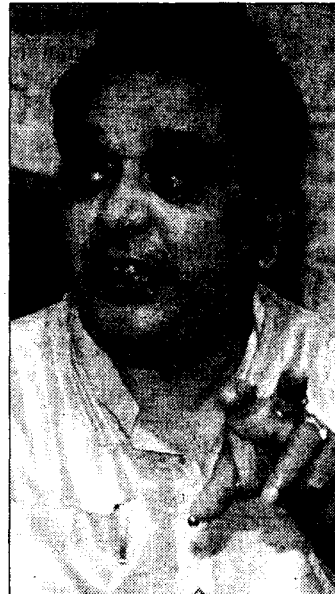


State BJP pulls Delhi levers to keep out Trinamool

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, October 13



MAMATA BANERJEE & TAPAN SIKDAR: The battle is not over yet

TALKS OF Cabinet expansion have once again sent jitters into the State BJP camp, which is still vehemently against the induction of Mamata Banerjee.

Indications from Delhi that Trinamool chief might be re-inducted into the Cabinet during future expansions have understandably made the State unit extremely unhappy.

And with the ruling group remaining under the control of the Union Minister Tapan Sikdar, the chief Mamata-baiter in the party, they have begun quiet exercises to stonewall Tri-

namool's re-entry into the Cabinet.

Apart from growing personal animosities between Mamata and Tapan Sikdar, here, the BJP attempts to resist Trinamool's comeback to the Cabinet are also guided by strict political considerations.

In the last Assembly election, the BJP, which fought the poll alone, fared disastrously, with almost all its candidates forfeiting deposits.

At the same time, the BJP vote percentage went down to a measly five per cent, turning the

party once more into a peripheral force in the State.

"If Trinamool is allowed a berth once more in the Cabinet and Mamata becomes Minister again, the political consequences for us would be ruinous. Even our meagre vote bank would be under threat and we would be completely sidelined in State politics. How can we allow that?" argues a senior party leader.

The worry is accentuated by the way the Ministers from West Bengal remain shelved in relatively unimportant Ministries.

9.11.02
By foisting high-profile Pramod Mahajan, known for his proximity with the Prime Minister, on Tapan Sikdar, the party's chief crowd-puller in the State has been virtually robbed of his importance in the Ministry.

This time the State BJP is also more cautious and circumspect in its efforts to thwart Trinamool's re-entry into the Cabinet simply because of the lessons learnt when it sought to prevent Trinamool's comeback to the NDA. Even though the State BJP went to a great extent, lobbying hard with the Prime Minister, its Central leadership and NDA partners, its objections were overruled and the Trinamool was allowed back to the NDA fold.

It was a huge loss of face for Tapan Sikdar and the State BJP, since it also underscored the central leadership's lack of faith on the State unit. With the end of the poll alliance between the Trinamool and the BJP here, hostility between the two parties has increased, with each leader taking pot shots at each other at regular intervals.

Party spokesman Muzaffar Khan, however, refused comments on the issue. "The composition of the Cabinet is the prerogative of the Prime Minister and also the concern of other NDA partners and our central leadership. We are more busy charting our own growth here and nothing else", said Khan.

THE HINDU

14 OCT 2002

INTERVIEW TRINAMOOL LEADER MAMATA BANERJEE, BACK IN THE NDA WHERE IT ALL BEGAN

'If it weren't for Tehelka, we wouldn't have left NDA'



Mamata Banerjee has truly come full circle in just six months. She's back in the NDA after walking out of the coalition just before the West Bengal Assembly elections. She's openly aligned herself with George Fernandes after making him the excuse for snapping ties with the NDA in the wake of the Tehelka controversy. The only thing she's consistent about is her anti-CPM stance. ARATI R. JERATH talked to Mamata about her flip-flop politics and where she's headed after failing to dislodge the CPM in Bengal despite a high-profile battle.

Six months ago, you left the NDA and now you're back. It doesn't say much for your political consistency.

■ WE left on a particular issue, Tehelka. We never said we are against the NDA. We didn't write a letter to the Speaker or the President when we left. We had our state and political compulsions at that time. Elections were coming up in West Bengal. The Tehelka controversy was there. But the NDA are our natural allies. You can't show me a single case where we did not support the Atal Behari Vajpayee Government after leaving.

