow, signed memoranda of understanding with four Russian institutions to promote Indian studies. These institutions, which will have chairs for Indian studies, are from Vladivostok in the east to Moscow, St. Petersburg and Tatarstan.

Vajpayee addressed a meeting of Indologists here and assured them that "there is something in the relations between India and Russia that defies time and tide".

The Prime Minister spoke of a little-known fact that a Russian was the first European to set foot on Indian soil. Six years before Vasco da Gama arrived in 1498, a Russian traveller, Afanasy Nikitin, had travelled to India.

Soon after Vajpayee's arrival in Moscow, six agreements were signed between various Indian and Russian agencies. They included banking and credit deals.

THE TELEGRAPH

6 NOV 2001

Vajpayee veiled warning to Pak

HT Correspondent
Somenath, October 31

IN A veiled warning to Pakistan, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today said none should be under the illusion that India can be divided again. India is known for her tolerance, but she can respond properly with her alert military and dependable scientists.

Giving a befitting reply to President Parvez Musharraf's recent *chudiyen* comment, Vajpayee said one must remember that along with bangles, Indians also wear *kadha*, a symbol of masculinity and bravery.

Without mentioning Musharraf, he said India is ever ready to face any challenge aimed at dividing the country. The accession of Kashmir to India is final and another partition would not be allowed, he added.

He was addressing a public rally on the conclusion of the golden jubilee celebrations of the Somenath temple reconstruction here this afternoon. It was from this temple that the BJP had started its historic 'rathayatra' to Ayodhya that finally catapulted the party from the periphery to the centre-stage of Indian politics. Union Home Minister L K Advani, who had led the 'rathayatra', was also present at this largely BJP function.

Paying tribute to Sardar Patel on his 125th birth anniversary, Vajpayee said it was the Iron

GENERAL THREATENS PAK WITH 'ACTION'

GOC-IN-CHIEF Lt-Gen R K Nanvatty on Wednesday warned that the Army could take "appropriate action" against Pakistan if it persisted with aiding and abetting terrorism in J&K. He saw similarities in the current situation and the one on the eve of the 1965 Indo-Pak war. "The situation now is not entirely dissimilar to what it was in August 1965 when we were forced to undertake a limited conventional war in Haji Peer." He was delivering the keynote address at a seminar on *The Jammu and Kashmir — the Way Ahead* in Jammu.

But Gen Nanvatty said the situation has strategically altered because of the nuclearisation of the subcontinent, but the "space exists for limited military operations". "I have a message for Pakistan Army. We are committed to restraint on the LoC and actual ground position on Siachen glacier," he said. "If, however, Pakistan Army indulges in hostile actions like infiltration, sabotage and raids in clear violation of the Simla Agreement, we reserve the right to take action against the Pakistan military and terrorists as deemed appropriate."

Tracing the roots of the problem of insurgency in Kashmir, the General partly blamed Pakistan and partly the "failure of the nation to address the aspirations of some sections of people in Kashmir".

Saying that two factors could contribute to restoring normalcy to J&K, he urged the need to look beyond the "number of terrorists neutralised". One is to make Pakistan desist from continuing cross-border terrorism and exploiting the situation for its geostrategic ends and second is to fulfil the aspirations of the people of the State.

HTC, Jammu

Man who prevented the nation from being fragmented into hundreds of independent states. The ancient Somenath temple would not have been here today but for Sardar Patel's efforts to reconstruct it from ruins.

In an oblique reference to the Taliban and terrorism, the Prime Minister said idol-destroyers would meet the same fate as the destroyers of the temple.

Setting the tone for the meeting, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi said for India,

terrorism had started in 1026 AD when the temple was destroyed by Muhammad Ghazni. Responding to popular demands, Vajpayee announced that Somenath would be linked with broad-gauge rail track so that more pilgrims can visit it. He also promised Central aid for the development of this part of Saurashtra.

Besides attending a *puja* at the temple, the PM inaugurated a drinking water project and laid the foundation for the Morajee Ghat at the Triveni Sangam.

