

PM defends textbook deletions

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 24. Commenting on the recent deletions in history textbooks, prepared for the schools by the National Council for Educational Research and Training (NCERT), the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today voiced his support for the move, saying "one-sided history" should be changed even as the major Opposition parties continued their protest on the issue.

'Agar itihaas one-sided hai, to isme sudhar kiya jaana chahiye (If history is one-sided, it should be corrected)," the Prime Minister told reporters during an informal chat at a lunch hosted by the BJP spokesperson, Mr. V.K. Malhotra, here.

When his attention was drawn to Rajya Sabha uproar over what

the Congress called "Talibanisation" of education, Mr. Vajpayee said: "We are ready for a debate on it in Parliament."

Meanwhile, the Communist Party of India (Marxist) today demanded the withdrawal of the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) circular deleting portions from history textbooks, while the Congress questioned its jurisdiction in issuing such a directive.

The CPI(M) politburo said in a statement that the textbooks written by prominent historians contained factual material about the 'Vedic age' which should be available to any student studying history. "The deletions have been done with a communal and sectarian viewpoint. It is shocking that even a true depiction of the oppressive caste system has been

censored. This speaks volumes for the brahminical and chauvinist outlook which has motivated the censorship," it said.

Laying the responsibility for the "obnoxious decision" at the door of the Human Resource Development Minister, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, the CPI(M) said this would be widely viewed as the 'Talibanisation' of the education system.

An independent group of experts should be asked to look into the whole exercise of rewriting history undertaken by the BJP-led Government and its proteges in the higher educational bodies.

Mr. Eduardo Faleiro, senior Congress leader, questioned the CBSE 'jurisdiction' to issue a circular directing the deletion of some portions from textbooks for middle school.

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Vajpayee leaves U.S. with enhanced status for India

P.M.
FI-17

By Chidanand Rajghatta
Times News Network

WASHINGTON: As the Indian and Pakistani leadership wing home in roughly the same direction after a testing international campaign to advance their position on some defining issues of nationhood, New Delhi can have the quiet satisfaction of knowing that its line of thinking has triumphed.

Here's the bottom line: A weightier section of the world community has rejected the use of terrorism and violence to advance any issue, even if it is a justifiable cause. There is also a growing universal revulsion about the use of religion to promote separatism.

Several smaller nations, mostly from the Islamic world and led by Pakistan, tried to draw attention to the "root cause" of violence, but given the current mood, the US, Russia, and India among other countries, rejected the proposition.

President Bush articulated this when he told the UN general assembly that "in this world, there are good causes and bad causes, and we may disagree on where that line is drawn. Yet, there is no such thing as a good terrorist."

He said, "We must unite in opposing all terrorists, not just some of them." Such sentiment now makes it difficult, if not impossible, for Pakistan to justify or rationalise the violent uprising it supports in Kashmir. Islamabad has had to publicly recant its transparent backing of terrorism in Kashmir and disown the groups it surreptitiously founded and funded.

Outside the UN deliberations on terrorism, the Indian leadership also returns home assured of the

country's enhanced stature in the community of nations. No Indian leader has ever touched down in Moscow, Washington, and London on the same journey. But more than the stops, there is a perceptible sense that India is now on a different trajectory in its relationship with these countries, especially with the US.

That Indo-US relationship is



A.B. Vajpayee



Gen. Musharraf

the environment, health, space, export controls, science and technology, including biotechnology and information technology.

There is also a surprising mention of potential defence purchases by India from the US and a definite hint of a military relationship between the two sides.

By contrast, the joint statement between Washington and Islamabad centres more on what the US can do to rescue, resuscitate and rehabilitate Pakistan economically and politically.

Indian officials take pleasure in pointing out that New Delhi does not come to Washington as a supplicant, and that it would prefer capital inflows arising from increased trade rather than putting out a begging bowl.

Officials also ridiculed the suggestion that Pakistani military leader Gen Musharraf had hogged the limelight at the expense of India, saying anyone facing such severe crisis would naturally get more attention. For the same reason, Pakistan's nuclear programme has been the subject of endless reporting in the US media.

There has not been the slightest mention of India's

nuclear programme or weapons, and Indian officials are relieved not to have it on anyone's radar screen.

The US-Pakistan joint statement offered little comfort to Islamabad in its Kashmir campaign. Washington reiterated its familiar line of helping India and Pakistan resolve the issue "through diplomacy and dialogue in mutually acceptable ways that take into account the wishes of the people of Kashmir."

now in a different orbit than the rather opportunistic Washington-Pakistan alliance is evident from the two separate joint statements. The one between India and the US is premised on a healthy respect for each other's democratic credentials and institutional strength. There is not a whiff of economic aid or mention of freebies in the statement.

Heavy in economic content, it instead speaks of dialogue and cooperation in the areas of energy,

GAINS FOR INDIA

- ▶ Overall enhanced stature
- ▶ Advanced military relationship with the US
- ▶ US endorsement for bilateral dialogue on Kashmir between India and Pak
- ▶ US rejection of any justification of terrorism in Kashmir

LOSSES FOR INDIA

- ▶ Tariff concessions to Pak may affect Indian exports, especially textiles
- ▶ Having to expend energy to counter Pakistani charges

GAINS FOR PAKISTAN

- ▶ Return to international mainstream
- ▶ Over \$1 billion in economic aid, yet to be clearly defined
- ▶ Promise of US interest in bringing about India-Pak talks on Kashmir
- ▶ Tacit recognition of its nuclear status

LOSSES FOR PAKISTAN

- ▶ Universal recognition as a problem country
- ▶ Forced to publicly recant on terrorism in all its forms
- ▶ Having to be defensive about its nuclear assets

THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE TIMES OF INDIA

13 NOV 2001

Target all terrorists, says Atal

V.S. Chandrasekar
LONDON 12 NOVEMBER

BRITISH PRIME Minister Tony Blair on Monday condemned the terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir (J&K) and said no cause can justify the "slaughter of innocents." He was responding to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement saying the global fight against terrorism should go beyond Osama bin Laden's Al-Qaeda.

After a 90-minute summit meeting at 10 Downing Street, the two leaders agreed that the international coalition against terrorism must be strengthened to fight "terrorism in all its forms."

Addressing a joint news conference with Mr Blair, Mr Vajpayee said: "We have agreed that terrorism shall not be encouraged for any purpose." "We have to go beyond Al-Qaeda and target all those who finance, harbour, train, equip, and arm terrorists."

Recalling the October 1 attack on the J&K Assembly, Mr Blair, in a forthright condemnation of terrorism, said: "It cannot ever be right for people to pursue their cause by slaughtering of innocents."

"All I can say is that the British position has not changed," he said. "It was opposed to those pursuing terrorism against innocent civilians," he added.

Asked by an Indian journalist whether it would take another September 11 type strike on the US and the October 1 suicide bomb attack in Srinagar to recognise the seriousness of terrorism in Kashmir, Mr Blair said: "People are well aware of acts of carnage involving innocent civilians including in Srinagar, which was strongly condemned by all."

Briefing reporters, national security adviser Brajesh Mishra said Kashmir did not come in for focus as such during the discussions between the two leaders.

However, Mr Blair stressed the "desirability" of a dialogue between India and Pakistan.

Mr Blair described the discussions with Mr Vajpayee as "constructive and detailed" on the current international coalition against terrorism, the conflict in Afghanistan and the post-Taliban scenario in the context of "some significant gains" made by the Northern Alliance. — PTI



PRIME TIME: Prime Minister Vajpayee & his British counterpart in London on Monday. — AP

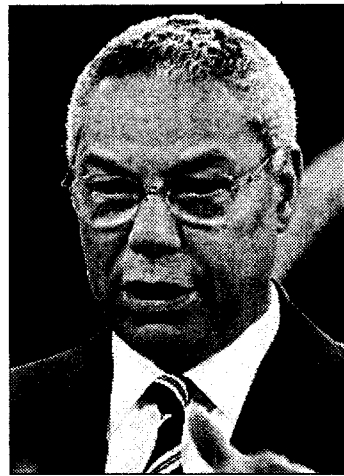
Pervez gets his billion but US refuses to play ref in Kashmir

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 12 NOVEMBER

IN A major setback for Pakistan President General Pervez Musharraf, the US on Monday made it plain that it cannot become a "mediator or arbitrator or intermediary" in the Kashmir dispute, which is essentially between India and Pakistan.

The General, who had expected the visit to bolster his diplomatic prestige, had to return with a \$1-billion loan, and no assurance on his pet theme of Kashmir. In other words, he could merely get monetary benefits in return for the support to the US strikes on Afghanistan, which has angered his country's Talibanised civil society and Islamised military.

While appearing on a TV programme, US secretary of state Colin Powell ruled out any mediation. He said the US can only be



Powell: Hands Off

helpful in fostering a dialogue between India and Pakistan — a by now established stand of the American establishment.

Mr Powell's forthright comments blunted General

Musharraf's statement in a separate programme on an American TV claiming that Mr Bush has "promised to facilitate the process of talks between New Delhi and Islamabad." The General had said "to that extent, he (Bush) has promised he would like to facilitate a process, may be persuade the Indian leadership to initiate a process of dialogue."

However, Colin Powell threw cold water on the expectations of the Pakistani General and said there were "limits" to such facilitation. When pointedly asked whether the US would like to get involved in a settlement on Kashmir, Mr Powell said: "The two sides have to settle that. There needs to be a dialogue between Pakistan and India. To an extent, the US can be helpful in fostering a dialogue but we cannot become a mediator or arbitrator or intermediary."

Terror tactics on Kashmir won't work: PM

NEW YORK: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has hit back at Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf, accusing him of pursuing a single campaign on Kashmir and declared that India would never part with Kashmir and would give a fitting reply to any evil designs from the neighbour.

"There is only one issue on his mind..How to wrest Kashmir. But he will not get Kashmir. Kashmir is at the core of our nationhood," he said, speaking at a reception hosted in his honour by the Indo-American community.

Mr Vajpayee's comments came hours after Gen Musharraf raked up the Kashmir issue in his speech in the UN general assembly accusing India of committing atrocities



Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee addresses the 56th United Nations General Assembly in New York on Saturday.

in the border state.

Referring to media reports of the attack by some Kashmiri militants at the Red Fort, Mr Vajpayee said, "India is competent to give fitting reply to any evil designs from across the border."

Gen Musharraf was also trying to raise a bogey on the issue and to cash in on it with other countries, he said. "Why is he asking for F-16s. What will you do with it," he asked referring to reports that Pakistan was pressing Washington for the release of 28 F-16s held by it.

Mr Vajpayee told Pakistan, "You cannot win Kashmir through terror." He said those who supported the Taliban were now fighting and using it to win favours from others. (Agencies)

Rebuff terror of all kinds, says Vajpayee

Times News Network & Agencies

NEW YORK: New York in November can be pretty chilly, but unnamed countries and parties might have felt the bite a little more than usual. Without once naming them, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee turned the ritual of the annual UN General Assembly speech into a sharp critique of terrorism, saying those who sought to justify terrorist action somewhere while condemning it elsewhere, "should explain what the root causes of September 11 were".

Considering the 'core issue' at this year's UN meetings is terrorism against the backdrop of '911' (as the September attacks are now known) in the city that suffered most, Mr Vajpayee used the occasion to lay down India's line.

"We must firmly rebuff any ideological, political or religious justification of terrorism," he said. "We should reject self-serving arguments seeking to classify terrorism according to its root causes."

Outside the precincts of the UN, the shadow fencing took on other contours. Sources said Mr Vajpayee would

give the regulation luncheon meeting hosted by UN secretary general Kofi Annan a miss, thereby avoiding running into the some unnamed parties. He may also miss the dinner banquet for the same reason, although cameras were hoping for at least a handshake.

At the best of times, this bustling city of ten million inhabitants, now slowly returning to its normal feisty self, is a hard place to stop and talk. But the lengths to which India is going to avoid a neighbour are astonishing even to those used to the cursed politics of South Asia.

The distance between the New York Palace and Roosevelt Hotel is only a few blocks, but its VIP occupants from the sub-continent, among the 48 heads of state and governments gathered here, will not be conversing, except through the interpretation of their speeches by the media.

The Indian side, though, would be pleased to hear President George W. Bush's speech, seeing it as a vindication of New Delhi's stand on the terrorism issue.

"We must unite in opposing all terrorists, not just some of them," Mr Bush said. "Any government that rejects this principle, trying to pick and choose its terrorist friends, will

know the consequences."

Mr Vajpayee said people in India knew from their bitter experience that terrorists developed global networks driven by religious extremism. Their operations were supported by drug trafficking, money laundering and arms smuggling.

Mr Vajpayee said it required the political will of the freedom-loving world to implement the UN Security Council resolutions on terrorism to curb the sources of financing for terrorists and deny them safe havens for training, arming and operations.

Referring to the "barbaric terrorist acts" on the U.S. on September 11, he said this reminded the world that neither distance nor power insulated a state from terrorism and had created an opportunity to fashion a determined global response to terrorism in all its forms and manifestations wherever it existed and under whatever name.

Declaring India's support to the current campaign against terrorist networks in Afghanistan, Mr Vajpayee expressed the hope that it would reach an early and successful conclusion.

He said, "Afghanistan's current travails could only end with the establishment of a broad-based, representative and neutral government which will stop the export of terrorism and extremism."

He said the international community should work towards this even while the military campaign continued, so that a political vacuum could be avoided at the end of the campaign.

The Prime Minister said it must be recognised that the current structures to facilitate a post-Taliban political settlement were unrepresentative and therefore ineffective.

"Located as it is in Afghanistan's neighbourhood, India's vital national interests are affected by developments in it. We also have traditionally close links with Afghanistan. That is the basis for our belief that India can play a useful role in this process," he said.

Drawing the international community's urgent attention to the reconstruction of post-conflict Afghanistan, the Prime Minister said it required massive external assistance to create an economic situation conducive to the speedy return and rehabilitation of the millions of Afghan refugees in the region.



A.B. Vajpayee George W. Bush Pervez Musharraf

PM for war on terror and poverty

AGENCIES *gnd p M*

WASHINGTON, Nov. 10. - Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee has called for a worldwide twin war against terrorism and poverty. The Prime Minister was addressing the 56th session of the UN General Assembly that opened here today.

While warning against the threat of terrorism to democratic and pluralistic societies, he said the war on poverty is as crucial for a peaceful global order. The Prime Minister delivered the speech to the 48 Presidents and Prime Ministers and 114 foreign ministers in Hindi and concluded by quoting Rabindranath Tagore. "From now onwards, any nation that takes an isolated view of its own interests will run contrary to the spirit of the new New Age and will know no peace. From now onwards, the anxiety that each country has for its own safety must embrace the welfare of the whole world," he quoted the poet as having said more than 60 years ago. "More than six decades after the poet penned these lines, they ring truer in our age of challenge and opportunity," he concluded.

On terror, he said: "Some states follow a policy of sponsoring and sheltering terrorists. They can only be countered through closely coordinated efforts of the international community... We in India know from our own bitter experience their operations are supported by drug trafficking, money laundering and arms smuggling" adding "it required political will of the international community to imple-

ment the UN Security Council resolutions to force strict curbs on sources of financing for terrorists and denying them safe havens for training, arming and operation." Mr Vajpayee extended full support to the campaign against terrorist networks in Afghanistan but hoped it reaches an early and successful conclusion.

Prior to the UN session, India and the USA condemned attempts to invoke religion to commit and justify acts of terrorism. But the joint statement refrained from making any reference to Indian concerns over Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. The leaders noted that India's interests in purchasing arms from the USA would be discussed at the Defence Policy Group meetings in December. Washington also invited the home minister, Mr LK Advani, for discussions to enhance anti-terrorism and interdiction assistance. Two US state department coordinators will also visit New Delhi.

India and the USA today also signed the New Strategic Framework. They announced the establishment of a Joint Cyber-Terrorism Initiative.