You said you left because of Tehelka,

but the issue is still very much alive. The Venkateswami Commission has not cleared George Fernandes yet. So how has the situation changed since you walked out of the NDA?

■ WE never said George should resign. He said he wanted to resign. We said on record we were leaving the NDA because we wanted to strengthen the Prime Minister's hands for an impartial inquiry. We were victims of circumstances. The Tehelka issue was planted on the NDA just before the assembly elections.

You mean you would not have left the NDA if the Tehelka controversy had not come up?

■ No.

Many of your NDA allies including the BJP didn't want you back. Some of them said you should apologise before you are allowed to rejoin the alliance.

■ WHY should I apologise? What did I do wrong? Some individuals may have their opinions about me. But I don't care for anyone. I have great regard for the Prime Minister and George. The Prime Minister rang me up and told me that we should work together. That's enough for me.

Your relationship with George Fernandes has obviously improved in you closer to him?

the time that you have been out of the NDA. What has happened to draw you closer to him?

■ I HAVE had a good relationship with George for a long time, not just from today. He's the NDA convenor. Naturally we will have good relations with him.

What about the TDP? At one point you seemed to have a special relationship with Chandrababu Naidu.

■ YES, our relationship with the TDP is very good. We have the same mind. We can't work with the CPM. The TDP can't work with the Congress. If the Congress and CPM are together then we can jointly fight the combination. Today, no single party can come to power. Alliance is a must and we must find our natural allies depending on our political compulsion. Our political compulsion is to fight the CPM. We are with anyone who will join us in this fight.

Don't you think your anti-CPM stand is too rigid? It doesn't leave you with much flexibility.

■ DO you know their record of atrocities? The Amnesty International report on human rights violations mentions the atrocities in West Bengal. In political violence, the CPM is number one. One day they will get what is due to them.

What do you do now? You are not in power in West Bengal. You are not a minister at the Centre.

■ SO what? When the Trinamool Congress started, we were zero. Today, we have nine Lok Sabha MPs, one Raya Sabha MP and 60 MLAs. We control the Kolkata Corporation. Our fight against the CPM will continue.

But what will you do without the Railway Ministry? How are you going to help West Bengal?

■ IT is not true that I only helped West Bengal. I didn't exclude any state from my plans in the Railway Ministry. I didn't decrease the budget for any state. If I did anything for West Bengal, I did it by mobilising funds from other sources. Like I saved Rs 800 crore through austerity measures. That's why I didn't have to raise passenger fare.

What about Ajit Panja? Where does he stand? After all the Prime Minister promised him a cabinet berth at a public rally during the election campaign.

■ PANJA has been suspended from the party. How can a suspended member join the Cabinet? He misled

I have an emotional relationship with the Gandhi family. But for a political relationship, we have to talk politically. The question is whether the Congress wants to fight the CPM. We have seen them working jointly in Parliament. How can we join hands with the Congress as long as they are with the CPM?

■ YES, I have an emotional relationship with the Gandhi family. I maintain that relationship. But for a political relationship, we have to talk politically. The question is whether the Congress wants to fight the CPM. We have seen them working jointly in Parliament. How can we join hands with the Congress as long as they are with the CPM?

But you were quite close to Sonia Gandhi at one point, weren't you?

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Do you see a time when you will align with the Congress again? After all, it is a bigger force in Bengal than the BJP?

■ WE are not the type. We kept 39 seats for the BJP in the assembly elections. But they didn't come to us for discussions. People advised me not to go alone. The Left Front was an alliance of six parties. We could not have fought them by ourselves. So we had a seat adjustment with the Congress. And we have seen what the state leadership is capable of. They deputed dissident candidates everywhere.

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■ PANJA has been suspended from the party. How can a suspended member join the Cabinet? He misled

Thackeray gives 'go-alone' call

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MUMBAI, Aug. 14. — Mr Bal Thackeray has again urged his partymen to prepare themselves to fight the coming polls on their own.

