

PARTY SEEKS TO ADJUST TO POST UP-POLL SCENARIO

# BJP looks to Jaya, Pawar as new allies

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Political scene

Sudesh K Verma in New Delhi

Dec. 7. — The BJP has started looking for new allies to adjust to a post-Uttar Pradesh Assembly poll scenario. Some senior party leaders calculate that irrespective of the BJP's victory or defeat in the state, the political equation at the Centre might change. The NDA and the BJP, which has a major stake, must not be caught off guard, they say.

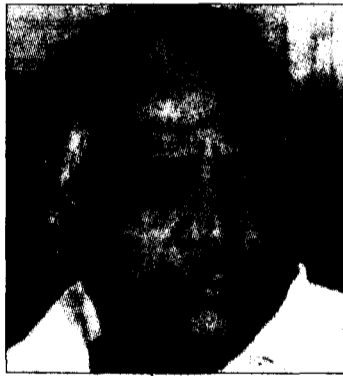
Some of the dangerous portents for the NDA are coming from the DMK, which has 12 members in the Lok Sabha, and the Shiv Sena, which has 15. Together they can tilt the balance against the NDA if it fails to manage the contradictions. The smaller parties, like the Samata Party and the Janata Dal-United, are already fragmented.

The BJP is trying to balance this with keeping the AIADMK (11) and the Nationalist Congress Party (8) in good humour. This might also help the BJP strengthen its bargaining power for the presidential election next year. The NDA has 304 members in the Lok Sabha, including outside support of the Telugu Desam Party (29).

The BJP has been sending political signals to the AIADMK which might have unnerved the DMK chief, Mr K Karunanidhi. The BJP was the first to welcome the AIADMK chief, Miss J Jayalalitha's acquittal by the court. It did not participate in the DMK sponsored bandh against her.



Ms Jayalalitha & Mr Pawar:  
Friends in need?



On the controversial Poto too, the DMK and the BJP spoke in different voices and the AIADMK supported the BJP. DMK leaders

had privately expressed doubts that Miss Jayalalitha could use Poto against the DMK.

To cap it all, the DMK said that the NDA had agreed to rebuild a mosque at the disputed Babari structure, which the BJP has denied. The BJP was committed to construction of a magnificent temple, said the senior party leader, Mr JP Mathur. Miss Jayalalitha is closer to the BJP on the temple issue.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee has decided to attend the NCP chief, Mr Sharad Pawar's birthday party in Mumbai to strengthen the bond with the NCP. This has irked the Shiv Sena but the BJP leaders do not rule out a BJP-NCP alliance in Maharashtra. Mr Pawar is capable of breaking the Congress there, one senior leader said.

As of now, the RSS leadership is opposed to dumping the Shiv Sena, as it represents a hardcore Hindutva force. It is not without significance that the NDA made Mr Pawar the chairman of the disaster management committee after the Gujarat earthquake which entitled him to a cabinet rank. Mr Pawar has privately told some BJP ministers that he would not make common cause with the Congress.

The TDP with 29 MPs holds the key to the Centre. As of today, the TDP is happy with a pliable Centre. It's getting everything from it at the drop of a hat.



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, flanked by the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, and the IT and Communications Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, at the all-party meeting on POTO in New Delhi on Tuesday. At left are the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, and her party colleagues, Dr. Manmohan Singh, and Mr. Shivraj Patil. — Photo: S. Arneja

# Talks fail, Govt. to go ahead with POTO

By Our Special Correspondent

*HPD-1*  
*5/12*

**NEW DELHI, DEC. 4.** The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today failed to convince the Opposition parties to give up their opposition to the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO). An all-party meeting, called by the Prime Minister, ended in a stalemate. There was little common ground between the two sides, with neither the Opposition willing to accept the proposed law without substantial dilution nor the Government agreeing to have a new draft prepared after substantial consultation with the political parties.

According to the Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, who briefed presspersons after the nearly two-hour long meeting, the Prime Minister assured the gathering that the Government was amenable to all the suggestions by the parties. Mr. Vajpayee apparently sought to allay the apprehensions of the Opposition parties that the new ordinance would be misused, like TADA was. Mr. Mahajan said the Prime Minister pointed out today that the country was much more alive to any potential abuse of the ordinance.

The meeting was attended by 39 leaders belonging to 24 political parties. As many as 23 leaders participated in the discussion. According to Mr. Mahajan's count, nine speakers opposed the ordinance and 14 supported it, including those who suggested amendments.

But it was obvious that the confrontation between the Government and the Opposition remained undiluted. While the Congress deputy leader, Mr. Shivraj Patil, merely pointed out a few lacunas, the Telugu Desam suggested that the life of the proposed law be reduced from five to three years as well as exempt media personnel from the ordinance's purview.

The DMK, the Trinamool Congress, and the JD(U) warned against potential misuse of the ordinance, while the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata

Dal opposed it outrightly and insisted that there was no need for a new law as the existing laws were sufficient to deal with the menace of terrorism. Mr. Sharad Pawar (NCP) was the only participant to offer as many as seven concrete suggestions on making the ordinance more reasonable. Mr. Pawar was reported to have suggested that if the Government could incorporate his suggestions, his party would have no difficulty supporting the ordinance. Talking to newsmen after the meeting, she reiterated the Congress position that "the law was structurally defective and that the Government must start afresh". Arguing that her party was equally committed to fighting terrorism, she, however, insisted that there was need for widespread consultation among political parties, Chief Ministers, legal luminaries before a well-rounded proposal could emerge.

According to the CPI(M) leader, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, the Government had failed to state the urgency of passing such an ordinance. "The Government has a closed mind; they did not even suggest any amendment nor did it hint at any dilution. We cannot accept this law in its present form."

The Centre got a pleasant surprise in the form of endorsement from the AIADMK, whose representative, Mr. P.H.Pandian, observed that "such a law was needed, though there should have been a consensus in preparing the law".

The contours of a stand-off were visible in the morning itself, when the BJP's parliamentary managers let it be known that the Government proposed to introduce the controversial legislation in the Lok Sabha on December 11 and to have a discussion on it on December 12 and 13. The Opposition parties were not amused at what they saw as a move contrary to the spirit of the Prime Minister's invitation for consultation. The Government seemed to have been emboldened by the strong endorsement of the POTO issued here by the TDP chief, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu, earlier in the day.

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*PO-Leave*

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# Opp walks out on George

New Delhi, November 29

DEFENCE MINISTER George Fernandes today asserted in Lok Sabha that there had been no violation of Indian air space by an American naval helicopter but Opposition members wouldn't listen to him and walked out of the House.

As soon as the Minister rose to make a statement on the alleged violation of air space by the US helicopter near Chennai on Monday, the Opposition challenged his competence to make any statement saying he was occupying the chair "immorally."

Fernandes told the members that there had been no report either from Air Force, Navy or civil authorities or Airport Authority of India to indicate that Indian air space had been violated by the US helicopter.

"I would like to assure the honourable members that no such overflight over Kalpakkam nuclear installation took place."

Fernandes, who was making the statement following yesterday's directions from the Chair, faced Opposition anger, which harped on his "immoral" continuance in Government and walked out as rose to read the statement.

Answering criticism over facilities being given to an American warship in India, Fernandes said the Government had received specific requests for assistance in connection with Operation Enduring Freedom from certain friendly countries, including the United States. "Those requests that conform to our existing policy guidelines for overflights and refuelling of aircraft and port calls by naval ships have been approved." The guidelines rule out India's participation in com-

bat operations, Indian military units operating under a foreign flag other than an operation mandated by the United Nations or the provisions of bases on Indian soil for any foreign military units. "It is in this context that the USS John Young was given permission to dock at Chennai commercial port," Fernandes said.

On allegations of violation of the airspace by the helicopter, he said as reported by the air force at 0255 hours on November 26, the civil radar of Chennai

Airport, manned by Airport Authority of India, picked up an unidentified aircraft at a distance of about 123 km from Chennai heading north.

The aircraft was flying over international waters, operating at a speed of about 125 to 140 km an hour at a height of five to six thousand feet, he said. Fernandes said naval authorities had given clearance.

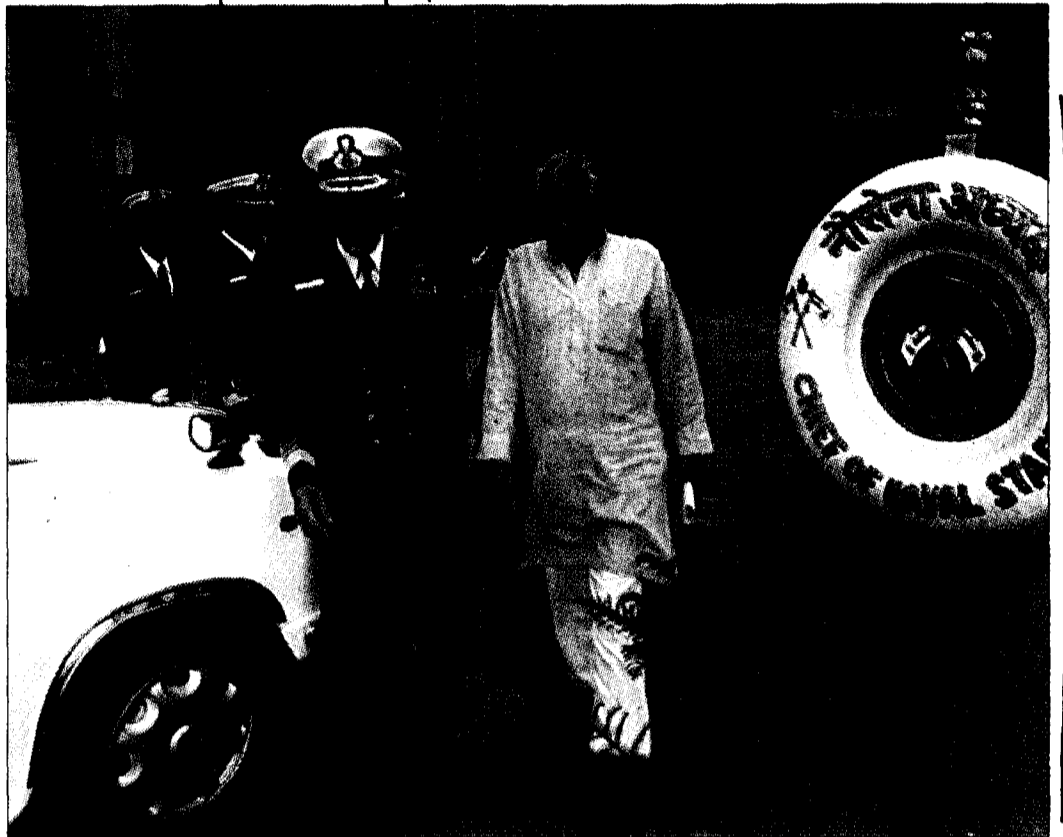
## Air Chief backs Govt

Chief of Air Staff A Y Tipnis

today said US aircraft have not violated Indian airspace.

"The Civil Aviation Ministry has said there was no violation of airspace. At the most, they may have probably violated air traffic," Tipnis said at the National Defence Academy at Khadakvasla after reviewing the passing out parade of its 101st batch. The air chief marshal said the ministry has clarified that the US navy helicopter from a warship has not violated airspace and that should suffice.

PTI



P PHOTO

Defence Minister George Fernandes is escorted by Naval Chief Admiral Sushil Kumar to the Naval Senior Officers' conference in New Delhi on Thursday.

# Sonia, Mulayam under pressure for alliance

MOHAN SAHAY  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 24. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi and Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav are under pressure from a corporate house to go in for a "tactical" alliance before the Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, sources said.

The Madhya Pradesh chief minister, Mr Digvijay Singh, on the steering committee of the AICC for Uttar Pradesh, is the key mediator between the Congress and Samajwadi Party, party officials said. Mr Singh's proximity with the corporate house is well known.

"We don't want an electoral alliance or adjustment of seats before the polls. But a tactical understanding or alliance with the Samajwadi Party would help prevent split in minorities' votes", a senior Congress leader and MP from Uttar Pradesh said.

According to a pre-poll survey conducted by the Samajwadi Party for internal circulation, many Muslims in the state are veering towards the Congress. The reason: the ag-

## RAJNATH BID TO WOO TRADERS

LUCKNOW, Nov. 24. — It is election time and traders have to be kept in good humour, feels the Uttar Pradesh chief minister, Mr Rajnath Singh.

The government today virtually suspended the application of the Essential Commodities Act 1955 in the state in "public interest".

An official release said the district magistrates have been directed not to lodge cases against traders under the Act. The release said district magistrates have been asked to withdraw "immediately" all cases pending in courts at any level under the Act. The release said the decision has been taken "in larger interest of the traders". It said traders played an important role in the development of the state and "this step would check their unnecessary harassment."

The directives had been issued following an announcement by the chief minister on different occasions in traders conferences that the government wouldn't "allow harassment of traders at any level." Today's announcement was a part of a series of sops announced by Mr Singh. — SNS

gressive campaign of Mr Mulayam Singh works for sharper polarisation of minority votes. If that happens it'd generate a backlash which by default would help the BJP in the elections.

The Congress campaign to influence the Muslim voters is on a milder note and doesn't generate the kind of backlash that galvanises Hindu voters particularly from the

upper castes to vote for the BJP. Leaders like Mr Salman Khursheed favour guarded canvassing to garner Muslim votes.

Mr Khursheed, former UPCC president, when asked to comment on the possibility of an electoral alliance between the Congress and the SP said, "The Congress would prefer to go it alone in Uttar Pradesh. There is no question

of seat-sharing before the polls with the Samajwadi Party."

Mr Khursheed said the Congress share of votes in the forthcoming elections'd increase considerably. It is for the Samajwadi Party to see the anti-BJP votes are not divided, he added.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi, however, is still opposed to any pre-poll alliance with Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav. "The overtures of Mr Amar Singh are nothing but a political stunt," said a Congress leader from Uttar Pradesh.

Mrs Gandhi is being told by her advisers to take on the BJP in Uttar Pradesh so that forces hostile to the NDA don't run into the camps of different political parties.

For there is no possibility of the major players in Uttar Pradesh on the Opposition side like the Congress, the SP and the BSP coming under one electoral umbrella. By minimising the split in the anti-BJP votes, the Congress could reduce the strength of the BJP in the next Assembly; it'd make the NDA's return to power difficult.

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25 NOV 2000

# Centre calls all-party meet on Poto

## Buddhadeb says formulating anti-terror laws should be left to State Govts

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, November 17

IN AN apparent softening of stand on the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (Poto), the Centre today said it was "open to suggestions" from Opposition parties on some of the controversial provisions of the legislation.

Faced with opposition from several State Governments at the day-long Chief Ministers' conference on internal security, Prime Minister Vajpayee adopted a conciliatory approach. He called for an all-party meeting to discuss Poto.

As Vajpayee is scheduled to visit Amristar tomorrow for the bicentenary celebrations of Maharaja Ranjit Singh's corona-

tion, the all-party meet is likely to be held on November 20, after the November 19 NDA conclave.