Northern Alliance claim: Northern Alliance claimed that they had swept four more provinces in north Afghanistan.

Taliban consulate: Afghanistan's consulate in the port city of Karachi was formally shut today in the latest Pakistani move against the Taliban.

■ **Osama says he has N-weapons: page 12**

Only Moscow has stood by Delhi on Kashmir, says Vajpayee

Old allies rally together

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

MOSCOW, Nov. 7. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today said nobody has supported India on Kashmir as much as Russia in the past decades.

In a veiled criticism of the USA and other Western countries, the Prime Minister said others had adopted a policy of "bandar bant" (discrimination) over Kashmir. "Nobody has supported us on the Kashmir issue as much as Russia (has)," Mr Vajpayee categorically said, recalling the tale of a monkey seeking to apportion eatables between two feuding cats and gobbling them all up in the end.

Terming his Russia visit as "highly successful", Mr Vajpayee told members of the Indian community here that Mr Vladimir Putin has accepted an invitation to visit India next year.

He expressed "deep satisfaction" over his talks with Mr Putin and other Russian leaders, and said there was consensus in both countries on close bilateral ties. "Governments have changed in both countries but the love and friendship remains. Others can't understand this phenomenon of Indo-Russian friendship."

Referring to racial attacks against Asians in Russia, he said India was aware of the problem, which was being caused by worsening law-and-order. "Russian authorities are doing their best to improve the law-and-order situation." He urged Indians to "bear the transient hardships".

No talks with Musharraf

The Prime Minister today brushed aside fresh appeals by various countries, including Russia, to restart dialogue with Pakistan. "The atmosphere is not conducive for talks," he said. He was speaking to reporters before emplaning for the USA.

Mr Vajpayee said India and Russia have taken some "significant decisions" in the area of security, but declined to disclose them.

On Mr George W Bush's complaint that many countries were not doing enough to fight terror, Mr Vajpayee said India had offered every kind of assistance to Washington. "All that



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee observes a minute's silence at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in the Kremlin in Moscow on Tuesday. — AP/PTI

we have offered has not been utilised." Aerial strikes on Afghanistan would not be effective unless the "ground battle" starts, he added.

Asked about the chances of his visiting Islamabad or General Pervez Musharraf going to India, Mr Vajpayee said: "Everyone agrees that talks between India and Pakistan should be held in a conducive atmosphere ... Lahore led to Kargil. Even after the Kandahar episode, I invited (the general) to Agra. But the atmosphere was not good ... There was no proper result."

Violence in Jammu and Kashmir has increased, cross-border incidents are on the rise and innocent lives are being lost. "This is not a conducive atmosphere for talks and till a proper climate is created there can be no talks," Mr Vajpayee said.

The Prime Minister said he fully supported the expansion of

the "Six-plus-Two" mechanism of the United Nations and India's inclusion in it.

Pressed about the "significant decisions" taken by India and Russia on security, Mr Vajpayee said: "I did not use the word 'secret'. But how can I tell you what we have decided".

Mr Putin yesterday had said that India had agreed to rectify its "mistake" of deciding to treat Russia as a "non-market" economy. Mr Vajpayee said: "There is no contradiction between the two. Russia will be treated like any other market economy." He also discussed the Rupee payment issue with Mr Putin.

On disarmament, Mr Vajpayee said the problem was not related to Afghanistan, and the USA and Russia were discussing disarmament efforts.

■ Editorial: Read Osama's lips! page 6

PUTIN'S STRAIGHT TALK

MOSCOW, Nov. 7. — Mr Vladimir Putin today ruled out the possibility of Russian troops participating in the war in Afghanistan. In an interview to ABC, quoted by Novosti Press, he said: "This is an unacceptable decision for Russians".

"For us, sending troops to Afghanistan is the same as for you, America, to return troops to Vietnam. (It is) something even more painful for us because the Soviet-Afghan war ended not so long ago as compared to the Vietnam War."

"Already the Russian Army is helping the USA, not virtually but factually ... with data. We are also rendering assistance to the Northern Alliance and have delivered arms to them worth millions of dollars," the President added. — UNI

US freeze on Osama network's millions

AGENCIES

WASHINGTON, Nov. 7. — The USA today froze the assets of Osama bin Laden's informal banking and financial networks in at least nine countries, including Canada and the UAE.

With this, two more suspected Osama networks, *Al-Taqua* and *Al-Nbarakaat*, have been covered by the US state department list on terror networks worldwide.

In Berlin, the Cabinet today approved the deployment of 3,900 troops for the US war effort. Italy, too, has promised 3,000 troops.

At the Istanbul airport, General Musharraf, on his way to Paris, said he would urge Mr Bush to halt the US-led bombing during Ramzan. Saudi Arabia is also believed to be supporting a halt in the bombing during Ramzan.

In Doha — where the five-day WTO meet is scheduled to start on Friday — security forces shot dead a Qatari national who had opened fire at the Al-Adid airbase used by the US forces. A US embassy official said some Americans were wounded in the attack, but the Pentagon denied any US injuries.

War: Waves of B-52 bombers pounded Taliban positions in Kapisa and Karabag, less than 50 km. north of Kabul, with huge single and cluster bombs. The planes targeted Al-Qaida's Arab and Pakistani fighters positioned at the front.

The Taliban today hung the charred remains of the US military helicopter they claimed to have downed recently from a traffic post outside the Presidential palace.

■ More reports on page 9

The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, with (from left) the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, the Planning Commission Deputy Chairman, Mr. K.C. Pant, and the Urban Development Minister, Mr. Anant Kumar, at the Indra Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi before he left for Moscow on Sunday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

PM's visit to focus on post-conflict Afghanistan

By Atul Aneja

NEW DELHI, NOV. 4. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, left for a tri-nation visit today and said that the core purpose of his tour was to discuss the challenges posed by international terrorism and the post-conflict situation in Afghanistan.

"In my discussions in all three countries, I will place particular emphasis on the issues relating to international terrorism and the urgent need to address the challenges of post-conflict Afghanistan", Mr. Vajpayee said at the airport, before emplaning for St. Petersburg.

Besides Russia, Mr. Vajpayee will go to the United States on a "working visit." He will also travel to New York where he will address the United Nations Gen-

eral Assembly. From the U.S., he would head for Britain before returning home on November 13.

In Moscow, Mr. Vajpayee said, he would seek to enhance the tempo of Indo-Russian ties, deepen political understanding and expand the economic agenda. The Moscow State University will confer an honorary doctorate on him.

The Prime Minister said he wished to consolidate the several positive trends that have emerged in Indo-U.S. ties. In Washington, he will interact with the a cross-section of the U.S. Congressmen and meet Indian community representatives.

In London, Mr. Vajpayee hoped to "pick up the threads" of his previous discussions with the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair.

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5 NOV 2001

'Vajpayee trip will not be Pakistan-centric'

By C. Raja Mohan

9-PM
HPD-1
9/11

NEW DELHI, NOV. 3. During his extended travel abroad beginning tomorrow, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, will re-emphasise the Indian commitment to combat international terrorism and focus on deepening bilateral relations with the great powers.

In the trip that will take him to Russia, the United States, Great Britain and the United Nations, Mr. Vajpayee has no desire to expend diplomatic energies on the current state of the relationship with Pakistan, well-placed sources here said.

The Pakistan President, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, will meet the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, in New York a day after Mr. Vajpayee is hosted at the White House at around the same time the latter would be addressing the U.N. General Assembly (UNGA).

Gen. Musharraf is expected to draw considerable media attention in the U.S. Mr. Vajpayee's attempt will be to focus on India's agenda rather than being drawn into a spat with Pakistan either in public or in conversations with his interlocutors.

At the U.N., Mr. Vajpayee will concentrate on getting out India's "strong message against international terrorism". He will also seek to garner support for the Indian initiative at the U.N. for a comprehensive convention against international terrorism.

On the bilateral front, the stress will be on consolidating the relations with Russia, building a new bilateral partnership with the U.S. and intensifying consultations with Britain.

In his conversations with Mr. Bush, the Russian President, Mr. Vladimir Putin, and the British Prime Minister, Mr. Tony Blair, Mr. Vajpayee would not raise either the Kashmir or Pakistan issues, the officials said. But he is fully prepared to respond to any

concerns from his interlocutors on New Delhi's current approach towards Pakistan. He is likely to communicate India's commitment to maintain restraint in its relations with that country. While indicating that New Delhi will not do anything to rock Gen. Musharraf's boat, Mr. Vajpayee will insist on retaining the right to respond vigorously to provocations from across the border.

Senior officials here virtually ruled out the possibility of a meeting between Mr. Vajpayee and Gen. Musharraf on the sidelines of the UNGA in the second week of November. They indicated that no decision had been taken on a possible meeting between the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, and his Pakistani counterpart, Mr. Abdul Sattar, in New York.

The deepened distrust of Gen. Musharraf is holding India back from an immediate renewal of political engagements with Pakistan, well-placed sources in the Government said. They pointed to the genuine anger in the Indian political leadership after the October 1 attack on the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly that has made it difficult for them to deal with Gen. Musharraf.

The Pakistan President's efforts to mollify India after the incident have not made an impression. Effective action by Gen. Musharraf against militants fomenting cross-border terrorism could have helped reduce the mistrust.

There is also some concern here at his ability to ride out the unfolding crisis in Pakistan since September 11. It may be prudent to wait and watch rather than jump into yet another attempt at making peace with Islamabad, sources here said.

The harsh Indian mood is likely to mellow only when there is a credible signal from Gen. Musharraf indicating a readiness to dissociate himself from cross-border terrorism.

4 NOV 2001

'IT IS NOT JUST A PIECE OF LAND FOR US'

Stop chanting Kashmir, PM tells Pakistan

By Neena Vyas

AMRITSAR, NOV. 2. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today told Pakistan in no uncertain terms that it should stop chanting 'Kashmir, Kashmir' while he forcefully stated that he had refused to meet Gen. Pervez Musharraf, Pakistan President, (in New York) "because no purposeful dialogue can be held in today's situation" in which cross-border terrorism continues unabated.

Addressing a modest gathering of BJP workers in Amritsar where earlier in the day the party began its two-day national executive committee meeting, Mr. Vajpayee dwelt mostly on terrorism, Kashmir and Pakistan. In fact, he hardly touched the subject of the impending Assembly elections in Punjab early next year for which his speech was expected to enthuse them.

"Maine milne se inkar kiya hai," (I have refused to meet Gen. Musharraf) he said, virtually charging Pakistan with reneging on the Shimla and Lahore agreements. "We, in India believe in democracy, our government is bound by agreements with another countries even if entered into by a previous Government," he emphasised, adding that Gen.

Musharraf wanted a dialogue with India to begin with where the Agra summit ended. "If Pakistan thinks it can forcibly occupy Kashmir, it is mistaken," he said with emphasis.

Going over the whole story of his association with Dr. Shyama Prasad Mookherjee's agitation against the permit system prevalent in Kashmir immediately after Independence, Mr. Vajpayee insisted that Pakistan must realise that Kashmir was an inseparable part of India, although for Pakistan it may be just a piece of land. The argument of religion, the fact that the valley had a Muslim majority was false, he said, because Bangladesh which broke away from Pakistan had proved that religion could not be a factor for determining nationhood.

The basic condition for peace with Pakistan was terrorism must stop. "The two neighbours can talk about trade, about dealing with poverty, about development of the region, and also Kashmir, but the continuous chant of 'Kashmir, Kashmir' must end. (*Pakistan ko Kashmir ki rut band karni hogi*)".

He went over the "betrayal" of Kargil after Lahore, and said it is not yet known for certain whether

Pakistan's then government or Nawaz Sharif was aware that preparations were afoot for Kargil even as he was "singing the friendship tune".

For some reason, the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, who was present and billed to speak, did not address the workers, but party president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthy did.

Earlier, opening the national executive, Mr. Krishnamurthy dwelt on the need for labour reforms, appealed to the opposition parties to support POTO and cooperate in the fight against terrorism, and suggested to the Government that banks and other institutions should be made to keep their commitment to pay rates of interest on older fixed deposits. His tone towards the Government was conciliatory, unlike at the Delhi national executive where he had asked the Government to come up with a code of ethics for "re-induction" of those who had earlier left the NDA. Mr. Krishnamurthy was sharply critical of Bangladesh suggesting that it had failed to provide security to the Hindu minority which had again started immigrating to India.

More reports on Pages 11, 13

3 NOV 2007

Vajpayee no to meeting Pervez in NY

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, October 29

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee today ruled out the possibility of his meeting Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly next month. Vajpayee said: "Where is the need for us to meet in New York if we can hold talks here in Delhi or Islamabad?"

Addressing a joint press conference with German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder, Vajpayee reiterated that talks with Pakistan would have to be on all outstanding issues. However, Pakistan must first create a conducive atmosphere for the resumption of the dialogue by stopping cross-border terrorism, he said.

Schroeder had called for the resumption of the Agra process while in Islamabad yesterday. But he clarified today that "Germany had always advocated the need for dialogue but appreciated the role played by India in moving the process forward". He said there was wide appreciation for India's position on cross-border terrorism and the positive role played by India in restarting a dialogue at Agra.

The two leaders discussed the ramifications of the ongoing US operations in Afghanistan on



ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE

regional and international security and agreed that a post-Taliban regime in Kabul should satisfy all Afghan ethnic groups and refrain from exporting terror.

Just hours before the joint press conference, the MEA spokesperson had indicated that the PM was reluctant to meet Musharraf in New York. "There does not appear to be any time left (in Vajpayee's schedule) for a sideline meeting with the Pakistani leader," the spokesperson said.

Schroeder, who was given a ceremonial reception at Rashtrapati Bhawan, invited Vajpayee for a summit next year, which the Prime Minister accepted. Earlier, addressing a select gathering at the German Ambassador's residence, Schroeder said his visit had paved the way for a comprehensive dialogue with India.

Schroeder's delegation included the German Interior Minister, Otto Schilly, who in a meeting with LK Advani today, agreed with New Delhi that Jammu and Kashmir should not be left out of the international fight against terrorism. The two ministers also agreed to step up the transfer of know-how between the German and Indian police to fight terrorism, cyber crime and drug trafficking.



GERHARD SCHROEDER

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 OCT 2001

CONCERN OVER 'UNTRUSTWORTHY NEIGHBOUR'

Choose peace or animosity, PM tells Pak.

By Lalit K. Jha

NEW DELHI, OCT. 23. Describing Pakistan as an "untrustworthy neighbour", the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said the powers that be in that country should first decide among themselves if they want peace or animosity with India.

Without directly mentioning Pakistan or its President, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, Mr. Vajpayee said: "Our neighbouring country's ruler talks of peace one day and the next day he threatens 'we will see you (*ham tumhe dekh lenge*)'. He should first decide what he wants from us and remove the confusion once for all."

Addressing a gathering of the Sikh community at his 7 Race Course Road residence here, Mr. Vajpayee remarked: "All this while this country (Pakistan) has been helping, training and arming the fundamentalist Taliban regime. At times, they even threatened us by saying that the Taliban was with them. The same country now has waged a war against the Taliban and is all set to destroy it."

"If this is the policy of the neighbouring country, then who is going to trust them? *Aap pe kaun bharo sa karega?*," Mr. Vajpayee asked. "We propose friendship and maintain it. We (India) are not an opportunist country. Our foreign policy is not dictated by some other country. It is for these reasons we are respected world over. Whenever there is a discussion on solving the Afghan problem, people ask what India's stand is."

Taking a dig at the lot of the people in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and comparing it with the Kashmir Valley, Mr. Vajpayee said: "What is the condition of the area occupied by Pakistan? There is no democracy, no rights for the people living there. Recently there was an election, but the power was handed over to an Army-General."