He alleged that in the last Assembly elections, the BJP had joined hands with the NCP to defeat some Shiv Sena nominees. The reason, he said, was that the Sena and BJP had agreed before the polls that if the alliance came to power, the chief minister would be from the party that had more MLAs.

Mr Thackeray, however, made it clear that he would not take the lead in breaking the alliance. The Sena has agreed to remain in the NDA in national interest, he said, but warned BJP leaders against "misconstruing" his reconciliatory moves as weaknesses.

Mr Thackeray was speaking at rally organised to mark the 41st anniversary of the Sena's weekly mouthpiece, Maarmik, last night.

The Sena supremo defended Mr Sanjay Nirupam's statement in the Rajya Sabha, hinting at the PMO's involvement in the UTI scam. The MP had spoken in the interest of two million US-64 unit holders and the criticism was legitimate, Mr Thackeray said.

He said he too had objected to the PMO's functioning, making particular references to Mr Brajesh Mishra, Mr NK Singh (now in the planning commission) and Mr Ranjan Bhattacharya (the Prime Minister's son-in-law).

He said Mr Nirupam had apologised to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee voluntarily, not under the BJP's pressure. He expressed his fondness for Mr Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani.

He said the proposal to form a government in Maharashtra with the NCP was first put to him by the BJP's former state unit president, Mr Suryabhan Wahadane. He had "instantly dismissed" the proposal.

The Sena, Mr Thackeray said, could never join hands with Mr Sharad Pawar, whom he had often described as an "onion sack" in his *Saamna* editorials.

He claimed Mr Pramod Mahajan and Mr Gopinath Munde had put before him another proposal: forming a government under the Peasants and Workers Party leader, Mr GA Deshmukh. That too was "rejected". He said the Sena would not accept a chief minister from a party (PWP) that has only five MLAs.

THE STATESMAN

15 AUG 2001

Nirupam apology comes with Thackeray thunder

OUR BUREAU

Aug. 7: Sanjay Nirupam's apology — not a retraction — to the Prime Minister was swept away in a storm unleashed hours later by Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray, who told the BJP it was free to snap ties if it wanted to.

"They (BJP) must know their limits. I know my limits. I am an independent person who takes his own decisions," he said in Mumbai today.

"They had come to me, I had not gone to them. If they want to break it off, they can do it. If they issue more threats to us, we will not keep quiet," he added in his

harshest-yet attack on his ally.

Nirupam's terse letter — faxed from Mumbai last night — began by referring to the allegation he had levelled at the PMO on the UTI scam in the Rajya Sabha last week. "My statement was not intended to hurt your feelings. While making my statement, I mentioned the telephone number of a former official in your office at which the previous UTI chairman had contacted him. My limited question was whether this conversation had anything to do with the Cyber-space scam and if it merited an inquiry. You yourself said you were open to a probe for which I

claimed neither the NDA nor the BJP would try to placate the Sena again, but conceded that "the alliance is not likely to break". Sources said that with the party split on snapping ties, the

am grateful. But if your feelings were hurt because of my question, then I offer an unconditional apology."

The apology came with a hand-written rider at the bottom that the letter was written on Thackeray's directive and did not withdraw the allegation.

A senior BJP leader claimed neither the NDA nor the BJP would try to placate the Sena again, but conceded that "the alliance is not likely to break". Sources said that with the party split on snapping ties, the



Thackeray (Reuters)

"ongoing game of brinkmanship would continue until one side gets worn out and stops making noises".

Even Thackeray, despite his sabre-rattling, does not expect a breakthrough. "It would lead to anarchy if this government collapsed," he said.

A Thackeray confidant said the Sena chief snapped after senior BJP leaders pressured him over Nirupam's remarks. The Sena, he said, was not going to take "more threats from the BJP" lying down. With

the warning came the threat that he might ask Sena MPs to break their silence, which he himself has imposed, in Parliament.

The BJP matched Thackeray's outburst, word for word. "Anyone is free to walk out any time. If the Sena is not happy with the government's policies, they can consider leaving the government but the government will not change its policies because of the Sena," BJP sources said.