Government sources said Home Minister LK Advani indicated to the CMs that the Centre might consider amending some of the controversial provisions of Poto. He made the offer in his concluding address at the meeting, which had witnessed "sharp divisions" on political lines.

In fact, Madhya Pradesh CM Digvijay Singh demanded "outright scrapping" of the ordinance and a ban on the Bajrang Dal. But there were some embarrassing moments for the Congress when Maharashtra's Deputy CM Chhagan Bhujbal, whose leader Sharad Pawar had been a defender of the infamous

TADA (a precursor of Poto), disagreed with Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh's line at the meeting.

Briefing newsmen later, Advani said there was general consensus on the need for a special anti-terrorism law, though several Opposition-ruled States were upset about not being consulted before the promulgation of the ordinance. But there was "no agreement" on the Federal Law Enforcement Agency (FLEA) proposed by the Centre.

"The Government is willing to accept any suggestion which will help in the fight against terrorism. A consensus is building up and we are open to views of the State Governments," Advani said, admitting that a couple of

CMs were in "total disagreement" with Poto.

Besides Digvijay Singh, West Bengal Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee opposed the ordinance. As law and order was a State subject, it should be left to the respective State Governments to formulate legislations, Bhattacharya argued. He also opposed the proposed FLEA.

On his part, Andhra CM Chandrababu Naidu provided the Centre the much-needed cushion by supporting Poto with some "modifications" of provisions which have caused apprehensions of curtailment of Press freedom. "Otherwise, there is nothing wrong with it as the country needs a good, strong anti-terror law," Naidu said.

THE TELEGRAPH

18 NOV 2007

# George gets defence again, Oppn sharpens its claws

Our Political Bureau

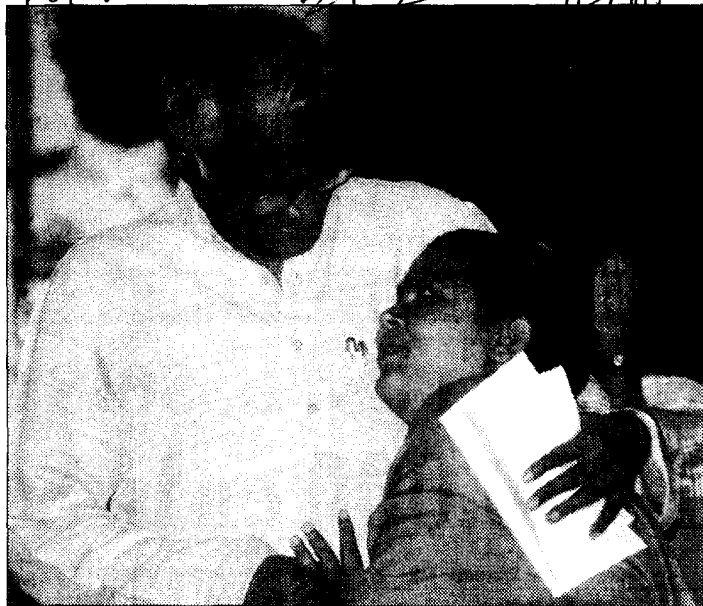
NEW DELHI 15 OCTOBER

**J**UST WHEN the ruling coalition at the Centre appeared to be settling down after successfully negotiating opposition to its stand on the US-led air strikes on Afghanistan, it finds itself in the middle of a political maelstrom over the re-induction of George Fernandes in the Union Cabinet.

Brushing aside all objections, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, on Monday, handed over the charge of the defence ministry to Mr Fernandes again, after a gap of seven months. Also making a re-entry in the Union council of ministers after about a year was Mr Harin Pathak, the BJP MP from Ahmedabad. He too was assigned his old portfolio, that of minister of state for defence production and supplies.

But it is Mr Fernandes' re-induction which has raised the hackles of the opposition parties. They've already declared their intention of opposing the move, and the winter session of Parliament, which gets underway in the last week of November, is set to be stormy.

An indication of the shape of things to come was given by the leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Ms Sonia Gandhi. Addressing a rally in Lucknow, the Congress president said: "Handing over the security of the



**SEEING EYE TO EYE: Sports minister Uma Bharti greets George Fernandes during the latter's swearing-in in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI**

country to a person who had to put in his papers because of corruption charges is a matter of shame," she said.

The Left parties also flayed the government. "The Vajpayee government has lost all its credibility by re-inducting him," the CPI (M) said, while its ally, the CPI, felt the move was a "betrayal of their own position and morality as the Venkataswami commission had not yet completed its probe into

the Tehelka expose."

The government, it seems, has decided to brazen it out. "There is no case against Mr Fernandes. He had resigned on his own. Nothing incriminating has come to light during the proceedings of the Venkataswami commission. Ever the notice given by the commission to him does not relate to any charges," the Prime Minister told reporters after the swearing-in ceremony.

The Economic Times

# Outlaw Bajrang Dal too: Opp

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Sept. 28. - Opposition parties today demanded a ban on the Bajrang Dal and asked the Centre to make the evidence against Simi public to remove doubts about its decision to ban the organisation.

The Congress expressed reservations in condemning "religious fundamentalism" of any one particular group. The party spokesman, Mr S Jaipal Reddy, said: "There is an imperative need to be even handed". The action against Simi was ill timed, he added.

Mrs Ambika Soni, an AICC general secretary, criticised the JP government for not allowing a team of Congress leaders to visit the violence-hit areas of Lucknow. She alleged that the BJP-led government resorted to brutal action against a particular community to polarise the people on communal lines. The Madhya Pradesh chief

## 'ALL PARTIES SHOULD BACK CENTRE'

KOLKATA, Sept. 28. - Mr Asim Ghosh, West Bengal BJP chief, today said all parties should support the ban on the Students Islamic Movement of India. "Delhi has concrete evidence that the organisation has been engaged in anti-national activities in collusion with the ISI," he said.

Mr LK Advani will disclose the evidence in the Lok Sabha.

As for the CPI-M's hint that the Bajrang Dal should be banned, Mr Ghosh wondered whether the party had any evidence to suggest that the Dal was indulging in anti-national activities. "If it has any such evidence... it should provide the same to the government," he said.

- SNS

minister, Mr Digvijay Singh, welcomed the ban on the Simi but criticised the Centre for not banning the Bajrang Dal.

Calling the Bajrang Dal a "communal organisation", he held it "directly responsible" for creating a body like Simi by "injecting fear into the minority community". He cited the Bajrang Dal's move to create an outfit like the Durga Vahini and its bid to train women to

handle arms as examples.

"The Bajrang Dal has been jeopardising communal harmony by creating fear psychosis among minorities, which resulted in formation of fundamentalist, anti-national organisations like the Simi", he said, adding that "fundamentalism in any religion breeds terrorism".

Mr Singh had written to Mr LK Advani a few months ago, urging the Centre to ban both

Simi and Bajrang Dal saying they were two sides of the same coin. He had denied permission to either of the organisations to hold conventions in Madhya Pradesh in the past.

The state BJP and Bajrang Dal have, however, appreciated the Central government's decision to ban the Simi.

The Madhya Pradesh Police raided Simi offices at several places and 13 activists were arrested since last evening under the Unlawful Activities Prevention Act, police said. No untoward incidents have been reported.

The Simi has bases in 11 districts including Bhopal, Indore, Jabalpur and Ujjain although the organisation, headquartered at Indore, is said to be not "very active" in the state.

The SPs of these districts have been put on alert. The State Simi president, Qamaruddin Nagori has not been arrested yet, sources said.

THE STATESMAN

29 SEP 2001

...the discerning will surely balk at buying a dubious ideological product long past its sell by date.

## 11-10 2009 Exit Jaya 9 p 01/04/09

The Supreme Court has done signal service in upholding that the will of the people is subordinate to the Constitution and, in the process, quashed the appointment of AIADMK supremo J Jayalithaa as the chief minister of Tamil Nadu. It is a different matter that this triumph of a constitutional principle — which implicitly indicts not only Ms Jayalithaa but the whole political class — will be overtaken by political developments, inevitable in the aftermath of such a landmark judgment. Ms Jayalithaa, being both the cause leading to the verdict and its principal casualty, has resigned from the office she assumed on May 14. The decision of the Union government to seek the resignation of the governor, Fatima Beevi, who had Ms Jayalithaa sworn in as chief minister would appear to be justified in retrospect, though that does not vindicate the crude way in which the Centre went about the job. With Ms Jayalithaa's resignation, the AIADMK is in a crisis, and for her chosen successor the mantle is likely to be more a crown of thorns. The incumbent is bound to be under tremendous pressure, not least from Ms Jayalithaa but also the vast cadres of the AIADMK that are restive at the turn of events. Being the canny politician that she is, Ms Jayalithaa can be expected to restrain her followers from going on the rampage, for her eventual political deliverance too must come only through constitutional processes. Therefore, any attempt to thwart the law of the land from taking its course can only do more harm than good to Ms Jayalithaa and her party. By the same token, any demand for the imposition of president's rule should be dismissed out of hand because the AIADMK has a clear legislative majority, though it remains to be seen whether her successor will fulfil the oath of office and secrecy without kow-towing to extra-constitutional centres of authority.

Immediate developments apart, the implications of the verdict hold a salutary lesson for all politicians who have cynically taken recourse to asserting their legitimacy in a "people's court", as if the will of the people is inimical to and separate from the Constitution. Although Ms Jayalithaa is the first political victim to lose office on this principle, there have been others who have no less aggressively defied the law by invoking the supremacy of "people's court" over all other constitutional institutions; from Indira Gandhi in the wake of the Allahabad high court judgment unseating her for corrupt practices to Laloo Prasad Yadav of fodder-fame. Rejecting Ms Jayalithaa's arguments, the Court held that the "Constitution will prevail over the people's will. (The) People's will will prevail only if it is in accordance with the Constitution". As has been pointed out in these columns earlier, the Constitution is the bedrock on which rests the sovereignty of the people exercised through elections and elected bodies. Without the enfranchisement guaranteed by the Constitution there can be no elections or expression of the people's will. That being the case, to locate the people's will outside the ambit of the Constitution, as an entity beyond and above the statute would be perverse, self-serving and most unrepresentative of democracy. For the political class as a whole this is wake-up time.

Time to Time

THE TIMES OF INDIA

22 SEP 2009



## **POTO: Once bitten, Govt still not shy**

9/2/01  
dominated by  
POTO with the debate turning  
acrimonious when Prabhunath  
Singh (Samata) made some di-  
rect charges against the Opposi-  
tion which the Chair expunged  
later. Taking serious objection  
to Singh's remarks, an agitated  
Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M)  
said: "What does he mean? He  
is calling us terrorists." Reddy  
and his Congress colleague P R  
Dasmunshi also joined in urging  
the Speaker to direct Singh to  
withdraw from the House.

The Opposition's attack  
hinged on Vajpayee's remarks  
which it said amounted to ques-  
tioning the nationalism of the  
members of the minority com-  
munities. Vajpayee defended  
himself by saying that his speech  
was distorted by the media.

He also criticised the Oppo-  
sition leaders for trying to block  
question hour at a time when all  
parties had pledged to maintain  
decorum in the House.

While Mulayam charged the  
government with promulgating  
POTO with an eye on the Uttar  
Pradesh Assembly elections,  
Chatterjee referred to the mis-  
use of the ordinance in Jammu  
and Kashmir where a house of  
an alleged militant was sealed  
and later withdrawn.

**VUP's demand**

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 4 SEP 2001

# POTO: Twice bitten, Govt still not shy

■ Another all-party meet to be held today

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, DECEMBER 3

1/9  
C ONCEDING that it would have been better if all parties had been consulted before the promulgation of the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO), Prime Minister A B Vajpayee said that an all-party meeting had been convened tomorrow to discuss it.

But chances of a breakthrough at the meeting were as dim as ever with the Congress saying that it would not support the Ordinance even if the Government were to make amendments.

Earlier, Vajpayee's announcement of the all-party meeting capped an acrimonious debate in the Lok Sabha today on remarks he had made yesterday in Hyderabad which the Opposition felt were an attack on patriotism of the minorities.

By offering to consider amendments to POTO the Prime Minister reflected a softening of the government's stance. But he also used the opportunity to hit back at the Opposition which he said was guilty of the same charge it had hurled at the government.

"If the Leader of the Opposition can speak on POTO why can't I? But if I speak, I am reminded of propriety," he remarked, answering Congressman S Jaipal Reddy's charge that he had committed impropriety by talking about POTO when Parliament was in session.



Referring to Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav's effort to raise the POTO issue through an adjournment motion during question hour itself, he said: "Wasn't politics played during question hour? He wants to prove that he is the most vocal critic within the Opposition. Isn't this politics or is it social work?"

Vajpayee began by denying that he had doubted the patriotism of Muslims during his remarks in Hyderabad yesterday. "What I said yesterday was that the minorities need not have any apprehensions (about POTO)," he said.

He pointed out that parties like the Telugu Desam had supported POTO while expressing reservations over certain provisions. But till today the Opposition parties had not made clear what their objections were, he said.

Mulayam made an attempt to raise the issue as soon as the proceedings began in the morning but Speaker G M C Balayogi disallowed disruption of question hour. On the other hand, Zero hour was completely

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

FRIDAY, AUGUST 3, 2001

AD-12

## EVADING THE LARGER ISSUE <sup>26/8</sup>

THE 'CRISIS' TRIGGERED by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's declaration of intent to quit office has dissipated, as it was expected to, with the ruling National Democratic Alliance true to style pledging its "unqualified faith and trust" in his leadership. As an earnest of the coalition's readiness to address Mr. Vajpayee's concerns about lack of cohesion among the constituents, the NDA leadership has promised to formulate a code of conduct, assigning the task to a four-member panel. On the face of it, the shock therapy would appear to have had the desired effect of getting the NDA partners to fall in line, at least for now and in a formal sense. That such commitments, driven as they invariably are by hard calculations of self-interest of the individual partners, are not intended to be taken seriously should be clear to anyone who is familiar with the functioning of political conglomerates the country has seen at the Central level especially since 1996. And the track-record of BJP-led coalitions has been quite dismal, what with resolves on cohesiveness and self-restraint being flouted brazenly by one constituent or another.