The condition of Afghanistan had worsened under Taliban rule, he said. Referring to the atrocities being



The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, being presented a 'saropa' by Sikh leaders who called on him at his residence in New Delhi on Tuesday. — Photo: V. Sudershan

committed by the Taliban on the people of Afghanistan and in particular curtailment of women's rights, Mr. Vajpayee said: "What kind of rule is it? Taliban began as an Islamic movement, but now it is ruling by force. It has no relationship with any religion. The manner in which the Taliban is killing innocent people only indicates that it is an armed group spreading fanaticism."

Earlier, the Sikh community members felicitated Mr. Vajpayee for his fight against terrorism. The former CBI Director, Mr. Joginder Singh, said: "The biggest achievement has been to show political will against terrorism. This is for the first time clear directions have been given to the security forces to fight against terrorism. Earlier it used to be on ad hoc basis."

THE HINDU

Atal travels to Russia, US with a baggage of firsts

FROM K.P. NAYAR

Washington, Oct. 28: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's first overseas trip after the September 11 terrorist attacks, which shook the world, will have many firsts.

It will be the first time that an Indian Prime Minister will travel directly from Moscow to Washington: in the days of the Cold War, this was a diplomatic privilege which was exclusive to the big players on the world scene.

It will also be the first time that an Indian Prime Minister will be present in Moscow on the anniversary of the "Great October Socialist Revolution".

The October revolution has lost its relevance in today's Moscow. But it will not be lost on Vajpayee, who has lived through the heyday of Indo-Soviet friend-

ship, that such amity notwithstanding, his presence in Moscow on November 7 was a privilege reserved only for comrades from other nations who marched under the banner of the hammer and sickle.

For those travelling with and watching Vajpayee in Moscow next month, it will, therefore, be a reminder that despite Russia's metamorphosis, India's friendship with that country is enduring.

Successive American administrations have discouraged leaders attending the United Nations General Assembly in New York from extending their trip to Washington.

Some years ago, relations between China and the US were ruffled because President Bill Clinton was unwilling to receive in the White House his Chinese

counterpart, Jiang Zemin, who was in New York for the General Assembly.

Last year, when Vajpayee flew into Washington from New York, the Clinton administration insisted that there should be a gap of several days—a week, in fact—between the Indian Prime Minister's address to the General Assembly and his meetings in Washington.

The idea was to keep alive the convention that heads of state and government do not just drop into the White House after their business at the UN.

This time, it is different. Vajpayee will meet Bush on November 9 and the very next day he will address the General Assembly.

This, combined with the significance of his arrival here directly from Moscow after parleys with

President Vladimir Putin, highlights India's place in the post-September 11 diplomatic blitz and bears criticism that New Delhi is peripheral to the current campaign against terrorism.

However, just as Vajpayee's visits to Moscow, Washington and New York open up new opportunities for India, the Prime Minister will also be walking a minefield, especially in Washington.

Vajpayee will arrive in this city, where Pakistan is clearly the flavour of the month. Vajpayee will probably have to take a leaf out of Israel's book in his dealings with Washington, post-September 11.

The Israelis are in a situation similar to India's. Prime minister Ariel Sharon went so far as to imply a few days ago that President George W. Bush was Neville Chamberlain, who

sacrificed Czechoslovakia to Hitler for illusory peace in Europe. Sharon warned Bush that Israel will not be another Czechoslovakia.

Vajpayee has been tough, yet diplomatic, with the US in his pronouncements in recent days. He will have to call a spade a spade when he is here, as far as General Pervez Musharraf is concerned.

For those planning the Prime Minister's Washington itinerary, a major dilemma is his interaction with the Congressional Caucus on India and Indian Americans.

Everyone expects Vajpayee to meet the India Caucus, which has been the most effective instrument in recent years in transforming Indo-US relations.

However, the co-chairman of the India Caucus, Congressman

Jim McDermott, has been recognised in his support for Bush in several aspects of the war on Afghanistan.

McDermott, a champion of Indian causes, has been openly critical of Bush. He is one of the few Congressmen to have voted against the administration's list on some issues after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon.

It is true that the India Caucus is not just McDermott. But can Vajpayee, whom Bush has invited here, breaking time-honour conventions, be seen rubbing shoulders with one of the few Congressmen who are not giving the President full support?

This is but one of the dilemmas that those drawing up the Prime Minister's itinerary will have to deal with in the next few days.

THE TELEGRAPH

Growing BJP-govt gulf worries PM

Advani hints at making Ayodhya poll issue

Times News Network and
Agencies

NEW DELHI: Ahead of the crucial Uttar Pradesh assembly elections, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Sunday spoke of a growing "communication gap" between the party and the government while Union home minister L.K. Advani indicated that the BJP could use Ayodhya as a poll issue.

"Somewhere something is amiss. This is an example of the growing distance between the organisation and the government. We have to look at it carefully," Mr Vajpayee told the concluding special session of the BJP national council to mark the party's golden jubilee.

Citing an example of the gap, he said he could not attend the flag-hoisting ceremony of the session as he was given the impression that his presence was needed only at the concluding function.

Arriving at the Talkatora stadium, the venue of the meet, two hours late, he apologised for having missed the *shubhaarambh* saying, "I was under the impression that (L.K.) Advani was to provide the *margdarshan* and I was to make

the concluding speech."

However, BJP sources said a copy of the programme, starting with the flag-hoisting, which was to have been done by the PM himself, had been sent to the PMO, and that if there was a gaffe, it was because of a gap between the PMO and the PM.

PARTY MATTERS



Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and BJP president Jana Krishnamurthy at the BJP national council meeting.

Addressing at the inaugural ceremony, Mr Advani said the Ram Janmabhoomi issue had helped the BJP to attain power at the Centre and asked partymen to project the issue in the right perspective and carry it forward. "Had we had not taken up the issue as a symbol of cultural nationalism, we would not have progressed so much. We tried

to present it in the right perspective though attempts were made to distort it. We should continue to project it in the right perspective and carry it forward."

He struck a cautious note to those in the government saying "politics itself is slippery, being in the government is far more slippery. One has to tread the path carefully".

While Mr Advani addressed people who wanted "an original BJP", Mr Vajpayee reached out to those who are a little uncomfortable with it. The PM spoke of the political stability the NDA coalition has given the country, with each of the 24 parties giving up part of its individual ideologies to frame a common national agenda.

In keeping with the tone set by Mr Advani, the session adopted a resolution saying the Ram Janmabhoomi issue "became reflective of India's cultural personality. Symbols of India's cultural personality are not inconsistent with secularism. The movement created a massive national impact and changed the mindset of millions of Indians. Our acceptability grew. We spread to areas where we earlier had little presence."

Put pressure on countries sponsoring terrorism: PM

By J.P. Shukla

AGRA, OCT. 14. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said that countries sponsoring terrorism should be brought under pressure to abandon their strategy to support the menace. India, which had been a victim of terrorism for quite some time now, had well realised its intensity while those who did not feel the pinch themselves failed to understand its problems. Now the dangers posed by terrorism had come to focus. India itself did not want the fight against terrorism to last long and for this it was necessary to pressure sponsors of terrorism to change their strategy, he said.

Addressing the concluding session of the two-day Golden Jubilee convention of the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha here, Mr. Vajpayee said the fight against terrorism should not be just symbolic. It was necessary to attack the problem at its roots. India itself would not allow the forces of terrorism to succeed at any level and would fight its battle with determination. It would be his endeavour to see that the Government and the opposition parties were united in facing the menace.

The greatest strength of India was the stability of its democracy. While in many other countries democracy had been replaced by military rule, in India forces of democracy had been strengthened. With the support of the people the country would be able to face all its problems, he said.

Mr. Vajpayee said some people were trying to disturb communal harmony in the name of supporting the Taliban Government but they would not become successful.

Terrorism could not be linked with religion though terrorists exploited religious feelings in their interests. "Did terrorism distinguish between Hindus and Mus-

lims in Jammu and Kashmir and were there not a large number of Muslims killed at the hands of terrorists?" Mr. Vajpayee asked. The divisive forces must realise the se-

riousness of the danger, he said.

Now with terrorists attack on the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly even Pakistan had accepted that this was terrorism. The definition of terrorism, according to Pakistan, had changed and the world had accepted that what India had been pleading so far was true. He called upon the people to maintain peace. Followers of all religions should stand united to save the country. India wanted to strengthen the forces of peace. "The battle has started in our home and now it is spreading. We want that this fight does not last long," he said.

Mr. Vajpayee, who was earlier handed over a document defining a youth policy as finalised at the convention, urged the delegates to focus on constructive politics. He said the Government would soon be framing its youth policy.

He accepted the demand made at the convention to constitute a National Youth Commission.

The BJYM delegates were given an oath in presence of the Prime Minister to engage themselves in various activities of social reconstruction, including a campaign against corruption. Mr. Vajpayee said the Government was trying to strike at corruption but no unnecessary scare should be created about the problem. The convention was also addressed on its last day by the BJP president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthy, the Union Minister, Mr. Venkaiya Naidu, the U.P. Chief Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh, and the State BJP president, Mr. Kalraj Mishra.

Harping on Hindutva

By Our Special Correspondent

AGRA, OCT. 14. Deliberations at the Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha Golden Jubilee convention here by and large centred round the theme of Hindutva with an effort by leaders to reaffirm their faith in the cultural identity of India as defined by the BJP and its affiliated organisations. Terrorist strikes in America followed by the war declared by the United States against terrorism has come as a new weapon to attack those opposed to their concept of nationalism.

The political resolution adopted at the convention stressed that India was an old nation with its special cultural identity which had faced turbulent historical occasions with its unflinching determination and heroism. India was not only a geographical identity with its mountains, rivers, plateaus, forests and fields but a living power of national individuality.

Tracing the history of the BJP from the days of Jana Sangh the resolution said there had emerged a class of people since the days of struggle for freedom which wanted the development of India on the basis of Indian characteristics and nationalism. The political ideology of the Jana Sangh was the culmination of this national ideology. The labour of leaders wedded to this ideology has led to the present state with Mr. A.B. Vajpayee holding the reins of the country.

The resolution eulogised the achievements of the three-year rule of Mr. Vajpayee emphasising that India no longer remained a weak nation depending on charity but had emerged as a powerful and prosperous country. Literacy rate had increased and defects in education system removed by the Ministry for Human Resource Development. Efforts had been made to make education value-based but the Congress and

Left parties had levelled allegations of saffronisation to denigrate these efforts. Besides making a mention of various steps taken by the Union Government to implement its policies and programmes the political resolution has also mentioned that the rate of conversion had increased in north-eastern states as a result of wrong Congress policies. The result had been that there had been remarkable growth of divisive tendencies in the region. Now the Government had prepared a special package to counter these divisive activities, the resolution said.

The convention lashed at the main opposition parties which had become directionless. They had lost all sense to distinguish between elements of national interest and disinterest and that was why they were supporting organisations like the Students Islamic Movement of India and making irrelevant allegations of saffronisation of education by the present Government.

The Ayodhya issue was not touched directly in official papers but leaders addressing the delegates did have blatant overtones of Hindutva in their speeches. The Union Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. Pramod Mahajan, said it was his dream that a grand Ram temple was constructed at the disputed site at Ayodhya. He mentioned that it was at Agra he had referred to the construction of the temple in 1988.

The demolition of the Babri structure, Mr. Mahajan said, was comparatively a minor job. A more important job was the construction of the temple at the site.

The Minister also declared that the Bajrang Dal was an organisation of patriots and the demand to declare the outfit illegal was evidence of bankruptcy of mind of the people making such demands.

THE HINDU

15 OCT 2002

Atal's tryst with comedy of errors

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Oct. 4: For almost five hours early today — from the time the first false alarm about the hijack that never was came from the Ahmedabad air traffic control at 11.40 pm — the government was on tenterhooks. The comedy ended when the National Security Guard commandos, who stormed the "hijacked" plane at 4.05 am, found no hijackers.

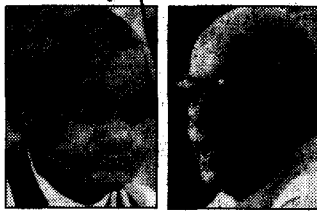
As news of the hijack came in, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, national security adviser Brajesh Mishra, joint secretary in the Prime Minister's Office Sudheendra Kulkarni, media adviser Ashok Tandon and home minister L.K. Advani woke up to face one of

the toughest challenge since the Kandahar hijack.

By 2.15 am, the high-profile crisis management group (CMG) was ready. The PMO had woken up the CMG members. Apart from Advani

and Mishra, there was civil aviation minister Shahnawaz Husain, Cabinet secretary T.R. Prasad, the home, civil aviation and defence secretaries, the chiefs of RAW and the Intelligence Bureau and foreign secretary Choklia Iyer, who substituted foreign minister Jaswant Singh.

Vajpayee stayed awake at his 7 Race Course Road residence, mon-



Vajpayee and Advani

itoring the situation inside and outside the "hijacked" aircraft. Advani, who had returned to Delhi late in the night from Srinagar, rushed to Rajiv Gandhi Bhavan, the headquarters of the civil aviation ministry, at 2.20 am to chair the CMG meeting. The meeting discussed all aspects of the crisis, including whether to negotiate with the hijackers or storm the plane. Mishra arrived a bit late at 3 am.

Vajpayee spoke to former Shiv Sena minister and Lok Sabha MP Chandrakant Khaire at 3.05 am for a first-hand version of what was

happening inside the aircraft. Kulkarni also spoke to the lone VIP passenger on board. Vajpayee, sources said, was awake till 4 am, when it was absolutely clear that the hijack was a false one.

The CMG meeting, which began at 2.30 am lasted till 4 am, when it was finally made clear that it was no hijack at all. Advani spoke to the pilot; Ashwin Bahal, at 4 am. At 4.05 am, the NSG commandos stormed the plane and found no hijackers, bringing the curtains down on one of most bizarre hijack dramas in aviation history.

A bleary-eyed Advani left Rajiv Gandhi Bhavan shortly after 4 am, followed by the Cabinet secretary. The civil aviation minister was the last to leave at 4.30 am.

THE TELEGRAPH

Strike at the roots of terrorism: PM

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 14. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today demanded that "the world must join hands to overwhelm (terrorists) militarily, to neutralise their poison" and called upon the nation that "every Indian has to be a part of this global war on terrorism".

Addressing the nation for the first time since the horrendous attacks on Tuesday, Mr. Vajpayee sought to paint India as a decade-long victim of the kind of terrorism that had manifested itself so viciously in New York and Washington. He noted that "what happens in Mumbai one day is bound to happen elsewhere tomorrow, that the poison that propels mercenaries and terrorists to kill and maim in Jammu and Kashmir will impel the same sort to blow up



people elsewhere". Without mentioning Pakistan, he virtually invited the international community to recognise Islamabad's role in aiding and abetting

terrorism. "We must strike at the roots of the system that breeds terrorism. We must stamp out the infrastructure that imparts the perverse ideological poison by which the terrorist is fired up. We must hold governments wholly accountable for the terrorism that originates from their countries. In other words, to get at the terrorists the world community must get at their organisations, at those who condition, finance, train, equip and protect them."

Making his message clear, Mr. Vajpayee asserted that "to get at the organisations, the world community must isolate, and thus compel the States that nurture and support them to desist from doing so". Though Mr. Vajpayee stopped short of offering assistance in any military steps the U.S. might be planning, he did tell the nation that he had told the U.S.

President, Mr. George Bush, that India was not only prepared to help in the investigations but also "to strengthen our partnership in leading international efforts to ensure that terrorism never succeeds again".

Harsh economic measures

The Prime Minister also warned that because of the attacks and the planned U.S. retaliation, there was bound to be certain amount of economic dislocation and "heightened costs". He observed, "We have to prepare ourselves for harsh measures in the coming months." Noting that the global economy was experiencing a slowdown, he used the occasion to prepare the country for a stiff dose of harsh economic measures, especially if the price of oil was to go up in the international market.