PM calls all-party meet

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 27. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has called an all-party meeting on Tuesday to discuss the fast-changing situation in the region, especially in the context of the U.S. military campaign in Afghanistan.

The idea is to make one more effort to generate a kind of consensus behind the Government's stance on the Afghan crisis.

Though the Opposition parties have not openly opposed the Vajpayee Government's distinctly pro-U.S. stance, they have not enthusiastically endorsed the Government either.

THE HINDU

28 OCT 2001

Vajpayee rues party-govt communication gap

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 21. — Lack of coordination and contradictions were evident among BJP leaders at the party's national council meeting today. Although the yellow cloth around the neck was a mark of unity for about 1200 delegates, one couldn't have possibly missed a note of discord.

To begin with the golden jubilee celebration of the Bharatiya Jan Sangh started without Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's presence. He was to hoist the party flag at the inaugural ceremony. He arrived late by an hour because of the "communication gap between the party and the government," as the Prime Minister explained.

The party vice-president, Mr Pyarelal Khandelwal, who was conducting the programme, said Mr Vajpayee would hoist the flag and the programme was postponed from 10-45 a.m. to 11 a.m. The party president, Mr Ja-

na Krishnamurthy, did the needful to start the programme on time.

When the Prime Minister's turn came to deliver the valedictory address, he apologised for his absence at the beginning. He said: "Somewhere something is amiss... This is an example of growing distance between the organisation and the government... we have to look at it carefully."

A miffed Vajpayee said he was given the impression that he was needed only for the valedictory address. This statement was significant because everyone in the BJP knows the importance of the flag-hoisting ceremony before the start of council meetings. Today, the programme was more auspicious for the party because it marked the 50th year of its formation.

A senior party leader said an invitation was sent to Mr Vajpayee but it seemed his secretariat didn't deliver the message in its original form. However, party



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, Mr LK Advani and Mr Kushabhau Thakre at the BJP national council meeting in New Delhi on Sunday. — PTI

pointed out from behind that Mr Krishnamurthy is younger, the home minister explained he was talking about those who were associated with the BJS from its inception. Except Mr Krishnamurthy, all of those present on the dais — Mr Kushabhau

place today was not on the dais. I joined the BJS 13 years after its formation... But as party president my job is to run the programme."

He said the party faced a hard time when its founder, Shyama Prasad Mookerjee, died because there was no leader of his stature to step into his shoes. Mr Vajpayee was then merely a "karyakarta."

Mr Vajpayee while referring to this sought to know jokingly if he was not a "karyakarta" now because he was the Prime Minister. Mr Krishnamurthy also spoke about his ties with the RSS.

Mr Advani and Mr Vajpayee didn't speak to each other for about two hours while they were on the podium. The home minister didn't join the Prime Minister for lunch as he had a prior engagement.

■ Editorial: Cell out? page 6
■ PM, Advani soothe BJP nerves, page 8

THE STATESMAN

22 OCT 2001

Ayodhya test for Atal authority

FROM RADHIKA
RAMASESHAN AND
KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, Oct. 18: A day after marching into the makeshift temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya, a militant VHP dared the government to take action against its leaders who had flouted a Supreme Court order.

The VHP threw the challenge hours after Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee admitted to reporters in Chennai that security in the Ramjanmabhoomi-Babri Masjid complex was "slack" and needed to be tightened. Vajpayee also said such "mishaps" should not recur.

Official sources said the Prime Minister spoke to Uttar Pradesh chief minister Rajnath Singh on phone and sought a blow-by-blow

account of what happened. The state government has ordered a probe into the incident.

With Uttar Pradesh elections around the corner, the Ayodhya barge-in is turning into a big political issue. The Samajwadi Party, the BJP's main rival in the state, today demanded the Prime Minister's resignation on "moral grounds" for his "inability to check" the VHP and Bajrang Dal activists from storming the place. Samajwadi chief Mulayam Singh Yadav announced that he would visit Ayodhya on October 23 to address his workers.