All the display of 'solidarity' and the re-dedication to work (under Mr. Vajpayee) as a "solid phalanx" orchestrated by the NDA at its meeting on Wednesday cannot conceal the 'message' a fuming Shiv Sena has sent by its non-participation. For all the favourable response Mr. George Fernandes managed to elicit from Mr. Bal Thackeray — to the extent of getting him to distance himself from the Shiv Sena MP, Mr. Sanjay Nirupam's remarks implicating the PMO in the UTI scam and to reassure Mr. Vajpayee of support to the NDA regime under him — there is, hardly anything to suggest that the party supremo had been won over completely and to the point of making Mr. Nirupam withdraw (as yet) the accusations that had hurt the Prime Minister. According to some reports, the Shiv Sena would seem to believe that, in the 'resignation drama', Mr. Nirupam was being made a "scapegoat" for the pow-

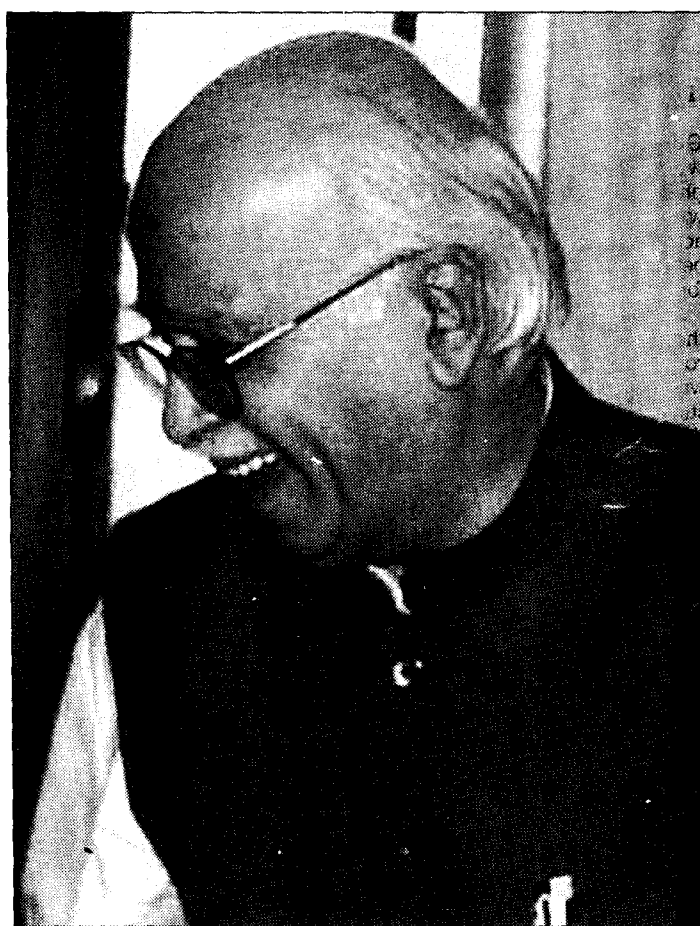
er struggle within the BJP itself. In effect, what is sought to be done in the name of 'cohesiveness' and 'adherence to the norms of a coalition system of governance' is to gag the voice of an ally that chooses to speak up against the murky goings-on in the corridors of power. This, surely, cannot be the right or effective way of ensuring a cohesive governance. What has been attempted, in the wake of the resignation threat held out by Mr. Vajpayee, is essentially in the nature of a political management of the uneasy coalition and the tactic of shock treatment may have paid off, for now. But the basic issues related to 'accountability' — raised in the context of the UTI scam and accusations linking high-ranking functionaries in the PMO — remain unaddressed and the Prime Minister has hardly helped to carry conviction by cursorily dismissing allegations of the PMO's involvement.

Viewed in a larger perspective, Mr. Vajpayee's 'resignation threat' would appear to have been intended to reassert his authority as the head of the coalition government and to convey to his own party that he would not like to be dictated to or pushed round by the party leadership in running the affairs of the Government or the alliance. The 'enough is enough' message he delivered at the NDA meeting is apparently directed as much at the BJP and its leadership as at the other members of the alliance. It is less than a week since the BJP executive came up with some carping criticism of the Government and as good as set the agenda for India-Pakistan engagement and virtually faulted it on the UTI issue. For his part, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi wanted the NDA to evolve norms for re-admission of parties that had earlier quit for making opportunistic forays — his strong line came in the context of the vigorous push being made by the PMK and the Trinamool Congress for re-entry. The fact that the PMK was allowed to participate in the NDA's Wednesday meeting conveyed its own message to the BJP leadership.

THE HINDU

- 3 AUG 2001

# UTI offensive in Sinha's defence



**SMILES AMID STORM:** A.B. Vajpayee at his office in Parliament House after the morning turmoil, Yashwant Sinha talks to reporters outside the House and L.K. Advani shares a joke with Farooq Abdullah (not in picture) at North Block on Tuesday. (PTI)

## FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**New Delhi, July 31:** Pitchforked into the middle of a full-blown financial scandal with political implications, Yashwant Sinha today picked fault with UTI inside the House and the Opposition outside. But Sinha's economics-dripping defence failed to impress the politicians on the Opposition benches. The Opposition demanded that he cut short his "long-winded history of UTI" and reply to allegations that PMO officials were the "hidden hands" that had influenced the fund's dud investments. Sinha charged UTI with not heeding the warning of a joint

parliamentary committee as early as 1993 not to resort to high exposure in equity in its flagship scheme US-64. At present, it stood at 70 per cent at a value of Rs 13,646 crore, he said, adding that the exposure to equity should have been much less as was the case before liberalisation in 1992. He asserted that small investors' money had "not been taken out". The value of the units has dropped due to fluctuations in the stock market as the scheme now was an equity-based one. "A general impression has been created as if this money has vanished. As if some people have pocketed this money," he said.

"Let me hasten to add that the value of the stock held under US-64 has declined. But it still has a value and a corpus." Singh said that considering the position he held, it was normal for him to talk to chairmen of various financial institutions, including UTI. However, he added: "At no stage have I spoken to him (Subramanyam) about Cyberspace." Singh said. The Rajya Sabha debate resumed at 2 pm after two adjournments during the course of Sinha's reply, much of which was unintelligible in the din. But soon after, agitated MPs brandished a statement made by parliamentary affairs minister

Pramod Mahajan stating that the Prime Minister had "expressed his desire to quit office" as he was unable to knit together the ruling NDA coalition. Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee and the CPM's Nilotpal Basu raised the issue and demanded that the Prime Minister make a statement. A few Congress MPs led by Arjun Singh invaded the well of the House, forcing an adjournment. Left and Congress leaders later debated in private whether a privilege motion could be brought against the ruling party for the statement Mahajan released through the Press Information Bureau. "Vajpayeeji is the Prime Minister

of the country, not of the BJP. He should make any offer to resign or take on office before all of us, especially when Parliament is in session. And, if it is an internal party matter, this should not be released officially through government channels," Basu said. Sinha had kicked off his reply by demanding that the Opposition give him an uninterrupted hearing. But the Opposition had decided to be particularly harsh on the minister. Virtually every sentence in his prepared speech was contested with demands that Sinha come to the point and clarify whether he was aware of UTI's mounting crisis and whether he had any replies to

allegations against PMO officials. Sinha chose not to reply to these points within the House. Outside the House, however, Sinha did try to raise walls of defence. He charged the Opposition parties with trying to "politicise" the UTI fiasco and accused them of not being interested in knowing the truth. "Basically, the Opposition is not interested in getting to the truth. They are interested only in politicising the issue to derive some political mileage," he told reporters. He said he was willing to give a point-by-point rebuttal to the Opposition's charges, provided it listened to him without interruption.

## FROM KAY BENEDICT

**New Delhi, July 31:** If Atal Bihari Vajpayee's threat to quit was a calculated move to rein in recalcitrant allies — especially the Shiv Sena — he has achieved instant success. Today, all of them sang paeans to the Prime Minister. The lone discordant note was struck by Janata Dal (United) parliamentary leader Devinder Prasad Yadav, who said it was an internal matter of the BJP and the Sangh parivar and the NDA had no role in it. "The allies are completely going by the NDA agenda. The Prime Minister's statement is surprising. It is beyond my comprehension. He never told us about his agony," Yadav said. If on one objective of the quit-threat was to protest against Sena MP Sanjay Nirupam's bid to drag the Prime Minister's Office into the UTI scam, Nirupam covered today saying he did not hurl accusations against the PMO but had merely wanted a probe. Sources said Nirupam back-

## Attack yesterday, allegiance today

acked after Sena chief Bal Thackeray spoke to Vajpayee over telephone immediately after news channels flashed his resignation offer. Thackeray, according to a Cabinet minister, dissociated himself from Nirupam's attack on the PMO. The Sena boss is understood to have told Vajpayee that Nirupam's views were not those of the party's. He also assured him of the Sena's support. A Sena minister in Vajpayee's Cabinet, Manohar Joshi, met the Prime Minister today to assuage his feelings. Thackeray tried to speak to Nirupam after Vajpayee went on the offensive, but could not reach the Rajya Sabha MP till 4 pm. Sources said even yesterday, senior

party leader Satish Pradhan had cautioned Nirupam when he tried to drag the PMO into the scam. Nirupam defended himself, saying: "I have never made any allegation against the Prime Minister. It is my personal conviction that he is honest. I have full faith and respect for him... But there is more than one person working in the PMO and, therefore, why not investigate (who talked to sacked UTI chief P.S. Subramanyam)?" He "stood by" his statements in the Rajya Sabha yesterday, maintaining that what he had said was in public interest. People, he said, want answers as to who was responsible for the scam that has hit the small investor hard.

Vajpayee also received support from Telugu Desam chief Chandrababu Naidu, National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, Janata Dal (United) chief Sharad Yadav, the Samata Party, the Indian National Lok Dal and other allies. Cementing his bond with the NDA, Naidu — the first among non-NDA allies to call up the PMO and speak with Vajpayee — declared that the crisis would blow over like "empty clouds". "You should concentrate on your forthcoming visit to Pakistan and on deliberations with the Pakistan President now," he told Vajpayee. There is "no crisis and no threat to the NDA government", Naidu told reporters in Hyderabad. "This is not the correct issue over which he has to resign." He said all parties should sit together and think out ways to prevent such scams from recurring. "We are for a very firm action against the culprits in the UTI fiasco. Laws need to be streamlined because people who are committing such crimes have no fear of law," he added.

## DNA test nails ex-minister

**BY ANUPAMB BORDOLOI**  
**Guwahati, July 31:** The cat is out of the bag. A DNA test has confirmed the veracity of 16-year-old Monila Brahma's claim that former Asom Gana Parishad minister Rajendra Mushahary is the father of her child. "Rajendra Mushahary is the biological father of the disputed child Pabitra," a source said, quoting from the laboratory report. The DNA test was carried out by the Hyderabad-based Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics. Mushahary, who had denied Monila's allegation that she became pregnant after being "raped" by him twice last year, was unavailable for comment. Based on Monila's FIR, filed six months after she was allegedly raped, police registered a case (number 224/2000) against Mushahary at the Gossaigaon police station in Kokrajhar last year. The DNA test report confirming the fact that the former minister had fathered Monila's child, was received by the Forensic Science Laboratory here on Friday. It was handed over to Kokrajhar police yesterday, sources said. DNA profiling of blood samples collected from Mushahary, Monila and the latter's infant son was carried out under the supervision of G.V. Rao, chief scientist at the Centre for DNA Fingerprinting and Diagnostics. Blood samples for the test were collected on June 7 after months of legal wrangles, claims and counter-claims. The police had to seek the court's permission for DNA profiling when the investigation

into the rape case reached a "dead end". Gossaigaon police had earlier claimed to have gathered "enough circumstantial evidence" to nail Mushahary. Though the DNA test has confirmed the paternity of Monila's child, there is still no evidence to prove her claim that Mushahary raped her. "The police will only succeed in proving the parentage of the child and not the rape," a source said. Mushahary, who was the minister of state for welfare of plains, tribes and other backward classes in the erstwhile AGP-led government, has termed the rape allegation against him as a ploy by political adversaries to malign his image. The former minister, who lost the Gossaigaon Assembly seat to Congress candidate Mithius Fuddu in the May 10 elections, has been charged under Sections 376 (rape), 109 and 506 (intimidation) of the IPC. According to the FIR filed by Monila, she was taken to a hotel at Warisa on the Assam-West Bengal border early last year and raped twice — first on February 27 and again in March. The FIR was filed at Gossaigaon police station on September 4. The case drew the attention of the National Human Rights Commission, which criticised former chief minister Prafulla Kumar Mahanta for allowing the accused to continue as a minister. The rights organisation questioned the "propriety" of allowing Mushahary to continue as a minister "in the face of the material already available, including the report of the police, wherein the minister has been clearly named as an accused".

## Rudderless Cong lets govt off

### FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

**New Delhi, July 31:** Events in the Lok Sabha, after news of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's resignation offer trickled in, again exposed the Opposition's inability to mount a concerted attack on the ruling NDA. The information had come in by the time the House reassembled at 2 pm, but the Opposition failed to coordinate an attack to put the NDA on the mat. When the Speaker assumed his seat, Mayavati and other Bahujan Samaj Party MPs rushed to the Well, resuming their protest against the killing of 17 Dalits in Uttar Pradesh. In the absence of the leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, Congress chief whip Priya Ran-

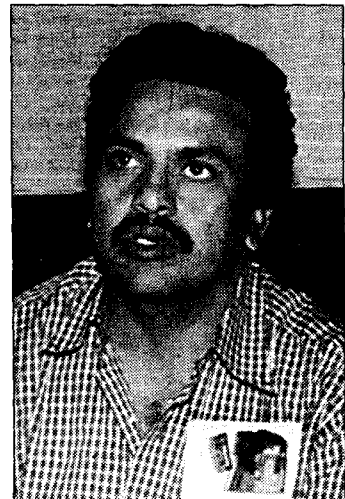
jan Das Munshi made an effort to bring up the resignation issue. He pleaded with Mayavati to rein in her MPs so that the topic could be taken up, but the BSP leader was unmoved. With an eye on her home state polls, Mayavati said the Dalit killings were much more important and "other things" could wait. Snubbed, Munshi retreated. Deputy leader of the Congress, Madhavrao Scindia, solicited support from Somnath Chatterjee of the CPM and Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav to prevail upon Mayavati. But they were unmoved. Two other senior leaders on the front row, Chandra Shekhar and Sharad Pawar, sat through, perhaps enjoying the discomfort in the Congress ranks. The Congress benches had ab-

out 80 MPs, but they looked lost. The Samajwadi and the Left were divided as Mulayam was keen to seek clarifications from home minister L.K. Advani on Phoolan Devi's murder while some Left leaders were willing to join hands with the Congress. Finally, it was left to Raghuvansh Prasad Singh to raise the issue. "Has he resigned? Vajpayee should come and clarify," he screamed. His voice drowning in the din, the Speaker disallowed anything from going on record. Mayavati's MPs' lungpower forced the Speaker to adjourn the House till tomorrow. The Congress is divided on tomorrow's strategy. Some floor managers believe that the party should insist on a statement from Vajpayee about his "inability" to lead the NDA and why he chose to

speak at the BJP parliamentary party meeting instead of Parliament. They want to grill him for "bypassing" the Lok Sabha. However, another group feels the strategy would deflect attention from the UTI scam and the charge of the PMO's involvement. "We should insist on a statement from Vajpayee on UTI and the role of the PMO. If he clarifies, we will have more ammunition," a Congress MP said, warning that the "resignation drama" was being enacted to shift the focus. Congress spokesman Jaipal Reddy dubbed the resignation offer as "hypocritical" and said it was a "deliberate ploy" to divert attention. "The offer is a deliberate design to pre-empt a probe into the role of the PMO in UTI investment," Reddy said.