'I worried a lot about stability, now I want to govern'

■ I'm not weak, I know where to draw the line...I have told critics within that they have harmed their govt, says the Prime Minister

SHEKHAR GUPTA
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 10

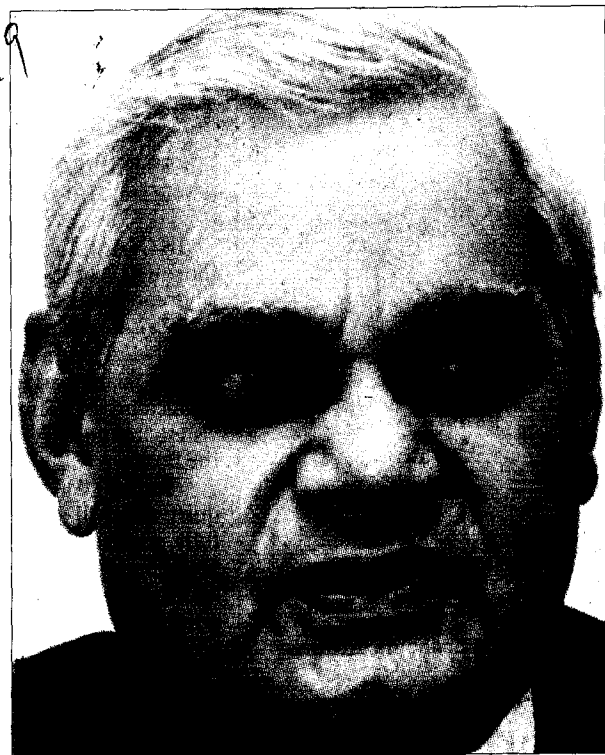
ADMITTING for the first time that political and personal issues have weighed him down and affected the quality of his government, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee yesterday signalled that enough was enough. And promised two years of straightforward, tough governance with accountability "that must begin at the political level."

IN his first comprehensive one-on-one interview to non-government media as Prime Minister (the full text of which is published on page 9), Vajpayee also told *The Indian Express* this evening that he was deeply hurt by the attacks on his economic policy, his office and his foster family and it didn't help that most of these came from people within his own party or the Sangh Parivar. "I have taken this up with them," he said. "They have been told in no uncertain terms. This has harmed their own government."

Strongly denying the charge that he is weak or indecisive—"I am not, I know where to draw the line"—Vajpayee recalled what until now hasn't been known: how he resisted pressure from President Bill Clinton during the Kargil crisis.

The moment of decision came on the night of July 4, 1999, the US Independence Day, he said, referring for the first time to some crucial, intricate diplomacy that went on behind the scenes. Nawaz Sharif, accompanied by General Pervez Musharraf, was in Washington. Clinton called Vajpayee at night to ask him to join in for a three-way meeting.

"He said, Prime Minister, please come



"It is ludicrous to suggest that I bend under pressure. Just because I do not talk or make song and dance over everything, it doesn't mean I give in," he said in the course of the two-hour interview.

Showing an on-record candour not usually associated with him, Vajpayee said the two factors that weighed "on my heart" so far were the survival of the coalition, and his health.

"I think I worried too much about whether the government will survive. That it was a 24-party coalition and that there must be political stability. Political considerations will always be there but I now want to govern for two years not bothering too much about

doubts in your mind, he said. "Now I have none."

The Prime Minister has his own take on why elements within his own ideological family have been critical of him. "They've been in the opposition too long. It is now a very old habit to oppose everything...they have political compulsions. They say, who knows how long this government will last? And when it goes, we will have to be back in the opposition. So we must keep our political posture alive or somebody else will take the Opposition's role."

He said he had reasoned with them and, as a result, discordance has diminished considerably. "I tell them, you are not only harming the nation but also yourselves. Does it help to go around conveying the impression that while this is your government it doesn't listen to you? Does this enhance your stature or clout?"

Vajpayee also said that these critics within had some genuine apprehensions about new policies, particularly on economic reform. And that he was addressing these. "They don't understand some things. For example, they say I am liberal.

EXCLUSIVE TO THE EXPRESS

to Washington. The three of us will sit together. I promise you not only a withdrawal, but also a new chapter in India-Pakistan relations. I will help move the

(peace) process forward," Vajpayee said Clinton told him.

"I said, Mr President, I cannot come now. The people of my country won't appreciate it. Pakistan must withdraw first," he said and then added for possible effect: "At that moment even Brajeshji (his Principal Secretary Brajesh Mishra) wasn't around for advice."

I tell them (those in the Sangh Parivar who oppose the Govt) you are not only harming the nation but also yourselves. Does it help to go around conveying the impression that while this is your government, it doesn't listen to you? Does this enhance your stature or clout?

these things," he said.

He said no medical reports had thrown up anything seriously wrong but just the problem with his knees, the surgery, had preyed on his mind. When you do not feel fully fit, you have some

But does anyone pause to think what we would be if not liberal? What will be the consequences if we are not liberal? They say so because they have no experience of running a government," Vajpayee said.

He also questioned the argument that to be a liberal is necessarily to be soft. "They say I am soft. I am doing all this for the Nobel Peace Prize. Do I really care about that? Can there be a bigger prize than the Prime Ministership of India?"

The Prime Minister said that this was the tone that he was now striking firmly and claimed that it was already straightening things out. "You will continue to see that situation improve."



On July 4, 1999, when Sharif was in the US, Clinton said, please come, I promise you a Kargil withdrawal, a new chapter in Indo-Pak ties. I said I can't. My country will not appreciate it, Pak must withdraw first

■ ECONOMY: Complacency, inexperience

No mismanagement but maybe some complacency. Market mess unnoticed because of inexperience. Finance Ministry has been asked hard questions, not good enough if it says it didn't know.



■ RESHUFFLE: Moving Jagmohan not bold

Despite problems in economy, Sinha best man for the job. Moving Jagmohan not exactly a bold idea. He was doing a good job, perhaps overdoing it causing problems for BJP in coming civic polls.



■ PAKISTAN: General invited me for NY talks

New York may not be substantive but could smoothen the dialogue process. Track II has done some damage making Pak believe that India is weak, wants peace at any cost. Distrust is Problem No 1.



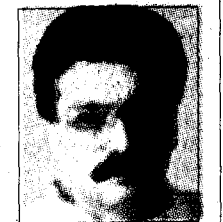
■ REFORMS: Sonia has her compulsions

Ridiculous that Cong and BJP should believe in reforms but continue blocking each other. Understands Sonia's compulsions. If Cong is constructive, people say, have you joined hands with BJP?



■ PMO: Family target because of me

Just because people made phone calls, doesn't mean there's a scandal. Might be a good idea if these calls are put on record. Sad that "because of me they (foster family) have been exposed to tension and trouble."



Vajpayee seeks to please RSS PM ridicules Musharraf the guest

ST
19/8

PM

PTI & UNI

NEW DELHI, Aug. 18. — The Prime Minister today took a dig at General Pervez Musharraf's conduct during the Agra summit, saying he was destined to have such a guest.

"We treat guests as gods. We invited Musharraf and he came. Now if someone asks what kind of a guest he was, then I would say I was destined to have such a guest," Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said. He was speaking after releasing a book here this evening. Written by BJP general secretary, Mr Narendra Modi, and late Raja Bhai Nene, the book, *Setubandh*, is a biography of an RSS volunteer, Lakshman Madhav Inamdar.

Mr Vajpayee said: "You get a guest if you have a good fortune and there must be something good behind it. The way the receiver's name is written on every morsel of food, the guest too might bring some good tidings with him."

Gen. Musharraf was criticised for "abusing" India's hospitality by meeting Hurriyat leaders in Delhi and televising an informal chat with journalists in Agra.

Taking another dig at Christian missionaries, Mr Vajpayee said some missionaries have a "conversion motive" behind their welfare work in backward areas. Conversion, though permissible under law, is "not proper", he said.

The Prime Minister, however, admitted that the Christians have a right to practise and preach their religion.

He regretted that the media gave little attention to the recent abduction and killing of four RSS activists by insurgents in the North-east. "The RSS activists had gone there to serve the people. I was sad to learn that their sacrifice has gone unnoticed.

Had the news been about Christian missionaries, it would have been widely covered."

Mr Vajpayee defended the RSS activities, saying the organisation should be judged by its conduct. He described the Sangh's activities as a "process, a science of linking people."

Others could learn from RSS the "art of bringing people together. There is no need for a charismatic personality or oratory. It is a matter of heart to heart. People join hands and it is a bond which continues for life."

He admitted there were ideological differences between the RSS and its opponents, but said the gap shouldn't be "unbridgeable".

Mr Vajpayee recalled his long association with the RSS. He said he didn't join the organisation out of any ideological commitment. "I joined to play games and the process that began is still on."

The RSS chief, Mr KS Sudershan, said the organisation appears "fascist or fundamentalist" to those who judge it by western yardsticks. "But

we aren't bothered about the detractors of the Sangh because bricks always come along with bouquets."

He said the RSS should be judged by Indian yardsticks such as upholding family values.

The RSS is growing in strength despite all the criticisms because of its idealism, conduct, work culture, values and the selfless service, he said.

Senior RSS leaders Mr Nanaji Deshmukh and Mr Shrikant Joshi, VHP president Mr Vishnu Hari Dalmia and vice-president Mr Giriraj Kishore, several MPs and senior BJP leaders were present in the function.



A Kashmiri woman hugs her son after a passing out parade of BSF recruits at Jakli Regiment Centre in Srinagar on Saturday. — PTI

■ India fights J&K ultras with Israel help: Jane's, page 7

15 AUG 2001

'J&K WILL HAVE FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS'

Pak. cannot wrest Kashmir through terrorism: PM

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, AUG. 15. Firmly rejecting the contention that the militant violence in Kashmir was part of a 'jihad' (holy war), the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today termed the killings of civilians unholy and un-Islamic. Delivering the customary Independence Day address from the Red Fort, he assured the nation that Islamabad's strategy of cross-border terrorism would be defeated, even though India would continue to engage Pakistan in a dialogue. "Let no one entertain any delusion that Pakistan can succeed in wresting Kashmir, through *jihad* and terrorism,

Milk and sugar

NEW DELHI, AUG. 15. "If the Muslim is milk, Hindu is sugar," said poet Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, quoting the great Kashmiri Sufi poet Meharji while making an impassioned appeal to the two communities in Jammu and Kashmir to stay in harmony.

Rendering a Hindi translation of a Kashmiri couplet penned by the Shayar-e-Kashmir, Mr. Vajpayee said in his Independence Day address, "the caste and land of you Kashmiris is the same. Do not unnecessarily create a distance between you. If Muslim is milk, Hindu is sugar. Mix the milk with this sugar". This Sufi ideology, he said, was the point of convergence of Kashmir with the spiritual tradition of India. — PTI

what it has failed to get through wars," noted Mr. Vajpayee matter-of-factly.

This was Mr. Vajpayee's fourth Red Fort speech, first non-Congress Prime Minister to have the distinction. It was a brief — only 30 minutes — business-like speech, and though it was not as spectacular a performance as many of his admirers were hoping for, his spirited and animated speech must have disappointed the dissident camp with the BJP.

As expected, the Prime Minister repeated his by-now-familiar view of what went wrong at Agra. According to him, the Pakistan President "came here with a single-point agenda to make India accept Pakistan's terms on Kashmir". This, he told the nation, was not acceptable to him. Also, expectedly, the Prime Minister was conspicuously subdued in discerning any thaw in Pakistan's unhelpful stance.

However, he did address himself to the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and acknowledged their "pain and agony". Significantly, he noted that when the election to the new State Assembly took place, "we shall ensure free and



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, gesturing during his address to the nation from the ramparts of the 17th century Red Fort in New Delhi on Wednesday. — AP

fair elections". The Prime Minister described "Kashmiriyat" as a "fine example of the *Sarva Dharma Samabhava* (secularism). It completely negates the two-nation theory."

Mr. Vajpayee also voiced concern over the situation in the northeast, and hoped the "comprehensive peace process" initiated in the region would bear

fruit. Celebrating the country's multi-lingual and multi-religious diversities, he said the "diversities are not our weakness". The note of inclusiveness is, of course, at variance with his own party's preference for a majoritarian polity.

Much of the Prime Minister's speech was devoted to the actual and perceived problems associat-

ed with the economic reforms. While asserting that the "fundamentals" of the economy were sound, and proceeding on the assumption that there were going to be second thoughts about the second generation of economic reforms, he acknowledged that the fruits of the experiment that began in 1991 had not been evenly distributed. "Inequalities have increased. Therefore, after serious introspection, my Government has decided to give a new pro-poor, pro-village, and pro-employment orientation to our economy. We shall make necessary modifications in the policy to remove imbalances and social inequalities."

The Prime Minister also noted the doubts and concerns on account of arrangements with the World Trade Organisation, and declared "we are quite capable, depending on our needs, to impose or hike import duties and to check unfair imports."

Wanting to rectify the adverse political consequences of bad economic policies and indifferent management, he announced a number of "populist" schemes, all aimed at wooing the vast majority of the electorate.

More than the WTO, the shadow of the recent financial scandals was discernible in Mr. Vajpayee's speech. He declared that "the corrupt elements will not be able to escape the long arm of the law, irrespective of how high a chair they may occupy." He cited the "introduction", once again, of the Lok Pal Bill in the Lok Sabha as evidence of his regime's sincerity and integrity.

Most significantly, the Prime Minister, perhaps for the first time, talked of the outbreak of unethical habits and practices of the business community.

"Profits earned by hook or by crook cannot be the sole criteria for judging the success of a business. The success of liberalisation requires the steady development of a new corporate ethics." These are harsh words from a Prime Minister who all these last few years has most eagerly sought to cultivate the chambers of commerce.

Mr. Vajpayee ended with a little sermon on the need to balance freedom with responsibilities in a democracy. But, like the President in his on-the-eve-of Independence Day address, the Prime Minister too sought to dispel the notions of pessimism.

This was a politically important speech for the beleaguered Prime Minister. He had to demonstrate to the country at large that contrary to the whispers from within the Sangh Parivar, he had the requisite physical health and the intellectual stamina to preside over the Centre.

New economic measures

The following are the economic measures announced by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, in his Independence Day address to the nation on Wednesday:

- Economic slowdown temporary; steps soon to reverse it.
- Action soon to reform capital markets and financial institutions.
- Economic policies to be given pro-poor, pro-village, pro-employment stance.
- Sampoorn Grameen Rozgar Yojana — Rs. 10,000-crore scheme to provide additional and guaranteed rural employment.
- Public sector banks to lend five per cent of net credit to women entrepreneurs — Rs. 17,000 crores over the next three years.
- Urban poor housing scheme for the benefit of the SCs, the STs, the backward classes and other weaker sections.
- Three lakh houses for armed forces on accelerated basis.
- Subsidised foodgrains for poor adolescent girls, expectant and nourishing mothers.
- Cheaper foodgrains for religious, social organisations undertaking mass-feeding programmes for poor.
- Farmers not to suffer due to WTO commitments.
- Next year to be 'Year of Implementation' — Rapid Action Force to oversee implementation of poverty-alleviation programmes.

STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN FREEDOM & JUSTICE: PRESIDENT

'Poor are getting impatient'

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, AUG. 14. The President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, said today that there was no need for the people of the country to be disheartened "by our many faults and failures" and instead reminded that the Independence Day was an occasion to celebrate our "achievement of unity and democracy".

Addressing the nation on the eve of Independence Day, he noted that the last 54 years had been the longest period in our history when we have had "relative peace, progress and a sense of unity".

Without mentioning any of the raging separatist aspirations, Mr. Narayanan asserted that if India was a united nation it was because "the unity has not been brought about by blood and iron"



The President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, addressing the nation on the eve of Independence Day on Tuesday.

but by "more enduring methods of tolerance and the human approach".