The BJP chose not to comment, saying it awaited details. But it was clear that in keeping with a time-tested strategy of the Sangh parivar, the party was allowing the VHP to raise the pitch

on Ayodhya while keeping itself in the background.

Defiant VHP general secretary Praveen Togadia said: "The government has a right to acquire land but no one has the right to acquire our right of worship." Togadia, who was among the leaders to barge into the makeshift temple and offer puja, was brazen when reminded of the Supreme Court's order to maintain status quo ante on the site.

"The status quo ordered by the court was regarding the construction of the Ram temple and not offering worship," he said. Ram Lalla was being treated like a "prisoner of war" with barricades enclosing the site, Togadia added.

Privately, BJP sources agreed that the Ram temple plank may come in "handy" during the Uttar

Pradesh polls provided the Centre avoided a confrontation with the VHP. The sources said Vajpayee ought not to have "jumped the gun" by commenting on the security lapse but should have kept quiet and allowed the home ministry to tackle the government.

The VHP — which, uncharacteristically, had been lying low after the NDA came to power — might have been "emboldened" after its leaders had a long meeting with Vajpayee last week in which he promised to find a solution to the Ayodhya dispute before March 2002, sources said.

Today, however, Togadia was sceptical about Vajpayee's assurance. "We have faith in the Prime Minister but there seems to be no option before us except mass agitation," he said. (See Page 10)

THE TELEGRAPH

19 OCT 2001

Cabinet nod to ordinance against terror

9-10-01
HT Correspondent

New Delhi, October 16

IN A bid to step up the war against terrorism, the Centre will promulgate the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance 2001. The decision was okayed tonight by the Union Cabinet.

The ordinance will define terrorist acts as caused by the use of weapons and explosives leading to death or injuries, damage to property or disruption of essential supplies and services, apart from detailing the essentials, for naming an organisation as a terrorist outfit.

The ordinance, which replaces the controversial Tada that has already lapsed, is generally based on a similar legislation drafted by the Home Ministry with considerable input from the Law Commission. The Cabinet also approved withdrawal of the Criminal Law (Amendment) Ordinance pending in the Rajya Sabha following approval of the new ordinance.

Once approved by President K R Narayanan, the ordinance will also provide for several safeguards such as confirmation of FIR by the DGP and its review by a committee within 10 and 30 days respectively; investigation are conducted by an officer not below the rank of a DSP; immediate intimation of an arrest to a member of the family of the accused; and the presence of a lawyer during the interrogation.

The Cabinet has also approved another ordinance empowering the Centre to suspend passport or travel documents not exceeding four weeks in case it is satisfied that such documents are likely to be impounded or revoked. Currently, there is no provision to prevent a criminal or an anti-national element from leaving the country while action to revoke the passport is initiated.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Buddha frowns, Mamata hails George return

It's shameful, says Sonia

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, Oct. 15. — Reacting sharply to Mr George Fernandes' re-induction into the Cabinet, the West Bengal chief minister, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, wondered how this could be done when the "problem" which led to his resignation still remained unresolved.

Mr Bhattacharya told The Statesman here that this only exposed the absence of morality in politics, adding that some of "us" still believe in morality and values. He pointed out that Mr Fernandes had resigned in the wake of the Tehelka tapes controversy and the Prime Minister had accepted the resignation. But though the probe into the matter is not yet over, Mr Fernandes has been re-inducted. Then why did the Prime Minister accept Mr Fernandes' resignation in the first place, he questioned. Mr Bhattacharya added that perhaps certain compromises had to be made by the Prime Minister because Mr Fernandes happens to be the "firefighter" who held the NDA together. The chief minister, however, refused to comment on Miss Mamata Banerjee being left out of today's Cabinet expansion. Earlier in the day, before the

'I AM HAPPY'