## Nirupam speaks his master's voice

### FROM DEBASHIS BHATTACHARYYA



**Sanjay Nirupam.**  
File picture by Pradip Sanyal

**Mumbai, July 31:** Sanjay Nirupam may know only a smattering of Marathi, but he always speaks the same language as his boss, Bal Thackeray. The Shiv Sena Rajya Sabha MP, who hails from Bihar, does as he is told by the party chief, who picked him as executive editor in 1993 to run *Dopahar Ka Saamna*, the Hindi offshoot of the Sena mouthpiece, *Saamna*. Shadows of Thackeray lurked behind when Nirupam pointed accusing finger at the Prime Minister's Office in connection with the UTI scandal yesterday, prompting Atal Bihari Vajpayee to offer his resignation within 24 hours. Sena leaders, who are in the know, said Nirupam, a Thackeray confidant, "articulated" the Sena chief's stance on major national issues in Delhi. A glib-talker, the former activist of Patna's A.N. College has the aggressiveness necessary to make himself and the

Sena heard in the capital. Though Nirupam at times tended to shoot his mouth off, Sena leaders said the MP usually "conveyed what Balasaheb wanted him to". Under no circumstances, Nirupam could have hurled accusations at the Prime Minister's Office without the Sena chief's nod, they said. Nirupam would only say it was his duty to bring the grievances of the people to the notice of the government. "More than two crore people have lost their money in the UTI scam. No one has the right to loot public money," the Sena MP told *The Telegraph*. Nirupam said he stood by what he said about the phone calls allegedly made from the house of N.K. Singh, a former key PMO official, who was shifted to the Planning Commission after the Sena demanded his scalp along with Brajesh Mishra's in the wake of the Tehelka expose. Sena leaders said Nirupam knows little Marathi. He speaks it haltingly, but understands it well. But Thackeray, a champion of

Marathi, waging a campaign to replace English shop signs with the local language in the financial capital, does not seem to mind. So happy was the Sena chief with the bold, go-getting former *Jansatta* journalist that he sent him to the Rajya Sabha for a second term, dashing the hopes of several faithfuls. The direct attack on the PMO appears to be Thackeray's way of asserting himself as a balance-tilting ally as he feels "he is increasingly being ignored". He clearly wants to send out the message that he should not be taken for granted, analysts said. Thackeray's relationship with Vajpayee has been on a roller-coaster for the last one year, with the Sena chief insisting on at least one more ministerial berth at the Centre. The animosity deepened in April when Thackeray refused to share the dais with Vajpayee at a meeting that was to be organised to defend the government against the Tehelka expose. As a result, the meeting was cancelled.

## Life in space

### FROM PAGE 1

"We have no evidence for one or the other as yet," said Lloyd. "The most likely possibility is that the bacteria have arrived from another planet. I'd like to think that, at any rate." Lloyd has tried to grow the bacteria in culture but said he hasn't found the right conditions yet. "It's the first pointer that it is possible to get evidence that there is life on other planets." Wickramasinghe is convinced the space bugs provide strong support for the panspermia theory — which suggests that life may have come from outer space in the form of germs or spores. "We have argued for more than two decades that terrestrial life was brought down to earth by comets and that cometary material containing micro-organisms must still reach us in large quantities," he said.

... position that she had upward trend in the New Delhi district.

G.N. Jha

# Chambal queen meets violent death

**P**hoolan Devi, who rose from the ranks of a law breaker to a law maker, from the ravines of Chambal to the corridors of power in Delhi, always believed in surprises, never revealing her plans till the last. But fate took her by surprise on Wednesday afternoon, when she was shot dead by masked men outside her residence in the heart of New Delhi.

She hit the headlines in 1981 when 22 upper-caste men were massacred at Behmai village in Uttar Pradesh. She denied leading the gang which carried out the killings, but surrendered to the Madhya Pradesh police two years later.

Phoolan Devi was portrayed in Shekhar Kapur's film *Bandit Queen* as a rape victim from the low-caste Mallah community whose career of crime began as a search for revenge on her attackers.

When she was released on parole in 1994, other charges against her in Uttar Pradesh were dropped.

However, in many ways, Phoolan got more out of life than she could have expected: she ruled the Chambal ravines for several years as a "Bandit Queen," had a biography writ-

ten about her and had her life story made into Kapur's controversial albeit successful film before finally becoming a member of Parliament.

After being elected for the first time for the eleventh Lok Sabha, she was now in her second term, having been elected from Mirzapur in the last elections.

Born in August 1963 (according to parliamentary records, although her interviews mention her year of birth as July 1957) in a

foxed the police forces in Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh. Increasing pressure finally forced her to surrender before the then Madhya Pradesh chief minister, Mr Arjun Singh, in February 1983. At that time, there were 55 criminal cases against her, including 22 for murders. Released on grounds of ill-health in February 1994, Phoolan married for the second time in July 1994 legislator Umed Singh.

During her prison term, she had insisted

## OBITUARY/ PHOOLAN DEVI (1963-2001)

that the government should fulfil 27 demands put forward by her. Though her appeals for release had gone unheeded for several years, she became the subject of discussion and many books were written about her, including one by French author Irene Frain. Many years later, she reportedly dictated an autobiography *I, Phoolan Devi*, Rambali.

While still in jail, she unsuccessfully contested Lok Sabha byelections in 1991 from

the New Delhi constituency, gaining fame as her opponents were Bollywood filmstars Rajesh Khanna and Shatrughan Sinha.

After being released, she organised the Eklavya Sena, which has been working to highlight the problems of the backward classes. She joined the Samajwadi Party later to continue her crusade for the backward classes.

Although India knew about her misdeeds, this short-statured woman shot to international fame when Shekhar Kapur made his controversial film on her, starring Seema Biswas based on a book by Mala Sen.

Phoolan had taken objection to the film, which attempted to show how the brutality of men forced her to take to arms, and had taken the matter to court. The case was ultimately sorted out of court.

As member of Parliament, she was a member of the committee on labour and welfare last year.

Till she breathed her last, she had one regret: she felt she still had a long way to go to ensure a life of dignity for the backward classes and a fair deal for the downtrodden. (UNI)

# Allies nervous as Jayalalitha meets Vajpayee

Sujata Anandan  
Chennai, June 5

TAMIL NADU Chief Minister Jayalalitha plays it correct by calling on both Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Congress president Sonia Gandhi on her first visit to New Delhi after assuming office.

But that does not remove suspicions in the minds of her allies about the possibility of a deal with the BJP to keep the cases against her at bay, and ensure a smooth election to the Tamil Nadu legislature in six months.

So all eyes are now focused on the Rajya Sabha polls, barely a month away, for which politicians have already started lobbying in Chennai.

Who Jayalalitha opts for (between the TMC and the PMK) may determine the course of political events in the country for the next five years. At stake are six seats, one of which the DMK can comfortably win. It needs 33.5 votes and has 27 of its own in the Assembly.

The rest would come from its allies who together bring the tally of the DMK-led front up to 37. Four of these belong to the BJP and already its allies are suspicious of the saffron group's intentions.

The BJP has a history of dumping the losers for the rulers, as it did in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh. With Mamata Banerjee out of the NDA and trouble brewing with the Samata Party, the BJP could do with the



Jayalalitha presents a bouquet to Atal Bihari Vajpayee in New Delhi on Tuesday.

PTI PHOTO

AIADMK's members in the Lok Sabha to boost the ruling alliance.

The DMK has 12 MPs while the AIADMK has 11; the PMK has five and MDMK has four. Dumping the DMK would mean three empty ministerial slots, and even a fourth if Industries and Commerce, currently held by Mura-

solli Maran, is split. This will also help the BJP to accommodate Ajit Singh, whom it desperately needs for the UP elections. Jayalalitha is likely to be less keen on ministerial berths than to avoid legal action in the cases against her. No wonder then that the two Left parties and the two

Congress groupings in Tamil Nadu are already sniffing a conspiracy in the air.

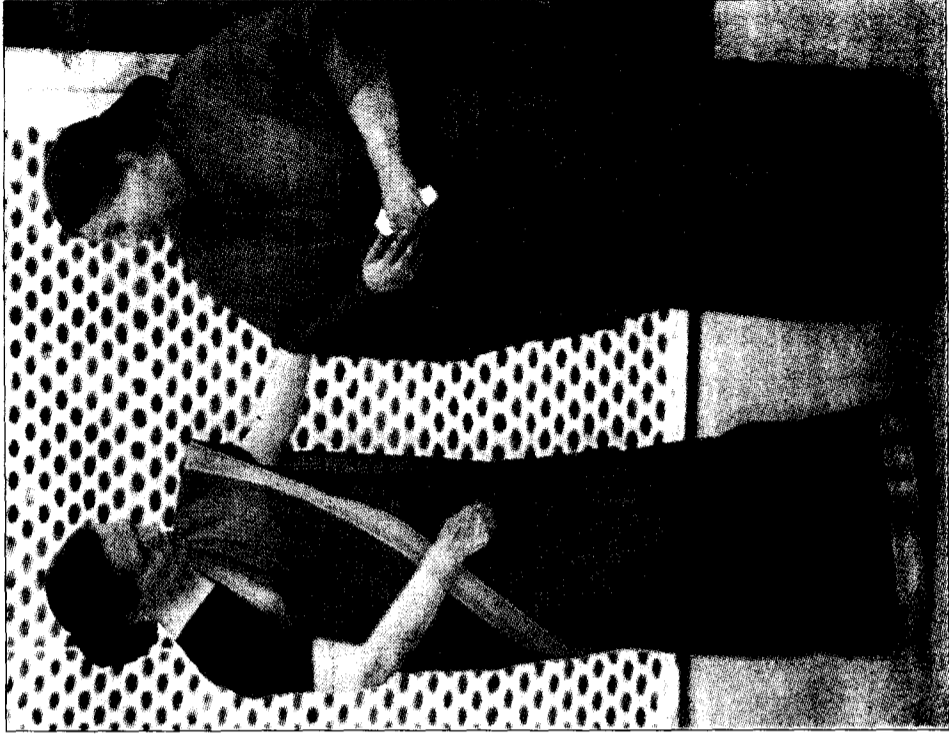
Jayalalitha swept the elections with the help of these parties. But they can now do little to further her goals. So the choice between the TMC and PMK now is also a choice between just good faith and political survival.

The TMC is staking its claim to the single seat that it can win in the current round, but not without help from Jayalalitha. And the PMK, so far reticent on the RS polls, has already indicated that it might not be averse to switching loyalties back to the BJP.

The situation is giving many Tamil Nadu leaders sleepless nights. Both Jayalalitha and the BJP have nothing more to gain from their current allies. The writing on the wall is beginning to be clear.

**Jaya no to NDA:** Jayalalitha today dismissed reports about her party joining NDA, downplayed ties with Congress and remained non-committal on aligning with the People's Front, reports PTI from New Delhi.

"There is no truth in such reports. There is no proposal to join NDA", the AIADMK chief said hours after she had a meeting with Atal Bihari Vajpayee. Talking to reporters after a meeting with Sonia Gandhi, she said it was "purely a courtesy call". Asked about reports about her party joining the People's Front, she said: "There has been some talk about it... We are in constant touch".



Jayalalitha and Sonia Gandhi at the latter's residence in New Delhi on Tuesday.

ARVIND YADAV/HINDUSTAN TIMES

# Plot to kill Tehelka chief foiled, 6 held

## Accused were hired by ISI, say police

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Six alleged hitmen who were planning to kill tehelka.com chief Tarun Tejpal and the website's editor, Aniruddha Bahal, were arrested by the Delhi police on Saturday. The police claimed that the accused, allegedly hired by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), were carrying a sizeable cache of sophisticated weapons.



Tarun Tejpal

The police said the ISI was "hoping to create political instability in India by killing Mr Tejpal and Mr Bahal." The tehelka website had recently exposed murky arms deals in India through an undercover operation.

The accused were identified by the police as Bhupinder Tyagi alias Avdesh Tyagi, Raj Kumar, Dinesh Tyagi, Rakesh, Anil and Ombir. Bhupinder Tyagi, a notorious criminal from Bihar who is allegedly involved in numerous killings and heinous crimes, was their leader.

"We have recovered two AK-47 rifles, two Chinese pistols, a bullet-proof jacket, counterfeit currency, photographs of the intended targets and a site map of Tehalka's Soami Nagar office," special commissioner (intelligence) S. Ramakrishnan said. Officials said that the gang had another eight AK-47s stashed away in various hideouts.

The police, who were tipped off about the murder plan by central intelligence agencies, assigned the job of tracking the hired killers to the special cell.

The special cell sleuths managed to identify a Bihar-based criminal,

who was using the assumed name of "Modi" and ran his operations from Nepal, as the person orchestrating the plan.

Investigations revealed that Modi was in constant touch with a Bawana resident, Raj Kumar alias Kapoor, and his associates Rakesh, Anil and Ombir, all residents of Delhi. While Rakesh ran a small spare parts shop in Poothkalan village, the other two were unemployed.

### Security will be beefed up for Tejpal

NEW DELHI: Security for Tarun Tejpal, editor-in-chief of news portal Tehelka.com, is being beefed up following the disclosure of an ISI-sponsored attempt to kill him and his colleague Anirudh Bahal, a senior Delhi police official said here on Sunday. Special commissioner of police (intelligence) S. Ramakrishnan told reporters that the security of Mr Tejpal, who already has Z-category security, would have to be further strengthened in the wake of arrests of six persons who were hired by the ISI to eliminate him and the portal's editor (investigation) Mr Bahal. (PTI)

Modi, whose true identity turned out to be Bhupinder Tyagi, was found to be making regular visits to the capital in a Tata Safari. It was also learnt that the suspects would be travelling to Delhi in the same vehicle on Saturday.

Around 4.30 p.m. on Saturday, the vehicle was intercepted at Mukarba Chowk in northwest Delhi and its six occupants overpowered. Bhupinder was reportedly carrying a loaded Chinese

made .30 pistol. Other weapons were allegedly concealed in a bag.

During interrogation, Bhupinder told the police that he belonged to Uttar Pradesh and had started his criminal career in 1993. Last November, he was introduced to a Nepalese underworld don by one of his associates. A month later, Bhupinder and an accomplice, Ramesh Rai alias Sahi, went to Beerganj in Nepal, where they set up a base.

Rai married a Nepalese girl and rented a house in Beerganj. Soon, other gang members, including Rajesh Yadav, Subhash Pandey, Vinod Pandey and Hare Ram Singh, also shifted there.

In January this year, Bhupinder again met the Nepalese don in Kathmandu, where he was introduced to an ISI agent, code-named "Jain" who asked him whether he was prepared to work for the agency. In return Jain promised Bhupinder large sums of money and sophisticated weapons.

In April, Bhupinder was directed by Jain to kill Mr Tejpal and Mr Bahal. He was promised Rs 10 lakh and given weapons to execute his job. Jain later gave him 10 AK-47s, 11 pistols and a large number of bullets. "The deal was that Bhupinder could keep the weapons once the job was done," special cell DCP Ashok Chand said.