The President put his faith in the "gentle and genuine method of democracy", in sharp contrast

to the increasingly fashionable itch for stern authoritarian rulers.

Attributing this success to a willingness to undertake "an unprecedented experiment in social democracy", he said that "increasingly we would be called upon to strike a balance between freedom and justice". Only this "essential and basic balance" which lay at the "heart of our system" had enabled us to stand up to the demands of globalisation.

In other words, he called upon the people to tap — as Gandhiji did — the power of the "dumb millions". For a country that has increasingly no recollection of its struggle for independence, the President reminded the nation that it was these "dumb millions" who "laid the moral foundations and the political framework that made India a resurgent nation and enabled all of us to hold our

head high in the world".

In his brief address, Mr. Narayanan struck a note of caution against the creeping elitism, and put his faith "in our people, the millions of our ordinary people what Gandhiji called the dumb millions, who are becoming today more and more articulate and impatient". Moreover, he gently reminded the rich to be mindful of their obligations to the rest of the society: "Let the better off among ourselves ask themselves what they can do for our people and for our country, to be the inheritors of our great past and trustees of our future."

The President's address was characterised by a dogged refusal to give in to the pervading sense of pessimism, and to put abiding faith in the healing and regenerative powers of democracy.

15 AUG 2001

Vajpayee claims some gains from Agra summit

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 7

INDIA AND Pakistan had come to an understanding on some issues at the Agra summit that would provide a direction to the dialogue process in future, Prime Minister A B Vajpayee said today.

Vajpayee was replying to a debate on the summit in the Lok Sabha today. He assured the House the "unity and integrity" of the country would not be compromised in his future talks with the Pakistan President.

Vajpayee was clear that he had faith in the future of the dialogue. "We will find a solution," he maintained, outlining his Government's commitment to discussing all pending issues with Islamabad, General Pervez Musharraf's unifocal approach on Kashmir notwithstanding.

Vajpayee lashed out at Pakistan's continued abetment of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. He provided the members some insight into what transpired behind closed doors over July 15 and 16. "The talks were held in a friendly atmosphere... such things are possible in diplomacy. But I told him that if he was bent on talking about Kashmir we will have to start from history. I asked him the rationale behind giving a part of the territory annexed to China. He replied that he was confident that once India and Pakistan came to a settlement, China could be asked to return that part. I said he was not talking on the basis of reality."

Vajpayee conceded that his Government had to learn how to use the electronic media to its advantage. "We failed to understand how to act. In future, we will try to come up with a remedy."

Sanjay Nirupam tenders 'unconditional apology' to Vajpayee Thackeray ready to snap BJP ties

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE 9 P.M.

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, Aug. 7. — Mr Bal Thackeray today said he was ready to break the alliance with the BJP if the latter so desired. "They should know their limit as we do ours," he told reporters after a book release function in Mumbai. Mr Thackeray was visibly angry over repeated threats held out by BJP leaders.

Mr Sanjay Nirupam's "unconditional apology" to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today has not satisfied the BJP. It has sent the apology to the NDA for consideration. Mr Thackeray's statement has added insult to injury. The BJP said it did not want any NDA partners out of the alliance but they (allies) were free to take their own decisions.

Mr Thackeray tried to underplay the hue and cry over Mr Nirupam's remarks inside and outside Parliament. Mr Nirupam spoke against the PMO

SUBRAMANYAM GETS BAIL

MUMBAI, Aug. 7. — The CBI special court judge, Mr Justice SR Mehra, today granted the conditional bail plea of former UTI chairman, Mr PS Subramanyam, suspended executive directors, Mr M M Kapoor and Mr SK Basu and stock broker, Mr Rakesh Mehta, charged with misappropriation of public funds, in the Rs 32.8 crore Cyberspace Infosys scam. Mr Arvind Johri, promoter, director of Cyberspace Infosys Ltd, did not get bail and was further remanded to judicial custody till 14 August. — SNS

■ Details on page 9

■ Editorial: Pique and clout, page 6

and his statements were not intended to hurt "Vajpayeeji", the Sena chief said. He was angry at the BJP's reluctance to accept Mr Nirupam's apology. Mr Vajpayee refused to meet Sena MPs on Monday.

It was "the BJP who approached us for alliance and we agreed to keep their honour," Mr Thackeray said. The BJP had no foothold in Maharashtra before the BJP-Sena alliance was forged 15 years ago. "Whatever strength they have today is be-

cause of us." A visibly angry Sena chief said he was competent to take his own decisions.

The state BJP unit had always complained about Shiv Sena's overbearing approach. The party played second fiddle to Sena. The strains came to fore after Mr LK Advani, on a personal visit to Mumbai last Saturday, did not meet or speak to Mr Thackeray. Mr Thackeray's outburst belied *Saamna* executive editor, Mr Sanjay Raut's statements in his Sunday column.

He had said the Shiv Sena should strengthen Mr Vajpayee's position since his resignation would lead to anarchy.

Mr Raut said Mr Thackeray had dissociated himself from what Mr Nirupam said about the PMO. But Mr Nirupam claimed he spoke with Mr Thackeray's permission. Mr Raut felt the Shiv Sena would not be able to return to power in the state without the BJP's help.

The BJP is divided on whether or not to part ways with the Shiv Sena, which has emerged as the chief proponent of hardcore Hindutva. The party fears the RSS might find the Shiv Sena more acceptable on many issues.

The liberals in the BJP, Mr Pramod Mahajan being one of them, do not see any merit in continuing the alliance. They wish to explore new alliances. The hardliners do not favour snapping of ties. They feel the

■ See THACKERAY: page 8

THE STATESMAN

- 8 AUG 2001

(Continued from page 1)

THACKERAY:

4-8 08
Sena, despite its inconsistencies, is more dependable than the likes of the NCP.

Mr Advani has not spoken his mind but party insiders say he too favours a soft approach.

The liberals feel this as an opportunity to get rid of the Shiv Sena and project this as another feather in Mr Vajpayee's cap. The Prime Minister is uncomfortable about projecting a hardline image for himself and is reportedly keen to buy the theory that the NDA minus the Shiv Sena might be more creditable.

There is no immediate problem with numbers. The NCP with eight Lok Sabha MPs is being counted on for support in hours of crisis if the Sena (15 MPs) walks out.

The Trinamul Congress (nine members including Mr Ajit Panja) is already knocking at the NDA's doors.

Party hardliners feel this is Mr Mahajan's personal agenda.

He is reportedly peeved at Mr Thackeray's refusal to accept Mr Gopinath Munde, his brother-in-law, as the state chief minister as a price for toppling the Congress-NCP government.

Mr Mahajan, architect of the BJP-Sena

alliance, has had strained relations with Mr Thackeray for quite some time.

9 PM
Mr Nirupam's Rajya Sabha speech gave him the opportunity to put the Sena in the dock in Mr Vajpayee's eyes, a senior BJP leader said. The Sena chief's utterances and the language of Mr Nirupam's apology have further complicated problems.

The Opposition said Mr Nirupam "has not withdrawn his original remarks against the PMO and has not expressed regret for hurting Mr Vajpayee's sentiments."

"There is nothing in Mr Nirupam's letter to call it an apology. He has merely expressed regret for hurting Mr Vajpayee's sentiments, not making the remarks", Mr Jaipal Reddy (Congress) said.

Mr Somnath Chatterjee said: "Mr Nirupam's letter at best is a tongue-in-cheek reply for the Prime Minister.

"He has expressed regret for his remarks hurting his sentiments, but he has not withdrawn his observations. On the contrary, in his letter, he has conveyed his happiness to Mr Vajpayee for offering a probe into his allegations that some PMO officials had made telephone calls to the then Unit Trust of India chairman. There is no apology in his letter".

PM on top after quit threat

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 4. — The Prime Minister's gambit seems to have paid off. At the end of a turbulent week, which saw Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee offering to quit in disgust, hardliners within his party and allies seem to have been reined in, leaving him in absolute command.

A senior official said today: "He looked like the Atal Behari Vajpayee 10 years ago — relaxed and absolutely tension-free." Another official, who visited his residence for the *Rakshabandhan* festivities, reported: "There was no sign of any health problem or otherwise. He seemed in complete control."

Last week in Parliament, Mr Vajpayee offered to step down, clarifying circumstances and drawing analogy to dark monsoon clouds, which, he said, "would blow over". This silenced all criticism.

55-10
5/8
"Given the way he handled himself in Parliament, there is no reason for his media managers to worry so much about fielding him in public," a media commentator said.

His allies within the NDA, probably "accepting that their chances without Mr Vajpayee at the helm didn't look very good," according to an official, "relied behind him", accepting, albeit reluctantly, the necessity for a code of conduct.

"The message got home that he was serious about quitting," a senior official said. Mr Vajpayee apparently sought an appointment with the President on Tuesday, but he was persuaded to stay on "in the party's interest".

Sniping within the alliance, though temporarily suspended, is unlikely to lie low, especially when the question of cabinet expansion surfaces again. And within the Sangh Parivar, which came to the government's aid on the UTI is-

sue, raking up the mutual fund's private placements in the past, there was a definite lull, even if temporary.

As expected, given the position of parliamentary numbers, the government also survived an adjournment motion in the Lok Sabha on its failure to control the UTI's mishandling of the US-64 scheme.

The finance minister managed to retain his office, but only just, although economic indicators from other major public sector financial institutions, like the IFCI and the IDBI suggest that the coming weeks of the monsoon session may be as charged as the last one.

Although Mr Vajpayee and his government may have tided over the immediate crises which brought on his threatened resignation, it's clear that the "storm clouds" of the monsoon will take a while to blow over, even though the Prime Minister is perhaps better equipped, politically, to deal with them.



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee

THE Prime Minister's Office and all the Prime Minister's men have been enjoying enormous influence ever since Indira Gandhi systematically propped up her office and kitchen cabinet as the centre of power. In the process, she had stripped the Cabinet Secretariat off its legitimate importance and powers that her father Jawaharlal Nehru had rightly granted it.

The power hub has since remained at the PMO, often at the cost of the independence of ministries and departments and the Cabinet's collective decision-making authority.

Most of Indira Gandhi's successors, including those who opposed her politics and style of functioning, had failed to resist the temptation of having an all-powerful, if not over-powerful, PMO. Atal Behari Vajpayee does not seem keen to be any different. A powerful PMO is almost all the time propped up by powerful men, not necessarily elected representatives, members of the ruling party or from its leadership.

In most cases, "all the Prime Minister's men" in the PMO ranged from trusted (read often pliable) political aides, relatives, power-brokers or deal-fixers, who won the trust of the Prime Minister of the time for known and unknown reasons.

From Indira Gandhi's time, the conduct of the PMO and some of the people there have contributed to a great extent to the "fall" or blemished image of many a powerful Prime Minister.

Onto his third innings, Mr Vajpayee, for reasons better known to him or at least not explained so far, also appears to be falling prey to this fatal attraction of trying to shelter the exposed ones or defending the indefensible. This is tricky. Many of his more powerful and crafty predecessors tried it and paid for it.

Indira Gandhi's undoing to a large extent – the erosion in her once enviable popularity and political authority – was caused by the brazen manner in which her kitchen cabinet were allowed to have a free run over accepted norms. Her kitchen cabinet included her son Sanjay Gandhi and his unruly brigade, her "men Friday" RK Dhawan and Mohammed Yunis, the dubious Dheerendra Brahmachari and many power-hungry, political trouble-shooters and fundraisers like V C Shukla and LN Mishra.

Though Indira Gandhi was not known for sharing power, and had been aided by capable officials such as the late PN Dhar, the late TN Kaul and Sharada Prasad, the damage done by the "dear and trusted ones" did erode the Durga in her. Even

PMO trappings fatal attractions



517 8/8

The Prime Minister's Office and a personal coterie have been the downfall of many a powerful prime minister. Atal Behari Vajpayee appears to be a prisoner of his own men as well. A resignation threat cannot dispel the doubts that he alone, through his inaction against the 'dear ones', allowed to grow, writes

CL MANOJ

Rajiv Gandhi failed to learn from his mother's experience and succumbed to the "fatal attraction". He let himself be led by his Doon School "above the grass-roots level" advisers like Arun Nehru, Arun Singh, Captain Satish Sharma and Mani Shankar Aiyar. They prompted him to ignore ground realities, stay focussed on the alien 21st century India and to generally have a nice time.

It took no time for this pilot-turned-Prime Minister's high-flying gang in the PMO to demolish his more than two-thirds majority and crash-land the flight to the 21st century of a young Prime Minister.

Even the only non-Nehru Congress Prime Minister to rule a full-term, PV Narasimha Rao, despite all his brilliance, administrative experience and Chanakya-like mastery over power politics fell into the PMO "trap".

Those were the days when the writ of his trusted but controversial officials dubiously ran over every ministry and every decision. These men included AN Verma, PVRK Prasad and KN Venugopal. His notorious "godman" Chandraswamy enjoyed influence and unrestricted proximity to the PMO. Mr Rao's greedy sons and relatives were allowed to meddle in business deals. All this added to his systematic decline and finally trapped him in a series of corruption charges and scams.

Major non-Congress Prime Ministers have been in the vice-like grip of the PMO as well. Though the Janata government was erected literally on the political ashes of Indira Gandhi's Emergency and its "action-hero", Sanjay Gandhi, Morarji Desai had failed to put his ambitious son Kanti Desai on a leash.

Apart from the lack of

cohesiveness of the Janata set-up and the clashing ambitions and egos of its leading lights, the "aspiring Sanjay" also contributed generously in tripping Morarji bhai, the famed high-priest of political morality and discipline. The stints of other non-Congress Prime Ministers till Mr Vajpayee's time were too short and uneventful to judge their "PMO temptation".

But Mr Vajpayee seems determined to join the "big-league". It is not the mediocre performance of his government so far, the failure of its economic policy to revive the economy, the seemingly never-ending tugs from the NDA allies and the compromises that follow or the embarrassing snipes from an uneasy Sangh Parivar that is damaging his image and credibility. (Mr Vajpayee's image till the other day was flaunted by his partymen as an invisible asset.)

On the contrary, it is his questionable defence of a bunch with doubtful integrity in his PMO and his personal circle that is sullying his image. These are the enemies within.

Mr Vajpayee's silent but dogmatic defence of Brajesh Mishra and NK Singh – his shifting to the Planning Commission is at best seen as a "protective" move – in the face of widespread allegations is baffling. The allegations have even come from the Sangh Parivar and National Democratic Alliance partners, of the developing nexus with controversial business houses like the Ambanis and the Hindujas.

These PMO officials have been charged with usurping control of many "resourceful" ministries in the name of the Group of Ministers. The air in New Delhi's power circles is thick with gossip about the record-breaking upward-mobility of Ranjan Bhattacharya, Mr Vajpayee's foster son-in-law. It is in this context that the UTI scandal is assuming full significance.

Yashwant Sinha's failure in questionable circumstances and his motives for preventing the US-64 burst are quite clear. What is not is the stone-like resistance of the finance minister – sitting in a closet of scams and failures – despite the fact that many of his colleagues are waiting for his much-delayed exit. Where from does Mr Sinha, an otherwise political lightweight, derive the strength to defy the pressure on him. Report after report is suggesting a possible nexus between Mr Sinha, PMO officials and big moneybags. Has this alleged nexus made the Prime Minister a prisoner of his own men and their deeds?

His predecessors, from Indira Gandhi to Narasimha Rao, when faced with similar allegations and situations, did not care to respond because they did not have credible answers to bail out the undesirable elements around them. Their inaction and silent defence of their "dear ones" cost them dearly at the end. Mr Vajpayee has been around in the big league for many decades to know that keeping or protecting "live-skeletons" in the PMO and in close circles is like sleeping with the enemy, unless he has compulsions or fatal attractions to do so. Has he?

A mere resignation threat shall, certainly, cannot dispel these nagging doubts that he alone, through his inaction against the "dear ones," has allowed to grow.