The sources also made it clear that when the NDA formulates a code of conduct, the Sena will be expected to abide by it. "The issue is not Nirupam's apology.

The main issue is: will the Sena continue to behave as if it is in the Opposition?"

While a section of the BJP, particularly its Maharashtra leaders, feels the Sena should be dumped before the civic polls early next year, the Sangh is believed to favour continuing ties because of the Uttar Pradesh and Punjab elections.

"The Sangh fears that if the ties are broken, the Sena would raise its Hindutva pitch even more and trash the BJP for going back on the Ram temple and Article 370 and failing to tackle terrorism in Kashmir," sources said.

'The PMO should not talk to the head of a financial institution'

Interview of the Week

NEERJA CHOWDHURY meets
SANJAY NIRUPAM

SHIV SENA MP, Sanjay Nirupam, 36, almost brought the NDA government down last week, by alleging in Parliament that the PMO had exercised undue influence on former UTI chairman, P.S. Subramanyam. His remarks were what provoked Prime Minister Vajpayee's offer to resign. This is his second term in the Rajya Sabha. First elected in 1996 for a four-year term, the former editor of the Shiv Sena mouthpiece, 'Samna', was reelected in April 2000. He is considered close to Thackeray.

■ Did Balasaheb Thackeray clear what you said on the UTI in Parliament?

Last week when it was decided that there would be a debate on the UTI, I told our party leader in the Rajya Sabha that I would like to speak. After that I phoned Balasaheb. I told him it was a big scam, that I was inquiring into it and that there may be startling revelations. He told me, "Whatever you speak, do so with evidence. *Phattu baat mat bolna.*" It was an evolving situation. The following week I got the information about the PMO connection.

■ Did you speak to Thackeray specifically about the PMO connection?

Balasaheb had himself said in the past that there were some corrupt elements in the PMO. I did not specifically get back to Balasaheb on the PMO angle and I was only substantiating what my boss had alleged.

■ Were you taken aback by the reaction to what you said?

I did not realise that there would be such a reaction from the PM and the PMO. I thought they would ignore it just as they have been ignoring so many things. The day I spoke, I called Saheb in the evening. He was with someone. I left a message that I had spoken on the UTI and that what I had said was being reported on TV and he could see it. The next morning I spoke to Uddhavji. His wife came on the phone first. Bhabhi was very happy with what I had said. Later Uddhavji called me and told me that what I had done was correct.



and I am going by that assumption, this too can be established by an inquiry. That is all I was asking for.

■ The PM has agreed to have an inquiry? Yes, and I am thankful to him.

■ Referring to the phone calls made during the crucial four days, Arun Jaitley said that these were mere 30-second calls.

When you call at that level, you don't exchange pleasantries. You only give clipped directions. If the finance minister and finance secretary talk to the UTI chairman, it is understandable. The PMO should not talk to the head of a financial or a banking institution. They should go through the finance secretary or the banking secretary.

■ Do you think this can jeopardise Shiv Sena-BJP ties?

It depends on the BJP. They know Balasaheb's temperament and the risk involved in pushing him.

■ Balasaheb said that the reason for the Shiv Sena boycott of the NDA meet was the role played by a BJP minister in preventing the fall of the Maharashtra government?

I also heard Balasaheb say that on TV. It is his statement. Whatever he says is correct.

■ It is also being said that the Shiv Sena's real grouse is that it has not been given certain plum ministries?

Balasaheb has never demanded a particular ministry. He is a *sadhu vyakti*. If he had wanted, he could have become the Maharashtra chief minister and a contender for prime ministership.

■ The NDA has set up a committee to formulate a code of conduct.

It remains to be seen what they propose. But a code of conduct should apply to the BJP and to other constituents of the NDA just as much as to the Shiv Sena. Nobody said anything about a code of conduct when Gopinath Munde spoke against Balasaheb, or when the NDA convenor George Fernandes publicly criticised the government's decision to extend the Naga ceasefire.

■ Is Balasaheb Thackeray angry with you?

Ask Balasaheb that question. I don't know. I won't be unhappy even if he is. We are the creatures of Balasaheb. If he tells us to sit, we will sit. If he tells us to stand, we stand.