A few weeks later, Bhupinder came to Delhi to carry out groundwork for the hit job. He spent the next few weeks travelling between Nepal and Delhi and finalising his plans.

Bhupinder planned to kill Mr Tejpal while he was driving to work from his house. His team of six killers were to use two stolen vehicles to intercept Mr Tejpal and gun him down.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

7 MAY 2001

'KEEN ON COOPERATING WITH CONGRESS'

# Sonia's charges baseless: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 29. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said there was "nothing objectionable" in his closing remarks on the last day of the budget session of Parliament on April 27 which could have provoked the angry remarks made by the Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, immediately afterwards.

While trying to sound conciliatory — "I am pained by the emotional outburst... I personally look forward to a constructive dialogue and cooperation with Ms. Sonia Gandhi..." — he did not let go of another opportunity to hit out at her saying "such episodes lower the prestige of Parliament." On Friday, winding up the budget session, the Prime Minister charged that never in his 40-year political career had he been forced to hear the kind of abuses hurled at him as was done by the Opposition during the session. The implication was that Ms. Gandhi had failed in controlling her party MPs or that she may have even encouraged them to use harsh words against the Prime Minister.

Immediately after the session was adjourned sine die by the Speaker, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, had walked towards Ms. Gandhi, presumably to exchange pleasantries. However, Ms. Gandhi in an emotional

outburst charged that Mr. Vajpayee as the Leader of the Opposition earlier had "crucified" her husband, Rajiv Gandhi, and "rubbed" her mother-in-law, Indira Gandhi, and that even now she and her children were being abused daily.

## Govt. not vindictive

In his statement today, Mr. Vajpayee virtually disowned all that the Bharatiya Janata Party had done and said when he was the Leader of the Opposition. "As the Leader of the Opposition, and even when I was an ordinary MP, I always stood up to stop the use of derogatory and unbecoming remarks in Parliament." He also denied that his Government had been vindictive towards her and her family, saying her charge on this count was "baseless".

The now soft now hard stance adopted by Mr. Vajpayee was evident throughout the one-page statement. While he appealed to her for cooperation and said "this unfortunate episode" should be "put behind us" and that both the treasury and opposition benches should "make a new beginning," he also admonished her for expressing her anger in the way she did adding the episode had lowered the prestige of Parliament.

"I refute Ms. Gandhi's charge that we in the BJP allowed this kind of abusive language to be used against Indiraji and Rajivji, which several Congress MPs used

against me in the House," was the Prime Minister's plaint.

Although those who heard the Prime Minister on the last day of the session found him unusually combative, he himself clearly felt he had done no wrong. "I had said nothing objectionable in my concluding session-end speech in the Lok Sabha. I fail to understand how my speech provoked such an angry and personalised outburst from the Leader of the Opposition."

The entire tone of the statement was that he was completely innocent of any wrongdoing, the fault lay with Ms. Gandhi for her display of emotion and anger.

## Privatisation vital

Earlier in the day, the Prime Minister addressed a gathering of the vaishya community (trading community) where he spoke of the need to go forward with economic reforms. Privatisation was the need of the hour for the times had changed and it was not the Government's job to be in business.

The meeting was organised by Mr. Naresh Aggarwal, Uttar Pradesh Power Minister, and Mr. Rajnath Singh, Chief Minister, was present. It was meant to be a show of strength of the trading castes and Mr. Aggarwal said these castes expected better representation in the State and at the Centre.

**Doublespeak, say Cong.: Page 13**



# Sonia livid over PM remarks

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, April 27

PARLIAMENT TODAY adjourned sine die on the same sour note underlying the NDA Government's fragile truce with the main Opposition party throughout the truncated second leg of the Budget session.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee provoked anger in the Congress bench with his concluding speech in the Lok Sabha, in which he hinted that the Congress, so keen on his resignation over the helka, might find itself at the receiving end of some equally uncomfortable questions. Probity and morality in public life were bipartisan values applicable to both sides, he said.

The Prime Minister railed at the Opposition for paralysing Parliament on the thelka issue.

"We cannot have parallel probes by a judicial commission and a JPC. The question of a parliamentary probe has to be decided by the House after a discussion. We did say that we have an open mind on the JPC question. But an open mind does not mean an empty mind," he said.

The tenor and substance of his veiled warnings were not lost on Sonia Gandhi. But she saved her outburst till Speaker G M C Balayogi adjourned the House. The Congress chief gave full vent to her anger when an unsuspecting L K Advani walked across to exchange customary pleasantries with her.

The Home Minister was visibly taken aback when an agitated Sonia Gandhi reminded him that she had gone out of her way to ensure that the session ended on a positive note. But Vajpayee had been unrelenting

in his criticism and had been attacking her party again.

"My husband was crucified in the House by all of you. My mother-in-law was insulted by your people day in and day out. Even now, they are calling me and my children thieves," the Congress chief said in a rare emotional outburst. "We will not take all this lying down. This will not go without a fight," she warned.

Countering Vajpayee's criticism that Congress had stalled the House, she asked the Home Minister, "Was the House stalled for the first time? Was it not stalled when he (Vajpayee) was Leader of the Opposition?" She also told Advani to recall the expletives his partymen had used when Vajpayee was Leader of the Opposition.

Determined not to give up, she

carried her protest outside the House.

Asked for comments on Vajpayee's argument that a JPC and a judicial probe could not go together, she said: "This is utter rubbish. There have been numerous instances in the past of parallel JPC and judicial probes."

Terming the Prime Minister's concluding remarks "unfortunate", Congress Deputy Leader Madhavrao Scindia said Vajpayee had no right to lecture his party: "His statement has further embittered the atmosphere," he added.

Reacting to Vajpayee's charge that the Congress had disrupted Parliament, Scindia said the Prime Minister should not forget that his party had stalled the House for 19 days on the Maruti issue (in the Seventies), for 18 days on Bofors and 13 days on the Sukh Ram issue.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

28 APR 2001

# Vajpayee to talk to Sonia

**LUCKNOW, APRIL 15.** A day after the Congress boycotted the all-party meet called to resolve the impasse in Parliament over the Tehelka issue, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said he would talk to the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, to ensure smooth functioning of the House when the Budget session resumes tomorrow. "I had spoken to Ms. Sonia Gandhi while I was in Teheran and would speak to her again and try to persuade her to help run Parliament smoothly," Mr. Vajpayee told reporters at the Raj Bhavan here.

The Congress president, in her capacity as Leader of the Opposition, could help in ensuring proceedings in the Lok Sabha go smoothly, Mr. Vajpayee said. Recalling his own tenure as Leader of the Opposition, the Prime Minister said he had never allowed continued disruption of proceedings of the House.

On the allegations levelled by the Janata Party leader, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, against Ms. Sonia Gandhi, Mr. Vajpayee said preliminary scrutiny was being done at the Ministry level. "The scrutiny would ascertain whether the allegations should be probed further or not."

## More teeth for SEBI

The Prime Minister expressed concern over the stock market crash and a series of share scams and said the Government was contemplating "concrete steps", including giving more teeth to the market regulator, Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), to check the malady.

On the recent scams involving financial institutions, including the Century Consultants in Lucknow, he said effective steps in this direction were being taken to prevent recurrence of such malpractices. "The Government is working on enacting a legislation



The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, with the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh (to his left), and the NDA convener, Mr. George Fernandes, and the Union Minister, Mr. Sharad Yadav, at an NDA rally in Lucknow on Sunday.

— Photo: Subir Roy.

in this connection and we may bring it in the current session of Parliament." — PTI, UNI

## Follow democratic methods, Cong. told

By Our Special Correspondent

**LUCKNOW, APRIL 15.** The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today challenged the Opposition to bring a no-confidence motion against his Government and defeat him on the floor of the Lok Sabha instead of demanding his resignation on the Tehelka issue. "If I fail to prove the majority of my Government in Parliament, I will quit," he said, disapproving of the manner in which the Tehelka expose had been made a political issue by the Opposition parties.

Addressing an NDA-organised rally at the Lakshman Mela grounds on the banks of the Gomti, the Prime Minister said the Congress threat that it would not allow Parliament to function unless his Government resigned had

no democratic sanction. His Government was accountable to Parliament. The Congress could have a trial of strength in the House tomorrow. There were democratically accepted norms to remove a government.

He said the Congress had lost all hope of returning to power through democratic means but was still craving for power. He had been defeated in the House

earlier by only one vote and his Government had quit.

The Prime Minister described corruption as a 'rashtra rog' (national disease), and a very serious issue which the Government was addressing. It was he who had agreed to the principle that even the post of Prime Minister should be brought under the ambit of the Lok Pal. This was proof that his Government seriously wanted to tackle the problem.

The Congress attitude was, however, improper. There was a long list of corruption charges during its 50-year rule. In the past, when such cases came to light, the Opposition demanded a debate and a statement in Parliament to which the Congress never agreed. Now, the Government was prepared for a debate and a judicial enquiry had also been ordered. But the Congress was insisting that it wanted only the resignation of the Government.

The rally was addressed by several NDA leaders, including its convener, Mr. George Fernandes, Union Ministers, Mr. Sharad Yadav, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan and Dr. Murl Manohar Joshi, and the MDMK leader, Mr. Vaiko.

**Cong. 'undermining' security needs: Page 13**

## 'Bofors case progressing'

**LUCKNOW, APRIL 15.** The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said the case relating to kickbacks in the Bofors gun deal was progressing and Congress "may find itself in the dock". "Bofors case pragati par hai, aur Congress party kathghare mein khari ho sakti hai" (The Bofors case is in progress and the Congress may find itself in the dock), he told a press conference here.

"We are not doing anything from our side, but it is just a coincidence that some corruption cases have started progressing." Mr. Vajpayee denied that the NDA's offensive against the Congress was to counter the Tehelka expose. "Corruption in the Congress is not a new thing." — PTI

The tehelka is about politics, not corruption

# Eyes wide shut

**T**HE former Supreme Court judge probing the Tehelka disclosures may, at best, end up naming the guilty. But that will not serve the real purpose. What has been exposed is the alarming extent to which corruption has corroded the system. It is not one set of people, one set of politicians or one set of activists that is to blame. It is society, which has stopped differentiating right from wrong and moral from immoral.

Corruption does not raise eyebrows any more. The dishonest are not shunned, as was the case for many years after Independence. Their parties are now the toast of the town, with top bureaucrats attending and newspapers publishing photographs of the invitees in a bid to promote circulation.

The rot runs so deep that the limited investigation is not even sufficient to scratch the surface. If the nation is to preserve the fundamental values of a clean society, every person — be it a public functionary or a private citizen — must display a degree of vigilance and willingness to sacrifice. Some dramatic moves are necessary.

In the late fifties and early sixties, when the country was tormented by regional chauvinism, Jawaharlal Nehru convened a National Integration Conference to discuss how to bring about emotional unity. The conference was divided into many committees, which submitted their reports on the line of action to be taken.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee should have torn a leaf out of Nehru's book and initiated steps to hold a similar conference to discuss the various facets of corruption which are now part and parcel of our present-day administration and politics. Key leaders, top academicians, retired bureaucrats and others should be invited, as was done by Nehru. The nation's eyes were then fixed on disunity, some 40 years ago. The point of focus now should be corruption and the steps needed to cleanse the system.

What has happened, in fact, is the

politicisation of the Tehelka allegations. The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) sees the move as part of an effort to dislodge it from power. The Opposition, particularly the Congress, feels it is a godsend, an opportunity to pull down the NDA, without having the necessary numbers in the Lok Sabha. Both sides have failed to fathom the disillusionment among the people. Both are missing the real point. Political parties can still meet to discuss joint measures to weed out corruption from public life. The manner in which they have faced the problem indicates that they are not serious about corrective steps.

Not long ago, the Vohra Committee report

committee has made it toothless. The CVC cannot even oversee the investigation or disposal of cases, which it has itself entrusted to the CBI.

An independent review committee of secretaries to the Government of India had recommended that the superintendence of the CBI should vest with the CVC. It was a fair suggestion, given how politicised the CBI has become over the

years. It is still a wing of the Department of Personnel in the Home Ministry. The parliamentary committee did not even discuss how the CBI could be rendered independent of political pressures, much less create an independent agency which could work



KULDIP NAYYAR

**The NDA sees the Tehelka episode as an effort to dislodge it from power. The Opposition feels it is an opportunity to pull down the NDA. Both are missing the real point**

pointed to the nexus between politicians and the underworld. Some politicians were mentioned in the report. The then government not only held back the names but also some of the contents of the report. Of course, the committee's conclusions were never pursued. The entire effort by the Intelligence Bureau, the CBI and RAW, spread over several months, was forgotten like a bad dream. The Tehelka expose may go the same way, except that Parliament may have a discussion on it after April 16 when the two Houses meet after the recess.

One, however, wonders to what extent Parliament is willing to go to combat corruption. What has emerged from the parliamentary select committee on the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) Bill does not inspire optimism. Instead of giving more powers to the CVC, the

for the CVC and the machinery set up after the Lok Pal Bill.

It is significant that the committee has restored the single director, which the Supreme Court had struck down in the hawala case. What it means is that the government's prior permission will be required before moving against persons of the rank of joint secretary or above. That the Vajpayee cabinet has gone back to the old system even after the Tehelka episode is really unfortunate. The government may once again shield delinquent and pliable officials. Public servants who carry out the errands of political masters may go scot-free since the Central government will not give permission to prosecute them. There is already some sort of quid pro quo between dishonest politicians and corrupt government employees. They

reportedly make money on transactions and share it with their political bosses who keep their eyes shut. Already, the ethical consideration inherent in public behaviour has become dim and, in many cases, is beyond the mental grasp of public functionaries. The government's prior permission to move against senior officials will only aggravate the situation.

It's not as if most MPs are taking any stringent measures against corruption. They are supposed to submit annually the details of assets owned by them and their spouses. Only a handful do so. Political parties should consider publishing details of the assets of their members in their official journals. While talking about corruption, it goes without saying that if the electoral system is purged of illegal money, clean elections are possible. Many committees have met in the past to suggest ways and means to do so. One such committee, which Jayaprakash Narayan headed, made useful proposals.

Finally, let me say a word on journalistic ethics. Tehelka did a wonderful job. But a few lapses, like an apology by one of its correspondents, raised some doubts on other aspects. A journalist should do such a thorough job that no one can pick holes. Otherwise, the entire story would lose its credibility. We have the Press Council to bring to light the mistakes the print media makes. Readers have come to look to the body as the custodian of their right to have a free, fearless and purposeful newspaper.

With the advent of TV and dotcoms, the Press Council needs to be restructured. The print media does not have the kind of impact — as was seen from the Tehelka tapes — TV networks do. The Press Council should be converted into a Media Council so that it embraces different aspects of information. The Media Council, too, should draw member from the different media engaged in collecting and purveying information. The own peers will judge them — their act of omission and commission.