(The author is Special Representative, The Statesman, New Delhi.)

No PMO role in UTI: Atal

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 1

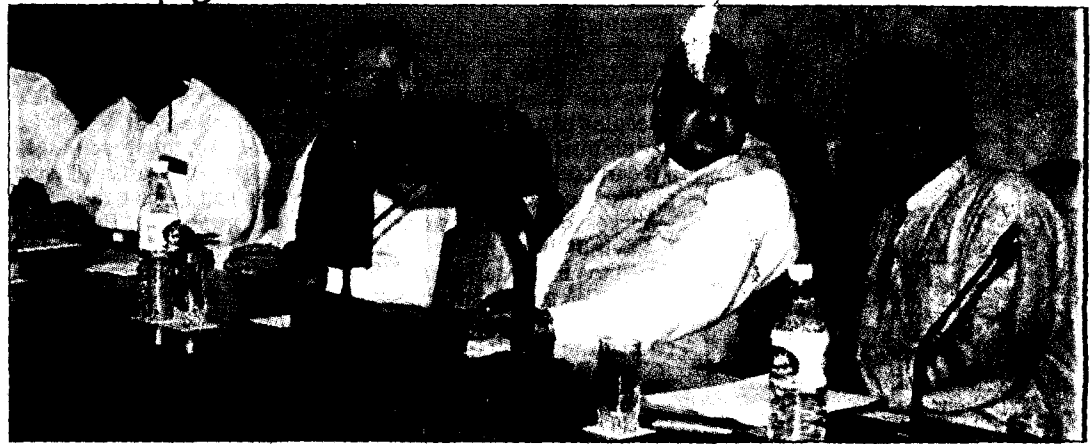
PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee said in the Rajya Sabha today that no PMO official was involved in the UTI muddle. He said, if necessary, the Government was ready for an inquiry.

At the NDA meeting today, Vajpayee won the NDA's backing to continue in office. Vajpayee went to Parliament soon after the NDA meeting to clear the confusion over his desire to quit office.

Responding to Opposition leaders in the Lok Sabha, who wanted him to clarify his position, the PM said the coalition had asked him to continue in office as they reiterated their "unqualified faith and trust" in him. "*Barsat ka mausam hai. Badal to ghirengi hi. Lekin badal chhatengi bhi. Yeh baki hai abhi* (the monsoon season is on. Clouds are bound to be there. But these do disappear. This is still to happen)."

In the Rajya Sabha, Vajpayee had to intervene as Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha's reply to the House on the UTI issue was repeatedly stalled by the Opposition, which forced two adjournments earlier in the day.

When the Question Hour ended, Leader of the Opposition Manmohan Singh led Congress mem-



Yashwant Sinha, L K Advani, A B Vajpayee and George Fernandes at the NDA meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday.

bers in demanding that the PM should immediately make a statement in the House on the important issue of his offer to quit.

Manmohan said his party was not interested in disrupting the proceedings and the members were willing to listen to what the Finance Minister had to say on the UTI fiasco. "But the dignity of the House warrants that the Prime Minister make a statement first," he added while stressing on the need to clear the confusion as the PMO, too, had been dragged into the controversy. NDA members protested at this. As the acrimo-

nious exchanges continued, the House was adjourned for 10 minutes. When it reassembled, it had to be adjourned till lunch.

Yashwant attacks Cong

In a bid to turn the tables on the Congress, Sinha claimed that the UTI invested Rs 1,073 crore in equity in a Mumbai-based company during Manmohan's stint as Finance Minister. Within two years of the 1994-1995 investment, the company's shares dipped from Rs 385 to Rs 77.50. "The Honourable leader of Opposition was

Finance Minister then and the UTI's investment was a private placement with a five years lock in period. I would like to be corrected and would stand corrected if it was not so," Sinha said.

His remarks sparked a volley of protests from the Opposition; the Congress and the Left members shouting that Sinha was skirting the real issue. Sinha's claims prompted Manmohan, who seldom interrupts other speakers, to stand up to counter Sinha's version. "He is trying to mislead the House and shirking his responsibility," Manmohan said.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 1, 2001

ACCOUNTABILITY NEEDED, NOT THEATRICS

THE PRIME MINISTER, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's dramatic offer to step down, made at a meeting of the BJP Parliamentary party, would appear to have been provoked by a sense of pique at the sharp criticism of the role of his office in the UTI muddle from within his own party and from the coalition partners, with aspersions being cast on the role of his aides. He was presumably stung to the quick because the names of his confidants were brought in. Although the BJP Executive Committee has, in its resolution, spoken generally of a nexus between the corporate sector and the financial institutions, the tone and tenor of the deliberations at the meeting were, by all accounts, stridently focussed against the Government on the UTI issue to the extent that the Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, was prompted to call for the party to "shed its Opposition mindset". The 'revelations' a member of the characteristically non-conformist NDA partner, the Shiv Sena, made in Parliament suggesting an unholy link between certain high-ranking officials in the PMO and the former UTI chief, Mr. P. S. Subramanyam (now facing investigation by the CBI on criminal charges), have indeed brought the high office under a cloud.

At one level, of course, the virtual collapse of the UTI's flagship scheme, US-64, adversely affecting the interests of 20 million small investors is traced to the conceptual flaws inherent in its framework which experts want to be removed so that the scheme itself is run as any other mutual fund and on well-established principles. But the more disturbing dimension consists in the dubious ways in which the scheme has been managed, as evidenced by the murky details being thrown up by the criminal investigations now under way and by other sources. Considering that a somewhat similar crisis had overtaken the US-64 scheme only in 1998 forcing the Centre to pump in Rs. 3,300 crores in a bailout operation to restore investors' confidence, it is inevitable that

the Union Finance Ministry should be blamed for not having drawn the right lesson and devised a credible monitoring mechanism. The most pernicious of all — and the one that is damaging to the political establishment at the Centre — is of course the suspected link of the higher-ups with the questionable investment decisions of the UTI management. It has been alleged that many of the bad investments were made under pressure from "top officials" and power brokers in Delhi. While these are still accusations and yet to be proved, the point that they have raised serious doubts about the role of certain "higher-ups" cannot be dismissed peremptorily. To the extent that an accusing finger has been pointed at the PMO, for having "influenced" the UTI's dubious investment decisions, the Prime Minister has some explaining to do.

Given the context in which Mr. Vajpayee has come up with his "resignation" offer, it may well be no more than a shock of the type political leaders at the helm are known to administer whenever they come under pressure from within their parties. In his case, it is evidently directed against the coalition over which he is presiding; reports suggest that he wanted to quit office in view of his "inability" to have the NDA function in a "coherent and disciplined manner". And the chances are that the shock treatment would have its desired effect, with the NDA, called to meet today, expressing full confidence in his leadership and pledging unstinted support to him. In any event, such a display of theatrics does not certainly behove the head of a responsible government whose top functionaries have come under a cloud and the "resignation" option, which betrays an escapist urge, will leave unanswered the host of hard questions the UTI muddle has raised. The cardinal principle of accountability demands that the Vajpayee regime come clean on the murky affair in all respects, after a thorough and independent inquiry.

THE HINDU

11/8

PM's plain-speaking

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, AUG. 1. If yesterday the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee had laid himself open to a bit of ridicule by first threatening to resign and then all too quickly agreeing to stay put, today he reclaimed some of his prestige. And if in the days to come he can prove that he means what he said to the NDA coalition partners this morning, he could well reclaim some of his eroded authority. And, that is a big if, as the evening was to show.

The Prime Minister reportedly told the NDA partners that he was no longer willing to lead the pack if it meant that the old ways would remain unmodified. More than what he said, it was Mr. Vajpayee's tone that conveyed a message to the allies that he was no longer willing to put up with any kind of nonsense from the NDA corner. The general assessment is that at least till the next crisis, the Prime Minister has reasserted his personal authority.

Buoyed up by the handsome tributes from the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, and from Mr. George Fernandes, the Prime Minister confidently informed the two houses of Parliament that the chapter was closed. In the Rajya Sabha, where the Opposition had forced him to make a statement, Mr. Vajpayee told the members that he had received the 'unanimous' NDA re-endorsement.

Squandering authority

However, even before the day was over and the political parlours could appreciate the Prime Minister's assertiveness, there came the

communique from the Rashtrapati Bhavan, announcing that Mr. Digvijay Singh, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, was also to have the additional charge of Railways. It has been the most widely known secret that Mr. Digvijay was unhappy that he had been shifted out of Railways and given Commerce (in the mini reshuffle of portfolios, effected by the Prime Minister on July 22).

Indeed Mr. Singh refused to take up his new charge, and it was only after nearly a week that he agreed to visit his offices in Udyog Bhavan. Mr. Singh is generally known to be a protege of Mr. George Fernandes, and his show of defiance in being shifted to the Ministry of Commerce was seen as being instigated by the NDA convener. However, Mr. Singh also enjoys

the patronage of another stalwart, Mr. Bhairon Singh Shekawat of the BJP. It is not yet known which patron was able to secure for Mr. Singh the second Ministry.

At the end of the day, Mr. Vajpayee had practically undone the impact of this morning's harsh words and tough tone. What is more, the numbers in the Lok Sabha — the core of the NDA's precariousness — remain unchanged. Nor can the 'unanimous' support from the NDA allies change the trouble on the health front, to which Mr. Vajpayee himself referred in such graphic terms. The retreat on the Digvijay Singh front has once again shown Mr. Vajpayee himself unwilling to exercise the prerogatives and power inherent in the office of the Prime Minister.

'Clouds are bound to be there'

NEW DELHI, AUG. 1. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today told the Lok Sabha that he had expressed his wish to resign yesterday but was persuaded by the BJP and NDA leaders not to do so.

"It is a fact that yesterday at the BJP parliamentary party meeting, I had expressed a desire to tender my resignation. The party did not accept my offer," he told a vociferous Opposition which demanded that he explain the circumstances behind his offer. In a reflective mood, he said *Barsat ka mausam hai. Badal to ghirengi hi. Lekin badal hatengi bhi. Yeh baki hai abhi* (the monsoon season is on. Clouds are bound to be there. But these do disappear. This is still to happen). Regretting that his remarks had caused inconvenience to the Speaker and the House, he said he had no intention of showing any disrespect.

Raising the issue, the Congress Deputy Leader, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, said the Prime Minister's remarks yesterday had created doubts about the existence of the Government. The CPI(M)'s Mr. Somnath Chatterjee said the Prime Minister should come out with the reasons that prompted him to take the drastic step. "It is good to see the Prime Minister occupying seat number one even today," he said.

Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav (Samajwadi party) said this was not an ordinary issue as the remarks had created "turmoil." — PTI

THE HINDU
THE HINDU

BJP leaders persuade PM to stay ■ Thackeray ready to 'disown' Sena MP

Vajpayee offers to quit

'I'm too old and ill and unable to manage NDA'

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 31. — The Prime Minister offered to resign today, a day after a Shiv Sena MP hinted at the PMO's involvement in the UTI scam.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee cited difficulties in managing the coalition as a reason for his desire to step down.

But BJP leaders later said Mr Vajpayee had been persuaded against resigning.

An emotional Mr Vajpayee earlier told his party MPs: "I'm too old, too ill and unable to manage the NDA." He wanted to quit because of his "inability to make the alliance function in a coherent and disciplined manner".

The damage control measures included the Shiv Sena chief, Mr Bal Thackeray, calling Mr Vajpayee and expressing full confidence in his leadership. He was even ready to disown Mr Sanjay Nirupam, whose comments in the Rajya Sabha yesterday seemed to have prompted the Prime Minister to think of resigning. Mr Thackeray said he could even come to Delhi to clarify his position.

Leaders of other NDA partners — such as Mr N Chandrababu Naidu, Mr Navin Patnaik and Mr Murasoli Maran — too spoke to Mr Vajpayee, requesting him not to resign.

The NDA will meet tomorrow when the BJP is expected to do some "tough talking" to its allies. The NDA convener, Mr George Fernandes, met Mr Vajpayee this evening but it was known what they discussed.

At the BJP parliamentary party meeting, some members, including ministers, reacted emotionally to Mr Vajpayee's offer. Mr Radha Mohan Singh and the health minister, Mr CP Thakur, broke down while requesting Mr Vajpayee to reconsider his decision, a leader said. He turned

down the plea, saying his stand was well thought out.

Later, Mr LK Advani told Mr Vajpayee in his Parliament House office that the alternative to his leadership was losing the government. He requested Mr Vajpayee to continue for the sake of the BJP and NDA.

Mr Advani was joined by other leaders and it was then that Mr Vajpayee agreed to stay.

The parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Pramod Mahajan, issued a statement, saying Mr Vajpayee had been persuaded to stay. It was shown to the Prime Minister before being released.

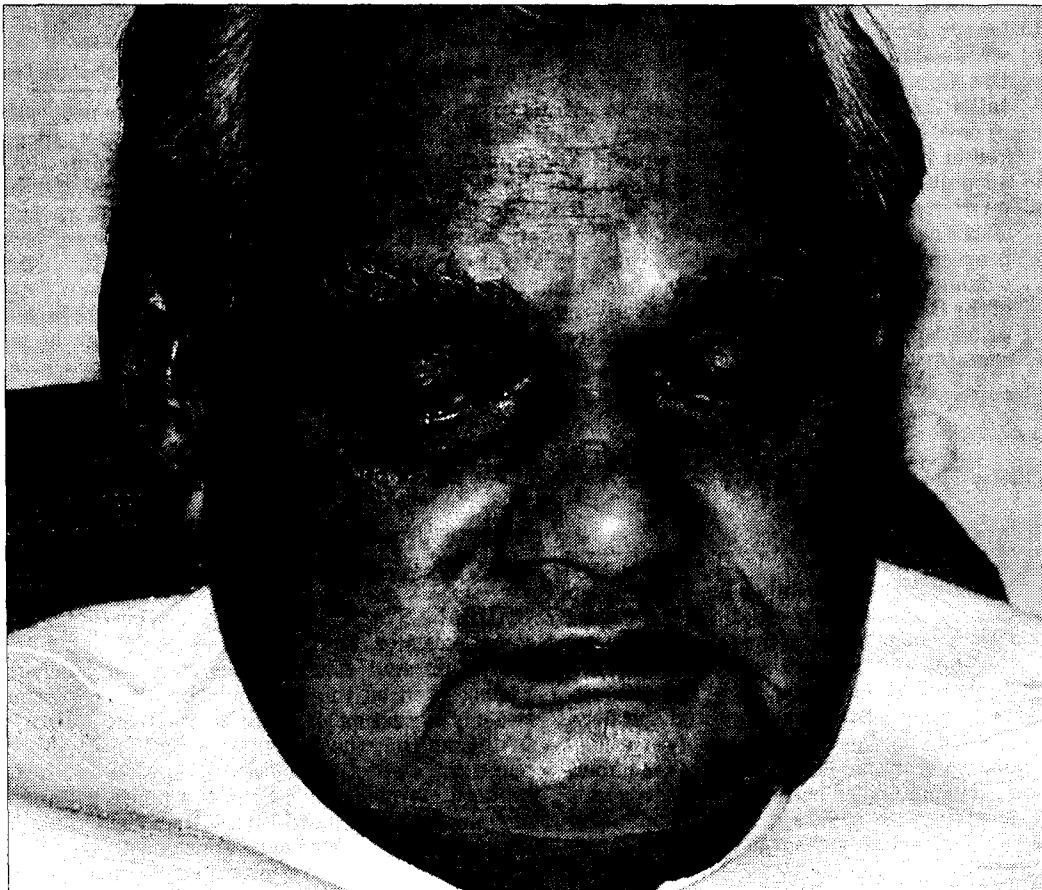
The MPs were stunned when Mr Vajpayee announced his decision. Normally, he doesn't speak at parliamentary party meetings. Today, when he told Mr Mahajan that he wanted to say something, the members sensed something was wrong. They asked Mr Jaswant Singh what would Mr Vajpayee talk about. Mr Singh told Mr Mahajan that the Prime Minister would offer to resign.