■ Were you aware about this when you had spoken to him the previous day?

I got to know of it in the morning of the NDA meet, from someone in Mumbai. I had spoken to Balasaheb the previous night and he had told me there was no need to be tense about the situation. "Continue to do what you are doing. The crisis is getting resolved. Don't aggravate it." I had called him up because a colleague told me that Vajpayee was very angry with you, he had said that while the Shiv Sena was a good party, Nirupam was a *galat admi*.

■ Was Balasaheb's decision to boycott the NDA meet in reaction to George Fernandes' call demanding that you apologise?

I don't know anything about what was discussed between them. All I know is that everyone abused the Shiv Sena at the NDA meet but nobody spelt out the crime. I had committed. I had taken up the cause of the small investor, the widows, the pensioners, whose biggest concern was savings. The basic issue of the investor has gone into the background. It is that small investor who forms the backbone of the Shiv Sena.

All I had said was that one person in the PMO had talked to the UTI chief during the days that the decision to invest in the Cyberspace Infosys was revived. The UTI chairman says that there was pressure on him from the top. Either he is lying, in which case there should be an inquiry. Assuming that there was no pressure from the PMO,

Later in the morning, while sitting in Parliament, a colleague said to me, "Do you know what has happened? The PM offered to resign because of you." The political activity picked up after that. At lunch time, I talked to Balasaheb again. He told me to say that I had made no allegation against the PM and, secondly, there was no need for the PM to resign. He told me this was not the time to weaken the government in Delhi and that uncertainty at the Centre was not in national interest.

He told me the PM was very disturbed. I told him that if that was the case, then I was ready to apologise and would do it unhesitatingly if he asked me to. Balasaheb told me I had committed no crime. But he asked me to make a statement in the Rajya Sabha that I did not mean to offend the PM. But I couldn't make the statement because the House got adjourned. I informed Balasaheb that I would make the statement the next day. He agreed. Meanwhile, he issued a statement that was published in *Samna*, in which he had urged the PM not to resign.

■ He had also stated that he had asked you to express regret?

The words he had used were, *Dilgeer vyakti karha*. That means regret. Regret is different from saying sorry.

■ Why did Thackeray decide to boycott the meeting of the NDA?

I have no information on this.

Sena to issue showcause notice to Nirupam

MP isolated within party, accused of ignoring Balasaheb's instructions

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 5: The Shiv Sena Parliamentary Party is planning to issue a showcause notice to its controversial member, Mr Sanjay Nirupam, for "violating" the directive of Shiv Sena chief Bal Thackeray.

The party has clearly distanced itself from his recent allegations.

A highly placed source told *The Asian Age* on Sunday that the Shiv Sena Parliamentary Party would ask Mr Nirupam to explain and justify his public diatribe against Prime Minister

Atal Behari Vajpayee ignoring Mr Thackeray's instructions.

"We are observing a *maun vrat* (vow of silence) inside Parliament and have decided not to talk to the media either. Barring Manohar Joshi and Suresh Prabhu (Union ministers), Anant Geete and Satish Pradhan (leaders in Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha respectively), nobody is allowed to express his or her views for some time," the source said, adding that instructions to this effect had been issued to everybody, including Mr Nirupam.

Mr Thackeray had himself instructed the parliamentary

party a few days ago in this regard, but Mr Nirupam conveniently ignored it.

Mr Nirupam has no backing within the Shiv Sena Parliamentary Party and has been completely isolated.

However, he has started projecting himself as Lord Hanuman for the Sena chief.

On why none of the fellow Shiv Sena MPs supported him in his "crusade," Mr Nirupam was quoted as saying: "It is their problem. It is human nature to be jealous of your colleagues. Fortunately or unfortunately, I am in the limelight and people resent it. As long as I have Bal-

asaheb's support, I do not care.

On whether Mr Thackeray was angry with him, Mr Nirupam was quoted as saying: "Ask Balasaheb that question. I don't know. I won't be unhappy even if he is. We are all creatures of Balasaheb. If he tells us to sit, we will sit. If he tells us to stand, we stand."