INDIAN EXPRESS

10 APR 2001

## CONG. DEMAND FOR JPC PROBE REJECTED

# Uncertainty haunts Parliament

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 17.** After the partial disruption of Parliament today — question hour was allowed to proceed smoothly — there is continued uncertainty not only in relation to the functioning of Parliament for the rest of the budget session, but also on the length of the session. It seems that the Rashtriya Janata Dal has decided to raise the Tehelka issue strongly tomorrow and force yet another adjournment.

There were reports today that if the stalemate continued, the Government's contingency plan was to push through the Finance Bill early next week and then adjourn

the House *sine die*. Several MPs, cutting across the political divide, were talking about it, but some expressed reservations — they felt forcibly pushing through the Finance Bill without a discussion would not bring applause for the Government either.

It seems neither the main Opposition party, Congress, nor the Government has displayed consistency.

After the Tehelka sting, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, had offered any type of probe the Opposition wanted. But today when the Congress lowered the pitch by dropping its earlier demand for the

Prime Minister's resignation and asking for a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe into suspicions of shady defence deals, the Government simply rejected the demand leading to adjournment. At best, it wants the House to decide after a debate. But if that principle were to be uniformly followed, every government would be able to reject any probe into any irregularity, no matter how serious, for every government has a majority in Parliament.

### Govt. may exploit chinks in Opposition armour

The Government is keen on exploiting the obvious differences

that have cropped up between the Congress and the Left (the two parties are facing each other in electoral battles in Kerala and West Bengal), and the Congress and the Samajwadi Party (the standoff between the two has continued since 1998), and is hopeful of isolating the Congress.

On the other hand, the Congress is keen on seizing the political opportunity to make Tehelka the main issue in the Assembly elections.

The RJD, which has been suffering as a result of the numerous cases slapped on its leading light, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, is more keen than even the Congress to make the Government go down on its knees. But the Left, which does not want to be seen to be lukewarm on this front, has its problem in being seen to be in the Congress camp.

The Telugu Desam Party's parliamentary leader, Mr. Yerran Naidu, has made it clear that his party would support any probe into the Tehelka expose, but the rider is (and that suits the Government) the party is not sure whether a second probe can be or should be launched when a judicial inquiry is already on.

It seems the Government is also keen on ending the session quickly — using the stalemate as an excuse — so that its leaders, especially the Prime Minister and the Home Minister, are free for electoral campaigning for the Assembly elections in five States.

## Preconditions undemocratic: PM

By Neena Vyas

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 17.** The BJP today decided to adopt a tough posture on the Congress demands on the Tehelka issue at its parliamentary party meeting, well before the two Houses met. This was later reflected in the proceedings in Parliament where the BJP firmly rejected the main Opposition party's demand for setting up a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) probe into Tehelka disclosures.

Sensing that the Congress was somewhat isolated, the BJP decided to try and push the Congress into a corner. Chairing the meeting and addressing party MPs, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, claimed that the Government had made "every effort" to get Parliament to run smoothly.

He noted that the Congress stance of wanting the House to run came with certain conditions; this was "undemocratic and inappropriate". No preconditions on allowing Parliament to function would be accepted or tolerated. The Prime Minister said that

except the Congress all other parties were in favour of a smooth conduct of Parliament. He said that any demand related to Tehelka, setting up a JPC or ordering a CBI inquiry, could be made during the debate in the House, and the House could decide what it wanted.

Immediately after the Tehelka scandal broke out last month, the Government had offered to set up any type of probe or inquiry acceptable to the Opposition; today this was more than altered when the Prime Minister said that the House should decide.

The mood at the BJP parliamentary party was that the Government cannot and should not be seen accepting all the "conditions" placed by the Congress for allowing the House to function. The BJP also hoped that the Congress would "see reason" and allow Parliament to debate the issue, Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra, party spokesperson, told reporters later. Many MPs spoke, and the view that emerged was that the Congress should not be allowed to get away with 'hullarbaz' (creating commotion).

THE HINDU

18 APR 2000

# A blurry political vision

By Malini Parthasarathy

*There are several contradictions in the Congress party's strategic approach that militate against its ability to provide an effective resistance to the BJP's current dominance of the political field.*

ON ALL accounts, these are dismal times for the ruling BJP-led NDA coalition. Television screens in middle class homes across the country carry endless replays of incriminating footage of an audacious sting operation which caught redhanded leading politicians of the ruling combine greedily grasping bundles of rupee notes intended to grease the way to lucrative arms deals. The sheen is clearly wearing off the glossy image assiduously peddled by the ruling establishment — that of a rapidly modernising India being taken confidently forward on a higher growth trajectory by a reform-minded Vajpayee administration striding purposefully ahead. The Tehelka exposes have effectively demolished the carefully cultivated myth of the Vajpayee administration being "cleaner and more efficient" than the previous regimes, thus diluting much of its appeal to the middle classes. Another major contradiction that makes a palpable mockery of the BJP-NDA's highly prized image of itself as a harbinger of economic revival and modernisation is the sharpening and painful polarisation currently taking place in India's civil society. The minorities are becoming more and more alienated by the aggressive and relentlessly bruising thrusts of the majoritarian Hindutva campaign that continues unabated and with the obvious patronage of leading members of the Vajpayee administration.

This probably represents the most opportune psychological moment for the leading Opposition party, the Congress(I), to step out of the shadows and to make an earnest attempt to recapture the imagination of an electorate that was drawn away by the BJP's false promise of a new dawn. It might also be the right moment for the party to invest all its energies in a project to restore the necessary emphasis to the political ethos of secular governance and the upholding of cultural pluralism. Of course, Congress party loyalists would argue that the party is indeed doing just that and that it has been tirelessly crusading against the Sangh Parivar's campaign to make India into a Hindu Rashtra. But in that case, why has the party been unable to recapture the high ground in the political arena?

Today, the Congress party has failed to reinvent itself in a manner that could be convincing. It has not yet been able to make a positive impression on the consciousness of an electorate evidently still

very disappointed with the years of Congress governance which had seemed to provide very little improvement in the quality of life for most people. Thus, despite the fact that the party is saying all the right things, its rhetoric sounds cliched, stale and unappealing, as indeed does its image continue to be lacklustre, leaving the BJP's present grip on the polity virtually unchallenged. Would it be possible in these circumstances for the Congress to offer a credible and authoritative challenge to the NDA's present dominance of the political arena?

There are several contradictions in the Congress party's strategic approach that militate against its ability to provide an effective resistance to the BJP's current dominance of the political field. Unless these are ironed out, it does seem that the Congress will have a long and arduous way to go before it can come back seriously into the reckoning. The first hurdle is the obvious ambivalence in its stance on crucial issues that undermine the credibility of its avowals that it will offer a governing dispensation that would mark a healthy departure from the present. The most glaring example of the Congress' vacillation on sensitive issues was the stance delineated on the Ayodhya controversy in the political resolution adopted at its AICC session in Bangalore a few weeks ago. In a position virtually indistinguishable from the NDA's official stance, the Congress party has said that it was "not against the building of a Ram mandir at Ayodhya" and that it was only "always against any such attempt being made by demolishing the Babri Masjid. The Congress remains committed to this course." This formulation contains very little outrage against the barbarity of the demolition and has also not taken into account the need to make amends to the Muslim community for this horrific injustice. What might have enhanced the appeal of the Congress party's declaration that it was opposed to the BJP's attempt to "safronise" India, would have been for the party to make it absolutely clear that it would have no truck with Hindu majoritarianism as a political phenomenon. In

the absence of any honest soul-searching which would acknowledge the party's own mistakes in relation to the appeasement of the Hindutva campaign, as reflecting in Rajiv Gandhi's allowing the shilanyas on the disputed site and Mr. Narasimha Rao's own failure to prevent the catastrophe of December 1992, the party's affirmations of a vigorous upholding of the tradition of secular governance lack credibility.

Another instance of the party's reluctance to take a step away from the beaten path is its stance on Kashmir and talks with Pakistan. While calling for a restoration of a dialogue with Pakistan, the Congress party has killed that suggestion in the very same breath by warning the BJP not to "forget and compromise the fundamental consideration that the internal and external tracks of the dialogue must not be mixed up." In what constitutes an unrealistic and unimaginative response, the party has made nonsense of its own pious call for a dialogue by completely ruling out any scope for such a dialogue by imposing this precondition. This in effect renders the party's policy position as virtually indistinguishable from that of the BJP.

Apart from the picture of a party still unable to tear itself away from old shibboleths is the visible confusion in its attitude to economic reforms. It would seem logical for shrewd party managers seeking to entice the middle classes back to the Congress to prefer to highlight the Congress party's original patent or copyright on the reforms process in this country. But ironically, the party appears to have been gripped by a fear of being perceived as the "B team of the BJP" and as a result its espousal of the reform process, as reflected in its economic resolution at the AICC session, is heavily laced with caveats. The result of this excessive caution is a document that is unlikely to appeal to potential voters in the reform-minded constituency in the middle classes. On the other hand, lacking as it does any real critique of the fundamental arguments in favour of the reform process, it is unlikely to be seen by the poorer sections as a brief on their be-

half either. The various formulations that have emerged from the party's Bangalore conclave do not suggest any profound introspection of the sort required if the Congress is to mount a serious challenge to the BJP and the NDA. It is also evident that little serious thought has been given to the implications of entering into various electoral alliances as has been done in Tamil Nadu and is being done in West Bengal. In Tamil Nadu, an alliance of which the Congress is a partner which includes the LTTE-friendly PMK puts severe strain on the Congress party's credibility, bringing into question as it does, the sincerity of its avowals that it will have nothing to do with political forces friendly to the LTTE. In West Bengal, an electoral understanding with the Trinamul Congress, politically rewarding as it might be in the context of State politics, puts at risk the larger understanding with the Left parties whom the Congress has identified as crucial allies in the national arena in the battle against the BJP-led NDA.

In what might seem curiously outdated and out of spirit with these times, when new leaders are emerging outside the Congress fold and are seen to be gaining considerable stature in the national arena, the only names that are repeatedly hailed within the Congress pantheon are those of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Instead of strategically projecting other leaders in the party who might have potential electoral appeal such as the Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Karnataka, Mr. Digvijay Singh and Mr. S. M. Krishna, or giving Dr. Manmohan Singh — whose tenure as Finance Minister marked the start of economic reforms in this country — due weightage as a symbol of the Congress party's commitment to economic reforms and modernisation, and thus appealing to the imagination of the electorate by offering it a wider choice of leaders from within the party, the Congress party remains a prisoner of its monolithic past.

The party and its present leader, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, must recognise that the party cannot have a real future unless it puts its past behind it and moves decisively to acquire a political identity that is more compatible with the realities and challenges of the present moment. Otherwise, there is little hope of the Congress being able to lead an effective challenge to the BJP's stewardship of this country, much less to resist the ominous implications of that stewardship in terms of its polarising impact on civil society.

THE HINDU

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# The post-Tehelka scenario

By K. K. Katyal

*The threat to the Government's survival has receded but its credibility is badly dented and its longevity is now dependent on imponderables in the political arena.*

**T**HE POLITICAL turmoil, caused by the Tehelka expose, threw up many a question but only a few answers are available as of now, after a gap of three weeks. The Government and the National Democratic Alliance were badly shaken in the immediate aftermath of the startling episode and took time to gather their wits and to embark on damage containment. That was one reason for the delay for all the ramifications to be clear. The popular perception in the first instance — of a major threat to the survival of the Government — was not misplaced. The situation, after all, was pretty grim — the president of the main constituent of the ruling coalition, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, had to resign after he was shown in a vivid camera shot, accepting money from an "arms dealer", another constituent, the Trinamul Congress walked out of the alliance, the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, had to quit office and the head of the group, he belonged to, the Samata Party, Ms. Jaya Jaitley, found it hard to retain her post. All manner of pressures mounted from within and without. The Opposition, calling for the resignation of the Vajpayee Government, did not let Parliament function, while a section of the Sangh Parivar mounted an offensive against the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). The ruling side was slow in responding to the new scenario.

The pressures have, somewhat, subsided, enabling the Government to tide over the immediate crisis. However, the potential for trouble continued to be high. The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, no doubt, got a respite, but could he feel easy, with dangers lurking around? The ruling alliance, waking up to the sudden challenge, sought to put its act together, but have we heard the last word? On its part, the Opposition was caught up by the law of diminishing return, as it found the moral ground slipping from below its feet, because of its action in blocking parliamentary proceedings. There was no sign of a viable alternative emerging in the Opposition camp — and that was the biggest factor that helped the Government. This situation is unlikely to change in the near future. Despite the loss of two partners, the Trinamul Congress and the PMK,

the NDA has a lead of 20 over the combined Opposition. There is, however, a change in the quality of the Government's margin, which is composed of outside support from the Telugu Desam Party of the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu.

The threat to the Government's survival has, thus, receded but its credibility is badly dented and its longevity is now dependent on imponderables in the political arena. The public rally organised in the country's capital a week ago demonstrated the "staying-together" (unity may not be an appropriate word) of all the constituents. They have a shared vested interest — to stay in office. It is this glue that holds them together, not any principle or programme or ideology. As such, the alliance could not be invulnerable to sudden pressures and blackmail. Its opponents are on the lookout for weak spots in the combine and waiting for the "best" to happen.

The Opposition was keen on depriving the NDA of its biggest asset — the Prime Minister's image — but did not succeed. Its attack took various forms, as it sought to extend its campaign against those figuring in the Tehelka exposure, so as to cover Mr. Vajpayee. The parliamentary proceedings were interrupted to press the demand for the resignation of the Vajpayee Government. The Prime Minister's foster son-in-law, Mr. Ranjan Bhattacharya, was targeted because of his alleged role in government deals, in the power sector, going by the description of his role by Mr. Laxman in the Tehelka tapes.

The PMO, in particular the Principal Secretary, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, was criticised for exercising extra-constitutional authority and, thus, distorting the decision-taking process in regard to key matters. On these two counts, the Opposition found a strange ally in a section of the RSS and others in the Sangh Parivar. Their objections were, however, different.

The Opposition was keen on Mr. Vajpayee's ouster as head of the NDA in the

hope that the ruling combine and the Government would become an easy target without him. The RSS was interested only in containing Mr. Vajpayee — and felt that the removal of Mr. Mishra, was the most effective way to achieve that end. Hence the pointed attacks on the Principal Secretary — he was called arrogant, imperious, was accused of concentrating wide powers unto himself. They, it was known, saw him an obstacle in the pursuit of the narrow agenda of the parivar (as against that of the NDA) and were sore that Mr. Vajpayee could not be used as a "mukhota" (mask). Some of those in the RSS who took the PMO to task for its extra-constitutional role had themselves sought to influence decisions to suit their personal prejudices. A case in point was the part played by them in getting the recent ambassadorial changes undone. Mercifully, their role remained limited.

It is one thing to debate the merits and demerits of having a set-up like the PMO — which had had its origin in the initiative of the second Prime Minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and which continued to operate under his successors, belonging both to the Congress and non-Congress parties. Because of the very nature of this set-up, its senior functionaries are bound to be perceived to be exercising wide powers. It is perfectly in order to suggest in-built safeguards against the use of authority in excess of what was necessary for the job assigned to them. But this could be done while ensuring that the debate does not get mixed with personal factors or that this issue is not used for side-attacks on Mr. Vajpayee. Obviously, aware of the real intentions of the critics, the Prime Minister has no plans to oblige them.