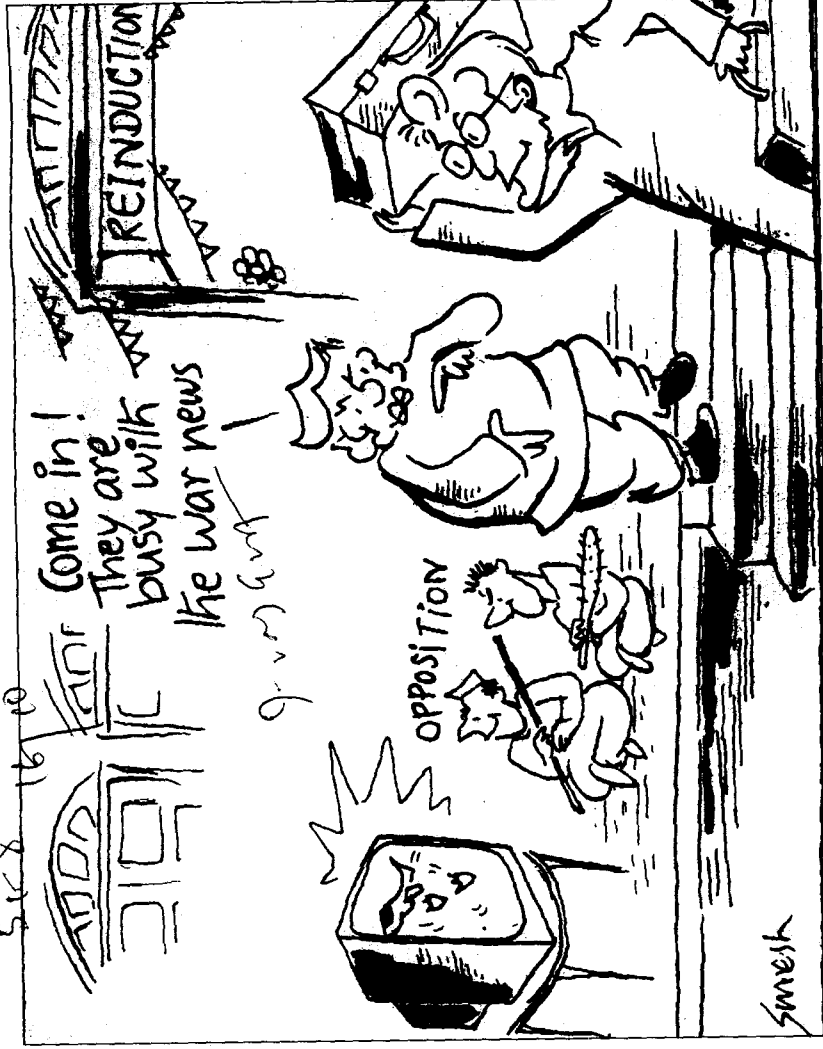
KOLKATA, Oct. 15. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today congratulated Mr George Fernandes on his re-induction into the Union Cabinet. Mr Fernandes has got back the defence portfolio.

Under the present circumstances, it is absolutely necessary that there should be a full time defence minister. "I am very happy that Mr Fernandes has been made the defence minister. He is the NDA convener and his induction will increase NDA's strength. A strong NDA can ensure the country's stability," she said.

Miss Banerjee had resigned from the Cabinet and the NDA demanding Mr Fernandes' resignation in the Tehelka case.

Why was she congratulating Mr Fernandes on his comeback? The Trinamul committee policy making chairman, Mr Pankaj Banerjee, said the Prime Minister had ordered an inquiry into the case. — **SNS**

expansion had been announced, Mr Bhattacharya had said that he hoped Mr Fernandes would not be inducted.



He is a "dangerous man" and his political connections with different groups across the country, particularly in the North-east, is known to even NDA partners, he alleged. He also had expressed his reservations about the Samata leader getting the defence portfolio at such a critical juncture.