Mr Sanjay Nirupam, who is believed to be aspiring for a Cabinet berth, has even stopped signing the Sena's daily attendance form kept at the parliamentary party office. This was strongly objected to by senior MPs.

Moreover, he is interfering

with organisational work in Jammu and Kashmir and even Uttar Pradesh, sources said.

According to a Union minister from the Shiv Sena, "The Shiv Sena cannot afford to behave irresponsibly. Some people are in the limelight, getting publicity mainly because we are a constituent of the ruling National Democratic Alliance."

Sena sources said the organisation is competent enough to fight the Bharatiya Janata Party, or any other party, at the state or national level on the basis of strong ideological convictions and not personal agenda.

THE ASIAN AGE

6 AUG 2001

Sena rules out apology to government by Nirupam

By Ambarish Mishra
Times News Network

MUMBAI: The Shiv Sena's last-minute patch-up with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), brokered by former defence minister George Fernandes after his talks with Sena chief Bal Thackeray in Mumbai on Wednesday night, may not rekindle the romance between the saffron partners, according to Sena watchers.

Although agreeing to remain in the National Democratic Alliance, Mr Thackeray has firmly rejected the BJP's suggestion, reportedly conveyed to him by Mr Fernandes, that Sena MP Sanjay Nirupam should tender an apology to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

The BJP is of the view that it was Mr Nirupam's speech in the Rajya Sabha on the UTI bungle which prompted a "pained" Mr Vajpayee

to consider the option of stepping down from office.

Senior BJP leaders, both at the Centre as well as in Maharashtra, have been baying for Mr Nirupam's blood. They want the

maverick Sena MP to observe restraint while expressing his views on the functioning of the BJP-led NDA government. By any reckoning, the BJP's move to finalise a code of conduct for MPs belonging to the constituent partners of the NDA has been provoked by Mr Nirupam's "blistering and uncalled for" attack on the PMO, according to a prominent

BJP leader from Maharashtra.

"The Sena should learn how to behave as an alliance partner. Moderation is the essence of coalition politics," the BJP leader said.

However, the Sena leadership is said to be in no mood to keep Mr Nirupam on a tight leash. By stating that there was nothing wrong in closing in on errant government officials, *Saamna*, the Sena mouthpiece, has indirectly defended Mr Nirupam's attack on a former key official in the PMO.

The newspaper, in its editorial published on Thursday, argued that by exposing the PMO, the party

had actually done a service to Mr Vajpayee. A government official's acts of omission and commission could bring a leader to disrepute. *Saamna* has cited the instance of former energy minister Kalpanath Rai who had to pay the price for the irregularities committed by his personal aides and officials.

Moreover, by asking his MPs to keep mum in the two Houses of parliament, Mr Thackeray has ridiculed the BJP's idea of a code of conduct for NDA allies.

Pointing out that the Sena's support to the BJP was blind but not "unspoken", *Saamna* notes with mock-despair, that in view of prevailing conditions, the party had no other option but to behave like the fabled monkeys of Mahatma Gandhi. "We will neither see nor speak. We will only listen," the leader commented wryly.

SAYING NO TO SORRY



Bal Thackeray



A.B. Vajpayee

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 3 AUG 2001

Decision had become inevitable: Pranab

Sr 1 3072

Cong snaps ties with Trinamul

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, July 29. - The state Congress unit today announced its break-up with the Trinamul Congress.

Making the announcement at a Press conference, state Congress president Mr Pranab Mukherjee said the decision became inevitable after 23 July when the Trinamul MPs continued to sit in the Parliament with other NDA members.

"Though Miss Mamata Banerjee had already declared that the Congress was a burden to her, we continued with the alliance as we were waiting to see whether Trinamul members would sit with other NDA partners," Mr Mukherjee said. "We had a clear stand - if Trinamul sits with NDA partners, our alliance will automatically break," he said.

When asked about the floor-sharing arrangements in the state Assembly, Mr Mukherjee said since both the parties are in the Opposition, they would come together on specific issues in the Assembly.

If the Trinamul joins the NDA, then the communal forces in the state will gain in strength, he said.

Underscoring his point, he added that the BJP gained foothold in West Bengal with Trinamul's help.