As Mr Advani was preparing to leave the meeting, Mr Vajpayee asked him to stay, saying he would make a statement. Unaware of his intentions, Mr Advani jocularly said that he too had to make a statement in Parliament and left.

Mr Mahajan tried his best to persuade Mr Vajpayee not to make the statement before 200 MPs. But a "determined Prime Minister" picked up the microphone.

Later, he rejected Mr VK Malhotra's plea to keep the matter away from the media. Mr Vajpayee said: "Yeh chhupane ki nahin, chhapwane ki baat hai." He reportedly said: "I'm not able to keep the NDA together. I've become old and not able to manage. People say I should retire. I'm

■ See Vajpayee: page 8



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee on Tuesday — AP/PTI

Pressure will mount on Yashwant

CL MANOJ
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 31. — Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee's offer to resign is likely to intensify the pressure on Mr Yashwant Sinha to resign.

Sources said the one reason why the BJP and the NDA were not asking for the Union finance minister's resignation over the UTI scam was the allegation that some PMO officials and persons close to the Prime Minister were involved in it.

But after the Prime Minister's announcement, questions are bound to be raised why Mr Sinha is not resigning.

Of late, the finance minister's fortunes in the party have been on the ebb. Several MPs now consider him a liability, thanks to the economic slow-down and the financial scandals.

Sources said despite his party colleagues' show of support and his damage-control exercises, Mr Sinha has become a lonely man in the government as well as in the party.

At the party's recent national executive meeting, Mr Sinha came and left the venue alone. Several leaders were unhappy to see him around. This reminded the leaders of Mr Bangaru Laxman's condition after the Tehelka expose.

The third threat

NEW DELHI July 31. — This is the third time the Prime Minister had threatened to resign.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's first offer to resign in 1999, when the BJP national executive was in session in Bangalore. The provocation was the resistance from within the party against the government's decision to privatise the insurance sector.

The second threat was when the Swadeshi Jagran Manch slammed the *Sankhya Vahini* project. — SNS

PMO denies UTI link

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 31. — On the day the Prime Minister offered to resign, the PMO launched its first major damage control exercise on the UTI mess.

The PMO denied that its officials had tried to influence the UTI to purchase Cyberspace shares. "No PMO official ever spoke to the former UTI chairman, Mr PS Subramaniam, in this regard," a PMO spokesman said.

The Cabinet, which meets on Tuesdays, initially called off today's meeting, but hurriedly recalled it at 6.30 p.m. Officials said cancelling the meeting "would have sent wrong signals."

The Cabinet spokesman, Mr Pramod Mahajan, said it was a "routine meeting" and that the Prime Minister didn't stick to his decision to resign at the meeting.

The Cabinet approved three legislative items to be introduced in the Parliament's present

session and two administrative items.

Sources said Mr Vajpayee was upset with Mr Sanjay Nirupam's (Shiv Sena) derogatory references to his son-in-law, Mr Ranjan Bhattacharya. The MP obliquely linked Mr Bhattacharya to the UTI scam. That was the cause of his outburst at the BJP parliamentary

party meeting. Mr Vajpayee is also disturbed by the criticism of New Delhi's handling of the Agra summit.

He was most upset when his integrity was questioned after the Tehelka expose. He is yet to recover from the "trauma" of being called a "thief" by members of

Parliament.

A senior Cabinet minister said Mr Vajpayee gave no indication of his desire to resign last night after he was informed about Mr Nirupam's comments in the Rajya Sabha.

He cursorily asked whose phone numbers were mentioned and left it at that, the minister said.

On page 8

- Allies sing the wrong tune against PM
- Why is Sonia soft on govt: wonder Congmen
- Left blasts PM' silence

On page 10

- 'UTI ready for redemption'

THE STATESMAN

WEDNESDAY

1 AUG 2001

'I CANNOT MANAGE THE NDA, I SHOULD LEAVE THE CHAIR'

PM offers to resign, relents later

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JULY 31. Responding to the carping criticism of his regime from within the BJP and the NDA, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today plunged the Government into a veritable crisis when he first threatened to resign and then relented, but not before the party leaders literally went on their knees, requesting him to stay put.

Mr. Vajpayee virtually walked away from a meeting of the BJP parliamentary party this morning after announcing that he found himself no longer able to lead the NDA in a cohesive manner and to the satisfaction of all. The stunned gathering of BJP parliamentarians and Ministers found itself beseeching the Prime Minister not to take the precipitous step.

Having so dramatically exposed the coalition Government's vul-

nerabilities, Mr. Vajpayee is set to get his leadership reaffirmed by the National Democratic Alliance partners tomorrow. Even the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, felt constrained to plead publicly with the Prime Minister not to leave the stewardship of the NDA ship.

The resignation threat was Mr. Vajpayee's riposte to the recent criticism — from the BJP, the Sangh Parivar, and the NDA allies — of his Government's handling of the Agra summit, the US-64 scam, the induction of new allies into the NDA, the terrorist violence in Kashmir, the botched up Naga ceasefire, etc.

Only last week the senior RSS functionary, Mr. Mohan Bhagwat, had issued an indictment of the Vajpayee Government: "It pains us utmost to see the Government unable to protect the life of its citizens from the murderous attacks

of a handful of terrorists." At the BJP's national executive last week, Mr. Vajpayee heard unpalatable criticism of his ministerial colleagues. Nor was he amused at the allegations made by the Shiv Sena in the Rajya Sabha that the Prime Minister's Office had a role in the US-64 scam.

Jaswant knew of it?

Many senior ministers were convinced that the Prime Minister came to the BJP meeting with his mind made up to administer a "resignation dose" to the MPs. In fact, it is believed that the Minister for External Affairs, Mr. Jaswant Singh, was privy to Mr. Vajpayee's decision to put in his papers; and, Mr. Singh, in turn, had pointed out that the party would predictably prevail upon him to stay.

All that happened at the parliamentary party meeting was a somewhat mild criticism of the Communications Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan's indifference to the requests of the BJP MPs. The charge was made by Mr. Maheshwar Singh, a member from Himachal Pradesh, who wanted to know how a Minister, belonging to a three-member party, could be so insulting to the 182-strong BJP. As if waiting for a cue, the Prime Minister sprang a surprise. He offered to step down as he was not able to make the NDA behave in a "coherent and disciplined manner".

Before the MPs could gather the drift of his remark, they heard him say: "Since I am the Prime Minister, I am responsible. I cannot manage the NDA. I have grown old. I am also unwell. I



The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, perusing a document in his Parliament office in New Delhi, on Tuesday. — AFP

should leave the chair. That is why I have decided to resign." The announcement produced the desired dramatic effect, with everyone wanting Mr. Vajpayee to re-consider his decision.

So baffled were the BJP parliamentary managers that they became totally unmindful of the fact that Parliament was in session. Mr. Pramod Mahajan, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs and Information, issued a press statement outside the two Houses. Mr. Mahajan said Mr. Vajpayee "did express his desire to quit office", but later "Mr. L. K. Advani, Mr. Jaswant Singh, Dr. M. M. Joshi, and myself called on the Prime Minister and persuaded him to abandon to the proposal".

While the news of the resignation — and its subsequent withdrawal — spread like wildfire

within Parliament House, the BJP leaders pretended as if the development was a private joke between them and Mr. Vajpayee. "There is no crisis before the Government as the entire BJP and all the NDA partners are fully behind the Prime Minister," asserted Mr. M. Venkaiah Naidu, Minister for Rural Development.

But an agitated Opposition in the two Houses was unwilling to let the matter rest and sought to know the actual position.

In the Rajya Sabha, the senior Congress leader, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, indignantly waved Mr. Mahajan's statement and wanted Mr. Vajpayee to come to the House to make a statement. The Opposition parties were this evening threatening to make an issue of the "resignation" in the days to come.

'PM over-reacted'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 31. The Shiv Sena MP, Mr. Sanjay Nirupam, today defended his statement in the Rajya Sabha during a discussion on the UTI scandal on Monday by seeking to focus on the role of some people in the Prime Minister's Office. He told *The Hindu* that he had not levelled any allegations against the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, or for that matter against any individual.

"I have made certain allegations. Let there be investigation into it. If I am wrong, I will withdraw the allegations."

Mr. Nirupam said Mr. Vajpayee had "over-reacted". He had "high regard" for Mr. Vajpayee and his intention was not to cause hurt to the Prime Minister. The attempt was to turn the spotlight on what was going on for otherwise the UTI debacle could not have occurred.

Not true, says PMO

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 31. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) today categorically said none of its officers had ever spoken to the former Unit Trust of India Chairman, Mr. P. S. Subrahmanyam, about making investments in Cyberspace Infosys Limited, a Lucknow-based company whose promoters are now in the dock on charges of defrauding the public and the UTI. Sources in the PMO today told *The Hindu* that their attention had been drawn to the reports in a section of the media alleging that the PMO tried to influence the UTI into investing in Cyberspace Infosys Limited. "It is clarified that no officer in the PMO ever spoke to the former UTI Chairman, Mr. Subrahmanyam, in this regard," the sources said. Recently, there were media reports that the cell phone records of Mr. Subrahmanyam had revealed that he had spoken to officers in the PMO on July 20 last year, a day before the UTI reversed its decision not to accept the private placement offer of Cyberspace Infosys Limited. Similar allegations were made in the Rajya Sabha on Monday by the Shiv Sena MP, Mr. Sanjay Nirupam.

Gimmick, says Opposition; NDA backs PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 31. The National Democratic Alliance leaders who are meeting here tomorrow are likely to express full faith in the leadership of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, even as a determined Opposition described his offer to resign as a "gimmick" to divert attention from the Unit Trust of India (UTI) scandal. It has demanded a statement in Parliament on the charges levelled against the Prime Minister's Office in the UTI fiasco.

The expression of solidarity that began today immediately after news that Mr. Vajpayee had threatened to resign — telephone calls from the Shiv Sena chief, Mr. Bal Thackeray, and the Telugu Desam Party leader, Mr. Chandrababu Naidu, and courtesy visits to express full support to the Prime Minister — is expected to be formalised through a resolution to be adopted by the NDA tomorrow.

However, the Opposition was not amused. The Congress came down sharply on the "hypocritical offer to resign and the instant willingness to withdraw it". The Party spokesperson, Mr. Jaipal Reddy, described it as "high drama and low comedy," enacted to "deliberately avoid a probe into the PMO's role in the UTI investments". The party saw it as an "admission of guilt". The facts that had already surfaced were "too startling to be sidetracked by the resignation drama".

The CPI(M) leader, Mr. Somnath Chatterji, charged that the resignation move was meant to "silence NDA partners" by dangling the "threat of elections" on a matter that called for the "immediate resignation of the Finance Minister".

The party's politburo member, Mr. Sitaram Yechury, said in Ranchi that the offer only "reaffirmed the tendency to protect the guilty in the UTI scam".

The BJP's view was "there was no crisis" facing the Government. Mr. Vajpayee had been "persuaded" to give up the idea of resigning. The Rural Development Minister, Mr. Venkaiah Naidu, stated categorically that the entire BJP and the NDA leadership was solidly behind the Prime Minister.

The BJP leaders were not willing to concede that many factors may have led to the resignation threat — the earlier Sangh Parivar allegations against the PMO, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch's attack on the Government's economic policies described by them as a "sellout to multinationals", the tough posture adopted by the BJP's national executive on the Agra summit fiasco and the barbs from the party against the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, which were interpreted by some as an indirect attack on Mr. Vajpayee, and the straight talk by party president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi, against using Cabinet berths

as lollipops. Instead, the suggestion by the Shiv Sena MP, Mr. Sanjay Nirupam, in the Rajya Sabha on Monday that the PMO may have been involved in the UTI scandal was seen as the main factor that led to Mr. Vajpayee's move. The threat had the desired effect. Mr. Thackeray, presumably told Mr. Vajpayee that the views of Mr. Nirupam were his own. This was re-affirmed by Shiv Sena's Cabinet Minister, Mr. Manohar Joshi, who met the Prime Minister to smoothen his ruffled feathers. The TDP leader, Mr. Yerran Naidu, met Mr. Vajpayee to explain that his party had never given any trouble to the NDA — it had only raised economic issues in the interest of the people.

And there were many BJP Ministers and leaders who met the Prime Minister to declare full support. Mr. L.K. Advani, Mr. Pramod Mahajan and Mr. Jaswant Singh were among those who "successfully persuaded" Mr. Vajpayee to give up the idea of resigning.

PTI reports:

The NDA convener, Mr. George Fernandes, met Mr. Vajpayee tonight at the latter's residence immediately after the Union Cabinet meeting. It was not immediately known what was discussed.

In Chennai, the DMK president, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, spoke to Mr. Vajpayee over the phone. He expressed shock over the resignation offer and hoped for good tidings.

Target is PMO, not PM, claims Shiv Sena

By Ambarish Mishra
The Times of India News Service

MUMBAI: The Shiv Sena's strident criticism of a former key official in the Prime Minister's office (PMO) for his alleged role in the unfolding UTI scam is part of the party's strategy to spare Prime Minister Atal



Bal Thackeray

Behari Vajpayee while closing in on the PMO. The Sena does not want Mr Vajpayee to put in his papers, but to restructure the PMO, according to party sources.

Talking to Mr Vajpayee on the phone on Tuesday afternoon, Sena chief Bal Thackeray made it clear that his party had not targeted the Prime Minister, nor did it plan to do so in future.

Mr Thackeray rang up Mr Vajpayee immediately after television channels flashed news reports about the PM's announcement at the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)

parliamentary party meeting that he wished to step down.

While persuading Mr Vajpayee to stay on and assuring him of the Sena's continued support in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Mr Thackeray told the Prime Minister that criticism of a former PMO official could not and should not be construed as the Sena's disapproval of the Prime Minister's style of functioning.

"Ms Sonia Gandhi did not resign as Congress president when all kinds of allegations were made against her secretary V. George," a top Sena leader pointed out while talking to this newspaper.

Nevertheless, the Sena's game-plan to attack the PMO is a calculated move by the party to embarrass the Prime Minister and compel him to reorganise his office, say political observers.

During the 'Tehelka' episode, the Sena had openly attacked the PMO and the Prime Minister's national security adviser Brajesh Mishra.

► BJP's reluctance to topple DF govt. is cause of Sena's ire, Page 3

THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE TIMES OF INDIA

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Why Atal wanted to quit

Vir Sanghvi
New Delhi, July 31

HOW SPONTANEOUS was Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's threat to resign at Tuesday's meeting of the BJP Parliamentary party? The party's trouble-shooters have told the press that Vajpayee flared up and made an emotional statement. "But it only took an hour for him to change his mind and decide to stay" says a senior minister.

This interpretation is at odds with the evidence. MPs who met Vajpayee before the BJP meet say that he had already told them that he was fed up and ready to quit. He was angered by the constant speculation about his health, annoyed by the incessant demands for more ministries from NDA allies and fed up with the inability of many members of his party to look beyond petty issues.

The last straw appears to have

118
been Sanjay Nirupam's remarks on the UTI scandal. Vajpayee believes that attacks on the PMO and his family are no more than proxy attacks on him. In the aftermath of Tehelka he told his BJP colleagues privately that if they insisted on dismantling the PMO, he might as well step down himself.

This time around Vajpayee made his position public. Sources within the Shiv Sena admit that the Prime Minister was so angered by Nirupam's remarks that he called Bal Thackeray first thing Tuesday morning. Thackeray was asleep and could not take the call. Vajpayee then went public with his resolve to quit at the BJP meeting.

Why then did he change his mind so quickly? Even now, it is not clear that he did, in fact, agree to stay within an hour. Those who met him later in the day say that he was still sticking

to his decision and his refusal to refer to it at the Cabinet meeting in the evening did not mean that he had necessarily reconsidered.