Mr Bhattacharya also criticised the "directionless foreign policy" of the NDA government, and said it was moving away

from the Third World in trying to become a strategic partner of the USA. He felt India should stay non-aligned and work in close coordination with the Third World and Asia, particularly with China.

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, Oct. 15. — The Congress president Sonia Gandhi today said it is "shameful" that the security of the country was being entrusted to the same person who had resigned as defence minister on corruption charges.

Mrs Gandhi was speaking at a massive party rally on the banks of the Gomti here this afternoon. At the time of her speech, she did not know whether the swearing in ceremony had already taken place.

"Everybody knows of the corruption both in the state and at the Centre. There has been the Unit Trust of India scam and the Tehelka episode", she said.

She did not name the Prime Minister or Mr George Fernandes in this context.

In her twenty-minute speech, Mrs Gandhi used no names except Mahatma Gandhi and members of the Nehru-Gandhi family. She read her speech from a paper. There was no mention of Pakistan, Afghanistan or the United States though she did talk of terrorism and the campaign to fight it.

The local Congress leaders were elated with the number of people present at the Laxman Mela grounds though there was a perceptible lack of crowd response. Leader of the legislature party, Mr Pramod Tewari compared the rally to the 1942 rallies and said it was the "biggest of all".

The rally marks the end of the Parivartan meetings held across the state (that numbered nearly 1000, according to Congress General Secretary, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad) in the bid to return to power in the state.

The State party chief, Mr Sriprakash Jaiswal, said the people were waiting for change in the state and the twelve years of Opposition rule in the state has been "a zalim rule".

Mrs Gandhi said that the country was facing terrorism for a long time. The country lost Mahatma Gandhi, Mrs Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi to terrorists.

"In Kashmir, we are facing terrorism for the last 12 years," she said, adding that the world was at cross-roads on this count.

George's Return

In an interview to a private news channel on Sunday, external affairs minister Jaswant Singh all but announced the return to the union cabinet of "my friend George Fernandes". Mr Singh, who had been holding the additional charge of the defence ministry since the resignation of Mr Fernandes from the post, proclaimed that the Samata leader was "the right person to take over" in the present circumstances. Even before that out-of-turn public endorsement, the media had been full of 'inspired' reports which underscored the need for the Samata leader's urgent rehabilitation to the ministerial ranks. So the actual event on Monday was hardly a cause for surprise. But for all that, it remains as difficult to be convinced about its purported justification as it is to condone the cynicism which underlies it. Recall the circumstances surrounding Mr Fernandes' exit from the cabinet in the wake of the Tehelka revelations, seven months ago. Apart from casting aspersions on the integrity of defence deals, the Tehelka tapes had pointed to the alleged complicity of senior Samata leaders in promising middlemen access to the minister. At the time, it was publicly put out by both the NDA coalition as well as Mr Fernandes that his return to the cabinet was contingent on being exonerated by the Venkataswami commission, constituted to probe the Tehelka allegations. It is not just that Mr Fernandes has yet to receive a clean chit from the commission. Only last week, the commission upheld the authenticity of the Tehelka tapes, rejecting suggestions to the contrary by the Samata party and the government.

So what is the government's case for the overhasty return of the former defence minister? Mr Singh's pointed reference to the "present circumstances" is meant to be one aspect of it. Given the extensive and delicate nature of the external affairs minister's job post-September 11, Mr Singh cannot, surely, be expected to handle the additional charge of defence. But does that make the case for Mr Fernandes' return? Clearly not. In fact, it goes against the most basic norms of propriety and accountability in the public life of a democracy. If there was a case for Mr Fernandes' resignation from the cabinet seven months ago, that case remains as pressing. If the prime minister still deems Mr Fernandes indispensable, it can, at best, be construed as an admission on his part that his government is seriously lacking in ministerial talent. There are, however, reasons to believe that Mr Fernandes' re-admission is premised not so much on the merits of the case as on extraneous considerations. Ever since his resignation, Mr Fernandes has made no secret of the fact that he feels hard done by the earlier demand for his resignation. He reluctantly reconciled himself to it on the condition that he would be allowed to make a comeback once his name was cleared in the inquiry. It was in deference to this wish, that the prime minister had not thus far looked for a permanent replacement for Mr Fernandes. Admittedly, Mr Vajpayee trusts Mr Fernandes as a trusted ally in a faction-ridden coalition, but he knows too that he cannot risk antagonising a colleague who has the potential of making a lot of avoidable political mischief. It is to this danger, rather than any tribute to Mr Fernandes' talents as defence minister, that we owe his premature return.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