The Congress forged ties with the Trinamul after Miss Mamata Banerjee and Mr Ajit Panja resigned from the Cabinet after the Tehelka expose.

The alliance with Congress

had not been advantageous to the Trinamul, which won only 56 out of 266 seats it had contested in the Assembly elections. To the Congress, however, it had been profitable with the party securing 30 seats.

"The Congress's decision didn't come as a surprise to us, specially when we had adopted a go-it-alone policy," Mr Pan-kaj Banerjee, Leader of the Opposition, said. "In the last election, the Congress had fielded independent candidates against us in some seats."

"But we stuck to the alliance

■ Left parties not surprised: page 4

as we had resolved to fight the CPI-M unitedly. But if the Congress is unwilling to participate in this, it can go," he added. The alliance with Congress had been one of the reasons behind the rift between Miss Banerjee and Mr Ajit Panja.

"It was an unholy alliance which had been cobbled together by Mr Pranab Mukherjee by hoodwinking Miss Banerjee," Mr Panja said, reacting to the break-up. "I repeatedly told her, knowing Mr Mukherjee as I do, that he'll backstab her," he said. "I pointed out to her that his political career is a history of treachery. But she not only refused to listen to me, but closed the door on me."

"Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, owing to his old loyalty to Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, played the main role in this conspiracy", Mr Panja said. "The Congress's withdrawal

from the alliance is the result of a secret talk between Mrs Sonia Gandhi and Miss Banerjee to clear the latter's path for her return to the NDA." Miss Banerjee's return will lull the NDA into a false sense of security, he felt. She would not hesitate to withdraw support to the NDA in case of a no-confidence motion and would support Congress, ensuring the government's fall, Mr Panja predicted.

"We knew it was a marriage of convenience from the beginning and it could not have lasted," Mr Muzaffar Khan, state BJP general secretary, said, commenting on the break-up of the alliance. The alliance harmed Trinamul and helped Congress, he added.

In response to the Congress announcement, (adds SNS from New Delhi), Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay said: "Since the Assembly elections, the alliance didn't percolate through to the workers, with many Congress candidates, who contested as independents being accepted back into the Congress party after the elections. Therefore, the alliance never clicked," he said. "And it's now non-existent."

Mrs Gandhi recently met and asked Mr Bandopadhyay what the status of their party's alliance was, upon which Mr Bandopadhyay told her that the Trinamul and the state Congress "are not in a position to work together because of the Congress's non-cooperative attitude."

Shiv Sena says PMO influenced UTI move to invest in Cyberspace

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 30 JULY

THE VAJPAYEE government found itself in an embarrassing position on Monday when its oldest ally, the Shiv Sena, blamed the Prime Minister's office (PMO) for influencing the Unit Trust of India's decision to invest in Cyberspace.

On a day when the Opposition blamed the Vajpayee government for the UTI disaster, Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Nirupam dropped a bombshell in the Rajya Sabha by insinuating that key PMO functionaries may have influenced UTI's decision to invest in Cyberspace. Mr Nirupam referred in particular to a former secretary with the PMO, who has since been appointed as a Planning Commission member. The reference was clearly to N.K. Singh, though Mr Nirupam did not take any names.

Mr Nirupam, who made these remarks while participating in the discussion on the UTI debacle, said these allegations were only the tip of the iceberg. He has threatened to reveal more in the days to come.

The treasury benches squirmed in embarrassment as the Shiv Sena member went about levelling charges, much to the glee of the Opposition benches.

"The Cyberspace," he said, "was a rejected item before July 17, 2000. Disregarding its own investment research group's advice, UTI decides to invest in the company. I'd like to share some information with the House on the phone-calls made from his (former UTI chairman P.S. Subramanyam's) office between July 17 and 21," he added.

"On July 18, the former UTI chairman called up three numbers in New Delhi. These were mobile

numbers, though I'm not too sure who they belong to. But I can speak about one number with some guarantee — 98101-80481. It is registered in the PMO. The other two numbers are — 98110-74666 and 98101-80466," the Shiv Sena member said.