One has to proceed on the premise that the present Government remains in position but it would not be correct to pretend that things are the same — both at the political and administrative levels. We are in for a period of fierce, sharp confrontation between the ruling side and the Op-

position. This, in turn, may affect legislative business. On two counts — one, a good part of Parliament's time may be taken up by partisan wrangles and, two, the Opposition may not be in a mood to accommodate the Government in the Rajya Sabha where the ruling combine, outnumbered as it is, could not secure the passage of controversial measures on its own. Within the ruling alliance, the Prime Minister's authority in his dealings with the allies is certain to be affected.

The outcome of the Assembly elections in five States, due to be held in May, would be the next occasion to assess the impact of the post-Tehelka developments on the Central Government. True, the BJP figures but marginally in the five cases and the poll result would, therefore, not be a verdict on it. But its major ally in Tamil Nadu, the DMK, is very much in the fray and its performance could not but have a bearing on the standing of the coalition at the Centre. A good showing by an ally in any State would be a boost and, conversely, a bad performance a setback. The Congress(I), however, has a presence in three cases, Kerala, Pondicherry and Assam, and the poll verdict would be important for it. The pre-poll strategy in the Opposition camp brought to the fore a major contradiction. The Congress(I) joined hands with Ms. Mamata Banerjee's party in West Bengal for a joint determined bid for the Left Front's ouster from power. This could not but cast a shadow over the moves for a joint anti-BJP front at the Centre.

In the administrative field, it may be a mixed fare. As already pointed out, major decisions requiring legislative approval may be thwarted. But there may be a step-up in executive-level decisions if only to show that it was business as usual. But here again crucial matters could get bogged in controversies — if it was BAI.CO last time, it could be Air India or Indian Airlines next. The bureaucracy, however, would tend to be cautious and the practice of passing on the buck to the next higher level may well grow, causing delays in the processing of issues — as also in implementation.

Physical survival ~~yes~~ but sans moral authority.

THE HINDU

4 APR 2001

# The 'secular' conceit

By M.S.S. Pandian

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**T**ORMENTORS OF Dalits, women-haters, swindlers of public money, foes of free speech, class enemies of the proletariat, kar sevaks of the past — all can now pass off as political radicals. This is an irresistible gift of Indian 'secularism' — a 'secularism' scripted and staged by India's parliamentary Left for the past decade. Conversion to 'secularism' — more precisely, to the 'secular' front, and in particular, during times of elections — cleanses one instantaneously of all sins of the past, present, and future. The prophets of 'secularism' are lying in wait with such a spiritual bonanza for everyone who, in any sane reckoning, would be treated as belonging to the political Right.

Take for instance, the two key constituents of the so-called secular front in Tamil Nadu — the PMK and the AIADMK. Dr. S. Ramdoss, who broke bread with the BJP till yesterday, has been welcomed into the 'secular' front without a moment's hesitation. Ms. J. Jayalalitha did not even think that she should consult her allies before accepting the PMK into the 'secular' fold. She knew that her comrades-in-arms would be just as delighted as herself to secularise the PMK. She was indeed right. The CPI declared the decision of the PMK 'bold'. The high priest of Indian 'secularism' and the general secretary of the CPI (M), Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, took a detour to Poes Garden, on his way to Thiruvananthapuram, to endorse the new-found 'secularism' of the PMK.

The new convert was not even asked to make a confession of his past sins. In fact, the obstinate convert pledged that he would continue to practice the sin of all sins — the communal sin. He declared, even as he walked out of the BJP-led NDA, that he had nothing to complain about the BJP. Truthful to his conviction, he continues to support the BJP at the Centre. In other words, he is half secular, half communal — chameleon-like. Ever merciful 'secularists' do not make much of such contradictions. After all, elections are round the corner.

If this is the credibility of the PMK in matters communal, its credibility in other matters is not any different. The Vanniars, led and incited by the PMK, are more or less exclusively responsible for the systematic attacks on the Dalits in the northern districts of Tamil Nadu. The poll violence unleashed by the PMK in the Chidambaram constituency in 1999 — which includ-

*If the 'secularists' then wept their hearts out at the plight of the Dalits, it was merely because the PMK was part of the NDA. Now that the PMK is 'secular', the 'secularists' do not take a moment to abandon the Dalits.*

ed the prevention of Dalits from voting by well-organised terror, arson of Dalit settlements, vandalisation of their properties — is a recent instance. If the 'secularists' then wept their hearts out at the plight of the Dalits, it was merely because the PMK was part of the NDA. Now that the PMK is 'secular', the 'secularists' do not take a moment to abandon the Dalits. In the self-righteous world of the 'secularists', Dalits are disposable.

Let us now turn to the track record of the AIADMK, secularism's bulwark in Tamil Nadu. One need not retell the well-known story of how the AIADMK rule under Ms. Jayalalitha programmatically communalised Tamil politics, and her decision to pull down the BJP-led Government at the Centre had nothing to do with anti-communalism. Even after the Left certified that the AIADMK is 'secular', Ms. Jayalalitha chose not to give up her irrepressible desire for the agenda of the Hindu Right all endorsed by the Left without a whimper of protest. Even the godless Mr. K. Veeramani of the Dravidar Kazhagam found it all secularism, pure and simple.

To reduce what Ms. Jayalalitha can offer to the Tamils to mere 'secularism' is to lack a sense of history. But for the feigned amnesia of the 'secularists' a la CPI and CPI (M) — feigned, because they claim history matters to them — everyone else who has even the least concern for the people of Tamil Nadu knows that any 'secular' rule led by the AIADMK would, on its immediate trail, bring inconsolable suffering — both political and personal. Unprecedented looting of the public money, violent stifling of democratic dissent, and unrepentant anti-Dalit politics have been the bounty that the AIADMK rule offered to the people of the State. Things have changed, the Left claims. We know differently. The very story of how the Left has been reduced to pick up mutely and ingloriously single-digit seats at the feet of Ms. Jayalalitha tells us how things have not changed.

In all these, one unmistakably finds a pattern which is familiar. If in the past, the

parliamentary Left rendered communism a humourless joke in the very name of communism, now it is sweating it out to render secularism another humourless joke in the very name of secularism. Skills of the past are being employed remorselessly in a new climate.

There is another past which is equally at play — a past of single-agenda politics of the Left. By reducing the field of politics to singular oppositions — in the past, class vs. non-class, and now, communal vs. secular — the Left has denied and continues to deny any space to contest manifold oppressions of the marginalised based on caste, gender, language etc. Instances from the heydays of the Indian Left's 'class' politics would illustrate this. Take for example, caste. The Left is the last political formation in the post-colonial India to discover that there is something called caste and it matters to the most. When caste dawned on them, they resisted it. They worried relentlessly, what would come of 'class'. The victim of class is not merely caste-based equality. Gender is yet another instance. Today, instead of class, secularism is employed by the Left to elbow out the articulation of other identities based on different forms of oppressions.

The long wait in vain by Mr. R. Thirumavalavan, the State Organiser of the Dalit Panthers of India (DPI), for the Third Front to emerge, tells us how the 'secularism vs. communalism' divide is leaving by the wayside other issues of critical importance. Mr. Thirumavalavan is no political angel. He has of course chosen his own brand of political opportunism to end the upper caste monopoly over such opportunism. That story can wait for the present. When the 'secularists' inducted the PMK into the 'secular' front, his voice resonated with passion and reason. Who can deny the truth of his statement that 'a genuine fight against religious fundamentalism should attack casteism which is the basis of communalism'. The non-existing unity of the Hindus peddled by the Hindu Right is obviously a move to keep at bay the caste-based demand for equality. All the

same, his anguished cry asking the TMC, the CPI and the CPI(M) to 'understand the wounded feelings of the Dalits' fell on deaf ears. Along with the Left, Mr. G.K. Mooppanar of the TMC, who claimed in 1999 to have ushered in a 'new effort in Tamil Nadu's history' by aligning with the Dalits, chose the single-agenda 'secular' path — forcing the DPI into the hands of the NDA. Secularism as it is practised cannot engage with the needs of the religious minorities, the Dalits and similarly placed others, at the same time. That is the tragedy of single-agenda politics.

To open up a field of politics where multiple demands for justice and equality enunciated by different social groups can jostle together, is not to be enslaved by the commonsense that politics is the art of the possible. Politics as the art of the possible is so entrenched today that even self-proclaimed communists think that defamation suits can recover sullied honour. We need to think of political options as not given within the domain of parliamentary politics, but created in the crucible of grassroots mobilisation and creative political imagination, outside the mainstream.

We do have models of politics which self-consciously treated politics as the art of the impossible, and left behind great legacies of radicalism. The critique of religion — in particular Brahminical Hinduism — by Periyar E.V. Ramasamy is a case in point. In tirelessly propagating how religions inferiorised, here and now, different social segments such as women, lower castes, minor linguistic regions and those who perform physical labour, he brought in the open and addressed varied forms of oppressions simultaneously. His movement, thus, offered space for diverse sections of the marginalised at once in the heydays of nationalism which sought to keep on the backburner multiple demands for justice by projecting a fictive unity of the Indians in opposition to the British. These neglected models of politics have much to offer to our present which is dominated by single agenda exclusivism marked by radical pretence and rank opportunism. To reduce Periyar and others who attempted to do the impossible as a mere stick to beat the DMK, as is being done by the 'secularists' of Tamil Nadu, is to mortgage our future by denying ourselves a politics of radical inclusivity.

(The writer is currently a Visiting Professor at the University of Wisconsin-Madison.)

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

20 MAR 2013

# Opp gameplan to nail govt

CL MANOJ  
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March. 18. - The Opposition gameplan, contrary to its public posturing, appears to be against toppling the Vajpayee government immediately. Instead it wants to fight the coming Assembly elections in five states on the "defence scam" issue.

The Left and Congress, in perfect coordination over stalling Parliament proceedings, are inclined to keep the scam and the Vajpayee government alive till the Assembly elections (unless some dramatic developments bring down the government). They feel any "active and open cooperation" between the two to prop up an alternative at the Centre now will erode the credibility of their fight against each other for power in West Bengal and Kerala next month.

There are enough indications that despite Mr Vajpayee ordering a judicial probe and Mr George Fernandes being shown the door, the Opposition will stall Parliament proceedings till next week-end when the budget session goes into recess.

Issues like the re-election of Mr Fernandes as the NDA convenor, the RSS "seeing some sense" in the Tehelka exposure and the "inaction" against the "tainted" PMO officials will be used to stoke the fire. The Opposition plans to place the "scam" in the "people's court" seeking a verdict in the Assembly elections in five states.

The Opposition is also alert against the government making a lightning move in the form of Mr Vajpayee moving a confidence motion in the Lok Sabha. CPI-M general secretary Mr Harkishen Singh Surjeet, the key Opposition coordinator said "The Vajpayee government has been totally exposed before the nation. Instead of moving a confidence motion, the Prime Minister should resign and seek a verdict from the people." The Opposition gameplan also includes discrediting the Vajpayee government, and more so the Sangh Parivar, which, many of them claim, "have been using the stint in the government to penetrate many vital social and political areas".

The Opposition now plans to focus its attack on the Sangh Parivar's most traditional and zealously-guarded planks - nationalism and patriotism. "The Sangh Parivar, especially the RSS and the BJP, have been giving sermons on nationalism and patriotism. Here the government is deep in a defence scam that has damaged national security. Even a BJP president and an RSS trustee have been caught in the scam. This shows the true colours of their patriotism," quipped Mr Surjeet who held another round of talks with many Opposition leaders.

The Opposition feels if they keep chipping at the credibility of the government till the Assembly elections, it will make the allies more sceptical about continuing in the NDA and give them the much-needed time, besides a "hot" election issue.

The real toppling bid and the troublesome exercise of propping up an alternative, they feel, could be launched in right earnest only thereafter.

THE STATESMAN

19 MAR 2001



# PRESSURE ON PM TO QUIT

BY SEEMA MUSTAFA

New Delhi, March 16: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee is under tremendous pressure to resign. In a desperate bid to gain time he has ordered a judicial inquiry into the Tehelka revelations but has been virtually left alone by the BJP and the RSS to defend the PMO. There has not been a single official word from the BJP in defence of principal secretary Brajesh Mishra and others in the PMO who have come under direct attack from the allies and the Opposition.

The Tehelka revelations have divided the allies with the Samata Party now leading the attack against the Prime Minister's men, including principal secretary Brajesh Mishra, economic adviser N.K. Singh and son-in-law Ranjan Bhattacharya. Senior leaders close to former defence minister George Fernandes have openly threatened to withdraw support unless action is taken against them. Two Samata Party MPs, Mr Prabhunath Singh and Mr Raghunath Jha, told reporters in Parliament earlier on Friday that both Mr Brajesh Mishra and Mr N.K. Singh should be removed immediately since their names had been clearly mentioned in the Tehelka tapes. "George Fernandes ko bali ka bakra banaya gaya hai, asal doshi to" **Turn to Page 2**



THE AFTERMATH: Bharatiya Janata Party and Congress MPs clash outside Parliament House in New Delhi on Friday. (AP)



TROUBLED WATERS: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee meets former defence minister George Fernandes at his residence in New Delhi on Friday. Mr Fernandes resigned on Thursday after mounting pressure over the tehelka expose. (Reuters)

## Vajpayee goes on TV to order inquiry by judge

BY OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 16: The government on Friday decided to set up a one-member commission of inquiry to probe the allegations made in the Tehelka tapes even as Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee expressed serious concern over the spread of corruption in public life. The commission is to be headed by a serving or retired judge of the Supreme Court.

In his televised address to the nation, Mr Vajpayee stressed on the need for urgent reforms to cleanse the "system," warning that the Tehelka revelations were "a wake-up call." The Prime Minister said, "In an important sense, what has come into view goes beyond security, the ease with which persons posing as arms merchants gained access to our defence personnel and politicians shows how far the cancer has spread." He also announced the government's decision to set up an inquiry commission.

Meanwhile, the Army said a lieutenant-general who is a director-general at Army Headquarters, and two major-generals will begin the court of inquiry from March 19 into the alleged involvement of senior officers in shady defence deals reported by tehelka.com.

The court of inquiry was constituted on Thursday evening following a meeting between the Army Chief, vice-chief and an adjutant-general who looks after discipline and vigilance.