2001 2002

Cabinet expansion on Monday, Pant may get defence

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, October 12

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee will expand the Cabinet on Monday with the possible induction of a new Defence Minister in place of Jaswant Singh, who is likely to retain his other charge as Minister of External Affairs.

Planning Commission Deputy Chairman K C Pant, who was Defence Minister under Rajiv Gandhi in the eighties, is strongly tipped for the slot to be vacated by Singh, who was given dual charges of Defence and External Affairs after George Fernandes's resignation in the wake of the tehelka disclosure. The Samata leader, as also Pant, reportedly met the PM today. But to a specific question whether Fernandes could be reinducted in the Cabinet, Vajpayee said: "I cannot say anything on this."

The chances of Fernandes's comeback appeared slim as the Venkataswami Commission probing the tehelka scoop today held that the website's tapes were genuine, not doctored. The probe panel's ruling couldn't have been more ill-timed for Fernandes.

NDA circles were agog with speculation about the fate of the two other Cabinet Ministers — Sharad Yadav (Labour) and Shahnawaz Hussain (Civil Aviation). There is a strong possibility of these leaders being shifted to other ministries.

Elevated to Cabinet rank in the September 1 reshuffle, Shahnawaz's tenure, if brought to an end, would perhaps be the shortest in the high profile ministry. He has been under flak for his handling of the recent hijack hoax. Yadav does not see eye to eye with the Government on the proposed labour reforms.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

13 OCT 2001

PM seeks Sonia's cooperation

By Harish Khare 10/10

NEW DELHI, OCT. 9. In an unusual development, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Leader of the Opposition and Congress President, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, had a meeting late this evening. It could not be confirmed who took the initiative, but the interaction is being described as an attempt by Mr. Vajpayee to evolve a consensus on India's response to the fast-changing geostrategic environment.

The meeting came about in the context of the Congress decision to ask its Chief Ministers to stay away from the proposed 'Davos'-type dialogue between the Centre and the States. The Karnataka Chief Minister was to play host at the proposed Nandi Hills conclave.

The Prime Minister is believed to have asked Ms. Gandhi why the 'Davos dialogue' could not take place, and Ms. Gandhi is said to have replied that since the Congress was a political party there were limits to which it could be seen as a cooperative partner of the Government. The two leaders agreed to meet more often.

'Tackling J&K terrorism is our job'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 9. The primary responsibility of fighting terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir is India's. This, despite recent events such as the suicide bomb attack in front of the State Assembly which have led to a greater understanding of India's concern by other countries, the Congress president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, said here today.

She said there was need to try and win over the hearts of the people of the State by exploring "every possible avenue of reconciliation in J&K." She hoped that the global coalition against terrorism "will be able to work for a common goal to fight terrorism in all its forms and wherever it exists."

Mrs. Gandhi's observations came in her opening remarks at a discussion organised by the Rajiv Gandhi Foundation on 'International Cooperation against Terrorism, Implications and Choices for India.'

Details on page 15

THE HINDU

10 OCT 2001

The hijack that never was

Swati Chaturvedi
New Delhi, October 4

FALSE ALERT: A sheepish Government politely said this morning after putting the 52 passengers and crew members, their families, the security establishment and an entire nation through five sleepless hours of agony and fear.

The midnight hijack drama (at last a real one) in the end turned out to be a conspiracy of circumstances that translated into a comedy of errors. And all this seems to have been triggered by Bureau of Civil Aviation Security (BCAS) Commissioner Veranna Aivalli.