Mr Nirupam then went on to allege that on July 20, 2000, the day on which the Cyberspace deal was signed, Mr Subramanyam rang up the number — 3011718. "The person to whom this number belonged was then in the PMO, but is now with the Planning Commission," he added amid loud protests from the BJP.

Asking the government to come clean on the allegations, Mr Nirupam charged it with not taking timely steps despite repeated warnings by the House members.

Fali S. Nariman demanded that JPCs be set up for the day-to-day

monitoring of UTI, LIC and other financial institutions.

Cutting across party lines, members demanded restructuring and corporatisation of the country's largest mutual fund and the adoption of a holistic, integrated approach towards public sector financial institutions.

Members said there was concern over the plight of the US-64 scheme and efforts should be made to ensure that this did not translate into a scare. Demanding finance minister Yashwant Sinha's resignation, Prem Chandran of the RSP described the UTI muddle as a daylight looting of small investors by corporate houses with the help of the UTI and the finance ministry.

Praful Patel (NCP) said the finance minister owed an explanation to the house and, to the country as a whole, as thousands of investors had been cheated.

Ajit Panja suspended

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 29. The Trinamool Congress today announced the suspension of the former Union Minister and its senior leader, Mr. Ajit Kumar Panja, and barred him from organising any function on behalf of the party.

Later, Mr. Panja expressed surprise over the move and said so far he had not received any communication in this regard.

The Trinamool chief whip, Mr. Sudip Bandopadhyay, said in a statement that a party working committee meeting had unanimously resolved to suspend Mr. Panja pending investigation. Barring Mr. Panja all other members were present.

This decision has been conveyed to the Lok Sabha Speaker, the Prime Minister and the Chief Election Commissioner. The West Bengal unit had earlier conveyed to the State Chief Electoral Office of its decision to suspend Mr.

Panja for alleged 'anti-party activities' and expulsion of three others.

Mr. Bandhopadhyay, however, said that like any suspended member of the parliamentary party, Mr. Panja would have to abide by any party whip, as per rules and procedure.

He said the Trinamool had recently held its election which was attended by all MPs, MLAs, Councillors of Calcutta Municipal Corporation, Zilla Parishad members, except Mr. Panja. On his part, Mr. Panja disputed the conduct of such a meeting.

"Mr Panja is totally isolated and detached from the whole organisation. What he is now doing is considered as totally illegal and he is urging unauthorised identification from himself and along with a very few expelled party members," Mr. Bandhyopadhyay said.

THE HINDU

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Panja pulls off parallel poll

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, December 22

REBEL TRINAMOOL Congress MP Ajit Panja was declared president of what he calls the "real Trinamool" after organisational elections at Mahajati Sadan today.

Panja had described as illegal the election of Mamata Banerjee as Trinamool chief. His holding of parallel party elections is another step in the challenge that he has thrown to Mamata's leadership.

About three thousand members from the districts and a few from outside the State voted to elect him their leader today. Panja received 1553 votes, against the 20 polled by rival candidate Amit Chatterjee.

Bani Sinha Roy polled 1517 votes for the post of West Bengal Trinamool Congress president, against 65 votes polled by Ramen Roy Chowdhury.

The returning officer, Swapan



Ajit Panja and Madhabi Mukherjee at Mahajati Sadan on Saturday.

Garai, declared 623 votes invalid. Elections to other organisational posts will be held in two weeks,

Panja said.

Polling started early in the morning, with Panja supervising

the entire exercise. "Seeing is believing. Party members from all parts of the State have come here to cast votes. The party is a democratic organisation and nothing could prove it better," he said, insisting that his is the "real Trinamool Congress". "If asked, we will produce necessary documents and the voters list to prove our claim."

Union Minister Ram Vilas Paswan had sent an observer, Nek Mohammad, from his Lok Janashakti.

Panja pulled a surprise with Madhabi Mukherjee turning up at the polling venue. Mamata had chosen her to contest against the Chief Minister in the Assembly election.

The actress said she was there at Panja's invitation, but denied taking "his side" in his quarrel with Mamata. "There is only one Trinamool. I have received an invitation from Mamata Banerjee to attend a meet called by her and I will go there too," she said.

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