An Army spokesman, confirming that the names of the members of the court of **Turn to Page 2**

### SOUNDBITES



**George Fernandes**  
Ex-defence minister

*If you wanted my head it should have been in Parliament, not on the street or through the media... I feel very hurt by Ms Banerjee's decision...*

**It's camera trick, says R.K. Gupta**

New Delhi: Raj Kumar Gupta, who was shown by the Tehelka tapes as the person bragging about his clout with NDA ministers, on Friday denied that he was ever involved in any defence deals. "Tehelka is nothing but a camera trick. They are playing a dirty game. This is nothing but a front organisation of arms dealers and other vested interests. If I have done any such wrong... I am prepared to be shot in full public view..." he said. (UNI)



**Ghulam Nabi Azad**  
AICC member

*There is no other option before the NDA government but to resign.*



**K.R. Narayanan**  
President

*Materialism and human greed has taken over the world.*

**No more tapes: Tehelka chief**

New Delhi: Tehelka.com said on Friday it was not coming out with any further tapes. "We are not coming out with any more tapes," Tehelka chief Tarun Tejpal said. "We have nothing more," he said when asked if they had information about any other deals or involving other names. (PTI)



**Uma Bharati**  
Sports minister

*George is an honest man. He has shown high morality by tendering his resignation. Truth will come out soon. We are unhappy that such an honest minister had to resign. But he has shown morality.*

### INSIDE

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- George uses two MPs to train guns on PMO
- Differences in JD(U) over statement
- Jyoti Basu will not be PM even if NDA falls, says CPM
- NDA faces disintegration in Bihar

### Home ministry to give reporter legal notice

New Delhi, March 16: The Union home ministry is issuing a legal notice to a reporter of tehelka.com asking him either to retract or face the consequences for his statement putting the Union home ministry in a scandal pertaining to border fencing.

"We have vetted the legal notice by the top law officers and the same will be sent soon to Mathew Samuel, who made the remarks against the home ministry at Thiruvananthapuram on March 14," top government sources told PTI. The legal notice to Mr Samuel comes soon after an apology issued by tehelka.com chief Tarun Tejpal dis- **Turn to Page 2**

## Tehelka tapes true, says RSS

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 16: The website tehelka.com received support from an unexpected quarter — the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh.

During the first day of the RSS' Pratinidhi Sabha, its spokesman, Mr M.G. Vaidya, said, "It appears prima facie that what tehelka.com has exposed is true and the government will have to take care of its administration."

The big brother of the Sangh Parivar demanded a thorough probe and punishment of the guilty. The RSS, however,

maintained that following the expose, the entire Cabinet need not resign. It also came to the rescue of Mr Vajpayee for the moment but indicated its displeasure with the "players" in the PMO. "How can you ask anyone to resign for the acts of his son-in-law," the RSS said. A section of RSS members were also of the opinion that PMO officials like Mr Brajesh Mishra and Mr N.K. Singh should be removed.

"After Bofors it was decided that there will be no middlemen in defence deals, but that has not been followed. It is unfortunate," Mr Vaidya said.

Mr Vaidya then censured former BJP

chief Bangaru Laxman by saying that he has "failed as a swayamsevak."

"We teach many students in our school. It is not necessary that everyone passes, some also fail," the RSS spokesperson said. He added that it was "the failure of the individual, and not the system." Asked whether Mr Laxman should be punished, the RSS leader said, "All those who are involved should be punished, irrespective of who they are."

The RSS tacitly supported the stepping down of defence minister George Fernandes when it reacted to the Opposition's **Turn to Page 2**

# Basu leads third front march back

Indian Political Scene 16/3 571

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 15. — The erstwhile third front came to life today. This time with fewer parties and a new name: Lok Morcha or People's Front for Mr Jyoti Basu and Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav, and Qaumi Morcha for Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet.

Mr Basu will be the morcha chairman and since Uttar Pradesh is an important state, its "most important", Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav will be the convener, Mr Surjeet said. The morcha partners are the Samajwadi Party, CPI-M, CPI, Forward Bloc, RSP and Janata Dal-S.

The *tehelka.com* quake, rocking the government, however, is not the front's immediate

concern. Any talk of the NDA government's exit and possible formation of a Lok Morcha government, with Mr Jyoti Basu, as the Prime Minister is "jumping the gun".

"... The matter will be considered when the situation arises," the former chief minister

said at a joint press conference held at Mr Yadav's home where front leaders, Mr AB Bardhan, Mr D Raja (both CPI), Mr Aboni Roy (RSP), Mr Madhu Dandavate (JD-S) and Mr



Mr Jyoti Basu

Amar Singh (Samajwadi Party) too were present.

Will he take over the leadership if the front comes to power? Mr Basu said: "You all know why I have resigned as chief minister. I'm not well yet I have agreed to become the front chairman on the persuasion of these leaders. They have promised me that they will give the minimum job for me."

But he didn't totally rule out leading front if it emerges as an alternative at the Centre.

"The moment this government goes on its own, an alternative would naturally come into formation and within minutes that would be announced before the media," a morcha leader said.

The morcha's primary concern is different. It's focused on fighting the Assembly polls unitedly in five states: West Bengal, Assam, Tamil Nadu, Pondicherry and Kerala.

But the parties will have their own election symbol to maintain the separate entity of the morcha partners. They will try to impress upon other "secular" parties, which have deviated from the "right" path, to join the non-BJP, non-Congress front, Mr Surjeet said. Their other "secular" ally, Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav, was not present but sent his good wishes.

# PMK withdraws support to NDA, two ministers resign

*Party will extend outside support during crises: Bangaru*

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is one brick loose, with one of its Tamil constituents, the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) withdrawing

its support to the NDA, the party had decided to extend "outside support to the government in times of crisis".

According to PMK sources, Mr Ramadoss might hold a meeting with the All-India

Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) leader J. Jayalalitha on Tuesday morning. If the meeting goes off well, the PMK might later in the afternoon announce the decision to join



E. Ponnuswamy



A.B. Vajpayee



N.T. Shanmugham

the Union cabinet, E. Ponnuswamy, minister of state for petroleum and natural gas, and N.T. Shanmugham, minister of state for coal with independent charge. Later in the day, BJP president Bangaru Laxman said that although the PMK had withdrawn its sup-

port to the NDA, the party had decided to extend "outside support to the government in times of crisis".

the AIADMK front to fight the coming assembly elections. "We will soon join the grand alliance," a senior PMK leader said. The first round of talks between Ms Jayalalitha and Mr Ramadoss are over and she might offer about 30 seats to the PMK.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

- 6 FEB 2001

# Pilgrim Sonia visits Sangam

By J. P. Shukla

**KUMBH NAGAR, (Allahabad) JAN. 22.** The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today visited the Kumbh Mela, ignoring the advice of the local administration, and took a dip in the Sangam, confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati. As the Government felt a blanket refusal would be counter-productive, the administration was asked to make necessary arrangements for the visit which was largely symbolic. Ms. Gandhi termed it a "religious and not a political" trip.

There was not much of the usual milling crowd, and Ms. Gandhi entered the waters at around 3.00 p.m. after performing a "Ganga puja and aarti" with two pundits chanting vedic slokas. Standing in waist-high water, she bowed, scooped a palmful of water, and sprinkled it over head and body before clasping her hands in prayer. She did not immerse herself. While some supporters clapped, a number of onlookers were kept at a distance.

Earlier, on her arrival in Allahabad, Ms. Gandhi went to Anand Bhavan, ancestral house of the Nehrus, and spent a few minutes there. Ms. Gandhi did not take the road route to the Sangam; she was brought in a speedboat, accompanied by security personnel and policemen who travelled in five other boats. Till she completed the rituals, no boat traffic was al-



**TESTING THE WATERS: The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, at the Sangam in Kumbh Nagar on Monday.**

— Photo: Akhilesh Kumar (Another picture on Page 15)

lowed in the vicinity.

## **Calls on Shankaracharya**

The Congress president also visited the ashram of the Shankaracharya of Dwarakapeeth, Swa-

mi Swaroopanand, who had formed the Ramalaya Trust during the tenure of the former Prime Minister, Mr. P.V. Narasimha Rao, with the declared objective of constructing a Ram temple at

Ayodhya. The Swami has been a bitter critic of the activities of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad though he too expressed support to the idea of constructing a temple at the disputed site.

Before leaving the Kumbh area, she visited the Manav Utthan Seva Kendra of Satpal Maharaj, a former Congress MP. She was accompanied by party leaders, Mr. Sushil Kumar Shinde, Mr. Anil Shastri, Mr. Makhan Lal Fotedar and the Uttar Pradesh Congress president, Mr. Sri Prakash Jaiswal.

Ms. Gandhi refrained from any political comments during her stay in the Kumbh area.

It seemed that the Congress had tried to reply in its own way to the VHP diatribes against Ms. Gandhi during the just concluded Dharma Sansad. On the last day of the Sansad, a few VHP speakers had raised the issue of the foreign Christian origin of Ms. Gandhi. They had criticised Ms. Gandhi's proximity to Swami Swaroopanand saying she wanted to introduce "Rome Rajya" in India by touching his feet.

The Swami, accepting the challenge of the VHP, invited Ms. Gandhi to the Kumbh Mela. The sentiments were echoed by other Sants associated with the Ramalaya Trust, including Ramanandacharya, Ramnareshacharya, Govindanand, Secretary of Panchagni Akhara, and Mahant Gopalanand.

**Cong., BJP trade charges: Page 15**

THE HINDU

23 JAN 2001

## POLITICS AT THE KUMBH MELA <sup>201</sup>

BY DECIDING TO be there at the Kumbh Mela and have a 'darshan' of a section of the sadhus (those outside the Sangh Parivar fold), the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, may have triggered off a debate with political overtones. It may be true that Ms. Gandhi's visit as such was not the only basis to the Kumbh Mela assuming some political colour. The 'dharam sansad' (clearly a political event rather than having anything to do with the religion) that the Sangh Parivar associates had organised alongside the 'sangam' and the discussion on the Ayodhya issue as well as the display at the mela grounds of a miniature model of the proposed temple had, even otherwise, introduced a political element. The VHP and the other associates of the Sangh Parivar were, indeed, responsible for this. The Kumbh is an occasion for the devout and a dip at the 'sangam' (confluence of the Ganga, the Yamuna and the mythical Saraswati) during the Kumbh is considered by them as a means to salvation; the Kumbh is also an occasion for the Hindu religious heads from various parts of the country, including the Naga sadhus, to congregate. But then, the event this time was made use of by the Sangh Parivar to revive its sectarian and revanchist campaign and the attempt was to appropriate the religious sentiments towards this agenda. Ms. Gandhi's visit to the mela grounds (apart from Anand Bhawan) at this time becomes a matter of political debate in this context.

Ms. Gandhi personal preference and her right to be in Allahabad during the Kumbh Mela and take a dip at the 'sangam' can hardly be questioned. But then, the fact that Ms. Gandhi is no ordinary citizen (for she is among those under protection under the SPG Act) makes all the difference. The very presence of such a person in the city itself is bound to put the law-enforcing agencies under a lot of strain; and when Ms.

Gandhi insisted on taking a dip in the 'sangam' at this time and going around the mela grounds (to meet a number of religious heads) there is every reason for the law-enforcing agencies and the civil administration to feel concerned. There have indeed been instances in the past — at the Kumbh Mela site as well as in other parts of the country when the devout gather on auspicious occasions — when visits by VIPs had led to stampedes. It was after one such tragedy — the stampede during the 1954 Kumbh Mela — that the then Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, suggested that VIPs keep out of such melas and gatherings as much as possible. But then, the Congress president's considerations behind planning the Allahabad visit and the Kumbh Mela were different. Her intentions seem no less political than those of the associates of the Sangh Parivar and all those who constituted the 'dharam sansad'. And there lies the problem.

Whether it be her plans to have darshan of the Sankaracharya of the Jyotishpeeth, Swaropanand Saraswati (only because he is among the religious heads who had refused to join the VHP bandwagon) or the propaganda by her partymen that Ms. Gandhi will go to the 'sangam' (even if it meant defying the local authorities and their fiat), all are pointers to the Congress once again attempting, quite unnecessarily, to gain an indigenous identity. Ms. Gandhi's predecessors in the office of Congress President did not feel the need to demonstrate their Indianness in this fashion. And the Congress as a party did not suffer any serious erosion of its support base when its leaders had refrained from taking a dip at the 'sangam.' It derived its strength from the sensitivity its leaders and its members displayed to the aspirations of the people. Ms. Gandhi's "pilgrimage" to the 'sangam' and all the controversy that marked the visit would seem a wholly unnecessary diversion.

THE HINDU

23 JAN 2001

# Opposition finds PM's musings inconsistent

By Neena Vyas

HP-1  
31/1

NEW DELHI, JAN. 2. Each time the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, says something on the Ram temple controversy, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) responds by saying he had remained consistent and truly reflected the party's views. But other political parties and the media see nothing consistent about it.

Today, it was no different. While the BJP asserted once again that "there was no difference" between what he told reporters on December 6 and 7 last, what he said in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha in response to the debates and what he spelt out in his "musings" from Kumarakom, the Congress wanted to know whether he had spoken his final word on Ayodhya. "We want to know whether the Prime Minister will stick to this position (the "musings" position) or change it once again," the Congress spokesperson, Mr. Anil Shastri, asked.

The CPI(M) politburo dismissed Mr. Vajpayee's latest statements as "verbal jugglery", saying he had earlier suggested that the temple be built on the site where the Babri mosque stood. The party also objected to the Prime Minister equating the problem in Jammu and Kashmir with the Ayodhya issue — the difference being that the Ayodhya issue was deliberately raised, and communal fires were stoked by the RSS combine for assaulting secular principles and for political gain.

The official BJP view was given by the party spokesperson, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi. "There was no ambiguity in the Prime Minister's approach. This should put at rest all speculation."

But the Congress disagreed. "First he said that the RSS was a cultural organisation; he was forced to retract that. Then, he asserted in Staten Island, New York, that he was a 'swayamsevak' always, and then he went back on that. Now, he is trying to go back on his Ayodhya statements," Mr. Shastri said.

He wanted to know whether this was the result of introspection or inner contradictions between the BJP and the RSS or the result of pressure from his NDA partners.

## 'Message to VHP, others'

But some BJP leaders preferred to either maintain a discreet silence — they were not particularly overjoyed by the "musings" — or explain Mr. Vajpayee's need to go back to the controversial issue by saying that he was giving a "message" to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), which is planning to announce later this month the date for starting construction of a Ram temple.

A senior party leader, Mr. J.P. Mathur, said, "It is a message to the VHP that the Centre will not sit back and watch silently if they break the law." Asked when the Centre would act, he said, "Only when the law is violated."

Mr. Krishnamurthi had earlier said that because of the differing interpretations by the Opposition parties and the media to what Mr. Vajpayee said in Parliament, this article and a further explanation became necessary. He refused to identify the VHP as the organisation the Prime Minister referred to in his article, saying it was a warning to all organisations not to cross the limit imposed by law.

The CPI(M)'s view was that whatever the Prime Minister had said and was saying, he could not escape the responsibility of having encouraged the RSS-VHP combine to go ahead with a conspiracy to build a temple at the disputed site. When the date for the start of construction was announced later this month, it would put to test his political will. He would be expected to put down firmly any illegal activity and "discharge his constitutional responsibility". The Congress noted that had the Prime Minister articulated earlier what he has said in his "musings", the confrontation in Parliament could have been avoided.

THE HINDU

3 JAN 2001