This is how it happened. The

Alliance Airlines office here got an anonymous call saying that the flight would be hijacked. As per procedure, it got in touch with Aivalli and other senior officials. Aivalli told the ATCs in Ahmedabad and Delhi that the flight *would* be hijacked. The Ahmedabad ATC sent a message, citing Aivalli, to Capt. Ashwini Behl: "This plane *will* be hijacked. *Samajh gaye na?*"

Behl in turn hit the 'squawk button', a standard procedure to send out a distress message. The message went to ATCs all over the country. Intriguingly, before pressing the alarm, the captain did not communicate with the cabin crew to ascertain what was

happening on the other side of the cockpit door. To make matters worse, an aircraft nearby enquired about the weather conditions in Lahore. The innocent query made the Delhi ATC conclude that the hijackers were planning to commandeer the plane to Lahore.

A large part of the goof-up is attributed to another confusion on board, when a passenger rose to use the front toilet. As it had been locked up at the pilot's instruction, he was asked to use the facility in the rear of the cabin area. At this, the passenger inexplicably banged the cockpit door. The pilot thought that it was *the knock*.

Aivalli is not saying why he sent the message to Ahmedabad ATC, but his message almost led to the evacuation of 7, Race Course Road and Rashtrapati Bhawan.

Between the time the first hijack message was flashed and the plane landed at Delhi airport, the Crisis Management Group (CMG) had been alerted. Fearing a September 11-style attack on key spots, the CMG drew up plans for an evacuation.

But the plans were put on hold when Shiv Sena MP Chandrakant Khare, who was on the 'hijacked' flight called the PMO from his cellphone to say that there was no hijack though the passengers were not being

allowed to disembark. The CMG was fast off the blocks, perhaps a bit too fast. A senior CMG member told the PMO that the hijacking had indeed taken place. The PMO got in touch with the Prime Minister, who stayed awake till 4 am. By then it was pretty clear that the hijack was a false alarm.

Vajpayee asked L K Advani to take charge. So when the group met in the headquarters of the Civil Aviation Ministry, Advani chaired it. By the time the passengers' ordeal was almost over, the CMG's embarrassment had just begun. Apart from alerting the PMO, a senior member of the CMG had categorically told Advani at 1.30 am that the hijacking

had indeed happened. It was not just the CMG, officials of the BCAS also insisted that the hijack had happened. And Civil Aviation Minister Shah Nawaz Hussain told the Press that flight CD 7444 had been hijacked.

An attempt was made to pass off the whole effort as a "mock exercise" to test security but this clearly won't wash. The PM has expressed displeasure at the way the episode has been handled. He is understood to have intervened to change the constitution of the committee appointed by Hussain. It will now be headed by Special Secretary, Home, S Mahapatra.

More reports on page 7

AIR SCARE: HOW IT HAPPENED

11.15 pm: Alliance Air Flight CD 7444 takes off from Mumbai	2.15 am: Civil Aviation secretary A H Jung says there are two hijackers on board, but cockpit is sterile and hijackers are in the passenger area
11.30 pm: Ahmedabad ATC receives an alert that flight will be hijacked. ATC tells pilot to lock cockpit as hijackers are on board	2.20 am: Home Minister L K Advani presides over CMG meeting
12.52 am: Aircraft lands at Delhi and is directed by ATC to isolation bay. NSG commandos surround the aircraft	2.30 to 4 am: TV networks call passengers on mobiles. Passengers say they are not aware of hijack but have been told the aircraft has developed a snag
1.21 am: Civil Aviation Minister Shah Nawaz Hussain confirms hijack	4.00 am: Advani speaks to pilot; NSG storms cockpit but find no hijackers
1.50 am: Crisis Management Group (CMG) comprising senior Government and airline officials reach HQ of Civil Aviation Ministry	4.10 am: Hussain says 'hijack' was a false alarm. Denies it was a drill. Passengers leave aircraft

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