Nobody is saying exactly what transpired during the Prime Minister's conversation with Thackeray when the two men did eventually talk, but the general view is that while Thackeray distanced himself from Nirupam, he did not disown him. Vajpayee is believed to have told his senior colleagues that he thought that as a responsible member of the NDA, Thackeray should ask Nirupam to apologise.

Even so, most of the BJP believes that the crisis has blown over—though a hard core of Vajpayee supporters warns against accepting this view. Vajpayee, they say, will not be satisfied till the Sena falls in line. Till that happens the Prime Minister has kept his options open.

Cong scoffs at PM resignation

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 31

THE CONGRESS today dubbed the Prime Minister's offer to resign as "hypocritical" and said the "farfical" resignation "drama" was a diversionary tactic to pre-empt a probe into the PMO's role in UTI investments.

The principal Opposition party will focus on the issue and seek clarification from the PM when Parliament convenes tomorrow. Asking Vajpayee to make a statement in both Houses of Parliament on charges levelled by Shiv Sena's Sanjay Nirupam against the PMO in the

UTI tangle, Congress spokesman Jaipal Reddy said such startling facts could not be sidetracked by a mere resignation drama.

"Let the message be clear that the PM can't get away with studied, conspiratorial silence. These new revelations can't be wished away by mere political stunts." Reddy also drew attention to the Johari brothers' role in the UTI scam, their proximity to the RSS and reports that the PM had inaugurated their technology park.

Though the Congress repeatedly attacked the PM for refusing to speak in Parliament, it stopped short of demanding his

resignation. "Before seeking his resignation, we would like the PM to first state the facts. The PM should realise that he is under a cloud and he needs to lift it," said Reddy.

Questioning the timing of Vajpayee's resignation, Reddy said his party would continue to demand that the PM clarify the facts in Parliament since millions of small investors had lost their hard-earned savings in the UTI.

"This is not just an internal affair of the BJP or the NDA. It is a national issue since over 20 million UTI investors have been badly affected."

Sena leader sees PMO link to UTI mess

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 30. The Government today suffered the mortification of coming under fire from one of its important allies over the Unit Trust of India debacle during a short duration debate in the Rajya Sabha. The Shiv Sena came virtually close to naming the Prime Minister's household for influencing the investment decisions of the UTI, causing embarrassment to the treasury benches.

Mr. Sanjay Nirupam, fielded by the Shiv Sena, created a stir by alleging that the jailed ex-UTI Chairman regularly called up influential people in Delhi, including highly-placed persons in the Prime Minister's Office. The list of Delhi-based mobile phone numbers made available to the CBI strengthened the claims made by the former UTI chief, Mr. P. S. Subramanyam's lawyer that most murky investment decisions were taken on instructions from top officials and Delhi-based power brokers. Mr. Nirupam also alleged that after the lawyer's disclosure about pressure from Delhi, the CBI was being influenced to release Mr. Subramanyam. He demanded that private placements made by the UTI between June 1999 and June 2000 be tabled in Parliament. A quarter of the 1,300 private placements made by the UTI during this period were in unregistered companies.

Fire will be met with fire, PM warns Pakistan

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: In a clear message to Pakistan on Thursday, which was commemorated as Kargil 'Vijay Diwas', Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee said that although India would continue to seek dialogue and reconciliation, it was fully capable of thwarting any misadventure by anyone.



A.B. Vajpayee

"Hum shanti ke poojari hai, par aakraman ka uttar dene mein bhi saksham hai" (We worship peace, but are capable of repulsing any aggression), he said at a function to mark the second anniversary of the Kargil victory. The function was attended, among others, by several gallantry award winners and families of Kargil martyrs.

Talking to newsmen, Mr Vajpayee reiterated that Pakistan's refusal to end cross-border terrorism was the main hurdle in the talks between the two countries. "Nobody in our delegation (at the Agra summit) was ready to accept cross-border terrorism as a freedom struggle," he said.

Refuting the suggestion that the two sides could not come up with a joint declaration

because of divisions within the Indian camp, he said, "It is a misconception that there were some hardliners. There were absolutely no differences in our delegation." He indicated that the utterances by Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf about a "split" in the ranks of the Indian government could come in the way of future talks between the two sides.

Speaking about the issue of Indian prisoners of war (POWs), he said that the government was preparing a detailed report on the 54 soldiers believed to be in Pakistan's custody and to send it to Pakistan. Lauding the manner in which Indian troops had pushed back enemy intruders entrenched on higher ground in harsh mountainous terrain during the Kargil conflict, Mr Vajpayee said the country was proud of their sacrifices.

Mr Vajpayee announced that while all the servicemen who had participated in the Kargil operation would be awarded 'Operation Vijay Stars', personnel from paramilitary and other forces would get 'Operation Vijay Medals'.

Stating that defence minister Jaswant Singh would head a new committee to formulate a national welfare policy for ex-servicemen, he promised them fresh medical benefits.



FLAME OF VICTORY
School children light candles at India Gate during the celebration of the second anniversary of 'Kargil Vijay Diwas' in New Delhi on Thursday.

HO-1
29/7

PMO distances itself from tainted company

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 23. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) today sought to distance itself from the scam-accused Johari group of Lucknow, promoters of Cyber Space Infosys Limited and Century Consultants Limited. The promoters of these companies are in jail for defrauding the public and the Unit Trust of India, but on January 31, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, had laid the foundation stone for a software technology park (STP) in Lucknow promoted by them.

While distancing the Prime Minister from the accused, the PMO almost admitted that no investigation had been conducted into the bona fides of the promoters before Mr. Vajpayee agreed to lay the foundation stone for their project. In a late evening press release, the PMO emphasised the point that the Johari family was not personally known to the Prime Minister and that he had laid the foundation for the STP at the request of the former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Ram Prakash Gupta, and the State Minister for Electronics and Information Technology, Mr. Shivkant Ojha. The Uttar Pradesh Government has 26 per cent equity in the STP.

According to the PMO, the Johari brothers were also involved

in stock exchange brokering at Lucknow and Mumbai through Century Consultants Limited. They also collected fixed deposits and money from the public for a "badla byaz scheme", which was used to finance share market activities.

It was also conceded that many small investors had invested money in the scheme, but this was done prior to the foundation-laying ceremony. There have been allegations from the Opposition parties that the Prime Minister's association with the group — through the foundation stone-laying ceremony — gave a false sense of security to small investors.

The share price of Cyber Space Infosys was in the range of Rs. 1,000 to Rs. 1,600 last year but with the meltdown of technology stocks, they crashed and the Joharis could not cope with their liabilities. In March, the Johari brothers absconded from Lucknow and Mumbai.

The PMO release listed the fact that on investor complaint, nine FIRs were registered in Lucknow against the promoters of these companies from March 21 onwards and on a request from the State Government on April 4, the matter was handed over to the CBI for investigation on April 11. By May 22, the brothers were apprehended from Kalimpong in

West Bengal and are now in custody. The CBI has to file its charge sheet by August 22. Properties owned by the accused, worth about Rs. 17.05 crores, have also been located by the CBI.

The CBI registered two more cases against the brothers in July, relating to a fraud of approximately Rs. 32 crores from the City Cooperative Bank, Lucknow. Another case was registered against Cyber Space Infosys for defrauding UTI.

The PMO release also drew attention to the assurance given by the Prime Minister that no one, however high, would be spared if found guilty in the scam. The proximity of some Uttar Pradesh BJP leaders to the Johari brothers has been hinted at in the recent past.

PTI reports:

The Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Rajnath Singh, said he would order, if necessary, a probe into the joint venture between the State Government and Cyber Space Infosys.

"I will get the documents and ascertain if any fraud was committed. If I feel something is wrong, I will definitely order an probe," he told Aaj Tak. The STP would not have been inaugurated by Mr. Vajpayee had proper information about the company been made available before.

499-1 INVITATION WELL-THOUGHT OUT: PM

Talk to Pant first, Hurriyat told

MANALI (H.P.), MAY 29. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today asked the All-Party Hurriyat Conference to talk to the Government interlocutor, Mr. K. C. Pant, before pressing for a meeting with Pakistan's Chief Executive and military ruler, Gen. Pervez Musharraf.

"The Hurriyat leaders were released from jail to enable them to talk to the Indian Government. Mr. Pant is in Jammu and Kashmir for talks with various groups and they should come forward for parleys with him," Mr. Vajpayee, who is on a holiday here, told presspersons.

"Doosron ki baari baad mein aayegi" (Others' turn will come later), he said when asked about Pakistan's demand that the Hurriyat leaders be permitted to meet Gen. Musharraf during his proposed visit to New Delhi.

(The Hurriyat refused to comment on Mr. Vajpayee's statement. "The Prime Minister has every right to make any statement. Likewise, we have every right to respond or not to respond," the Hurriyat chairman, Prof. Abdul Gani Bhat, said in Srinagar).



Terming his invitation to Gen. Musharraf as a "well thought-out" new peace initiative, Mr. Vajpayee said "the invitation for talks should not be considered as weakness. It is a demonstration of India's self-confidence."

Replying to question, Mr. Vajpayee said he had taken the major Opposition parties into confidence on the move to invite Gen. Musharraf.

The Prime Minister, whose week-long holiday at Prini ends

tomorrow, drove 6 km to the Mountaineering Training Institute here to meet the media.

New Delhi had always favoured a political solution to the Kashmir dispute because it did not consider it a religious issue. Replying to a query, Mr. Vajpayee said Gen. Musharraf had stated on several occasions that he was prepared to talk to India any time, at any place and at any level. Other countries had also favoured the resumption of a dialogue between India and Pakistan.

New Delhi had never said that it would not talk to a military regime in Islamabad. Even after the Kargil conflict, India had maintained diplomatic relations with Pakistan, Mr. Vajpayee said.

Condemns Taliban decree

Mr. Vajpayee strongly condemned the imposition of a dress code on Hindus in Afghanistan. Pointing out that the international community had criticised the Taliban for issuing the decree, he said "we also condemn it strongly." The Government had already called for international pressure against the Taliban regime.

— PTI, UNI

PMO calls summit shots, foreign ministry sidelined

NILOVA ROY CHAUDHURY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 29 — The Prime Minister is personally setting the agenda for the summit with the Pakistani President, using his principal secretary, Mr Brajesh Mishra, for coordination, and leaving the foreign ministry "not very well clued-in."

Mr Mishra is in the USA on Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's instruction. No foreign ministry official is accompanying him and he has reportedly held talks with senior US officials to "carry forward the strategic dialogue" between the two countries.

It's highly possible that the Bush administration will be aware of some of the subjects to be discussed at the summit, widely expected to feature Kashmir, especially since Pakistan wants it to be the core issue.

Close on the heels of the US tour of the Pakistani foreign minister, Mr Abdus Sattar, Mr Mishra's visit, about which no official is willing to comment, will place on record India's initiatives to firm up Indo-Pak relations.

PMO denial: A PMO spokesman, however, denied that Mr Mishra's visit had anything to do with the summit. He said his visit was fixed "a long time ago," like Mrs Sonia Gandhi's.

J&K PLEA REJECTED

NEW DELHI, June 29. — The Planning Commission has reportedly turned down a proposal to grant "special category status" to J&K and Assam with retrospective effect from 1969, instead of 1990 (as has been done).

This is being seen as a big setback to senior commission officials trying to get the status, especially for J&K.

Some officials present at the meeting said the proposal was turned down, among others, by Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee. — SNS

**(Reforms will get a boost:
PM, page 8)**

The foreign ministry's agenda is not likely to feature major suggestions beyond what has already been spelt out in the eight "non-papers" exchanged earlier. That makes any important breakthrough in bilateral relations unrealistic.

"Any speculation on a positive outcomes is based entirely on behind-the-scenes ideas, those which have not been officially articulated," officials said.

Delhi security beefed up: Most parts of Delhi that General Pervez Musharraf is

scheduled to visit or pass through has been fixed. He will visit Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya and Amir Khusro's dargahs before proceeding for his old ancestral house in Daryaganj.

Both areas are being combed by security personnel and are being given a facelift. It is considered necessary, according to belief, to visit the Nizamuddin dargah before visiting the shrine of Sheikh Moinuddin Chisti at Ajmer.

Gen Musharraf will not have time to visit the third important Sufi shrine of Sheikh Salim Chisti at Fatehpur Sikri outside Agra.

He will be accorded a ceremonial reception at the red-gravelled forecourt of Rashtrapati Bhavan, after which he is scheduled to visit Raj Ghat.

He will also receive visits from the Leader of the Opposition, among other senior political leaders, and President Mr Narayanan will host a banquet in his honour on the evening of 14 July — observed worldwide as Bastille Day which saw the culmination of the French Revolution.

Details of where the summit in Agra will be held have not been formalised yet but a final decision is likely next week after visits from the Pakistani foreign office personnel and the foreign ministry.

THE STATESMAN

PoK will figure in summit: PM

By Mahesh Vijapurkar

MUMBAI, JUNE 19. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said the issue of Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) would figure during his coming summit talks with Pakistan's military ruler, Gen. Pervez Musharraf. "A third of Kashmir is with them and it is an indivisible part of our country," he told a press conference here — in the photo he is arriving for the press meet from the Breach Candy Hospital — before leaving for New Delhi after a knee surgery here.

India's stand on Kashmir, Mr. Vajpayee said, "is very clear." Talks between the two would go towards enforcing India's stance. But the issue of enormous spending on defence on either side of the border too could come up. The Rs. 2 billion cut in defence budget by the neighbour was "too nominal".

After returning to New Delhi, Mr. Vajpayee would convene an all-party meeting on the planned summit, where relations with Pakistan would be reviewed and the future course determined. On the outcome of the talks, he said "I am an optimist and therefore invited Gen. Musharraf for talks."

Manipur won't be affected

Turning to the extension of the ceasefire with the NSCN (I-M) in Nagaland, he said it would not impact adversely on the status or borders of Mani-



pur or for that matter, any other State in the northeast region.

Terming the violence in Manipur "unfortunate", he said it could be due to a misunderstanding among the people. He appealed to the people, especially the youth, to "give up violence".

THE HINDU

Get well, Mr PM, but put your foot down on Valley

FROM DEBASHIS BHATTACHARYYA

Mumbai, June 8: As Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee started recovering from his second knee operation in eight months, people appeared as concerned about his health as his proposed meeting with Pakistani chief executive Pervez Musharraf.

Dozens of e-mails are streaming into Vajpayee's mailbox created by the Mumbai unit of the BJP, wishing him quick recovery and urging him not to compromise on Kashmir. He also received a get-well note from Congress president Sonia Gandhi, but with a reminder on the Ayodhya issue. (See Page 6)

Doctors said the leader was recovering well. Vajpayee was helped out of his bed today and made to sit on a chair, though briefly. The pain in his operated knee was subsiding and he did not have any health complaints. The Prime Minister remained on a liquid diet. He is expected to return to normal diet in a day or two.

Vajpayee's inbox was overflowing with mails, said Mangal Lodha, BJP MLA in charge of

9/6
media management. In the past 24 hours, the box received 1,200 e-mails. Most were "get well" types, but many were about Vajpayee's summit with Musharraf.

Many even suggested how he should go about the summit — not budging an inch from India's position on Kashmir. Ashok Dugar, in Hindi, asked Vajpayee not to take a "soft line" during his meeting with Musharraf, reminding him of the Kargil war that had cost the lives of many Indian soldiers.

Another man, wishing the leader a quick recovery, asked him not to compromise on Kashmir which, he said, was an integral part of India. He asked Vajpayee to make sure that the Pakistani chief executive really wanted peace in the embattled state. Otherwise, he said, nothing would come of the meeting.

The summit with Musharraf is high on the Prime Minister's post-operative agenda, a Vajpayee aide said. Next is the expansion of his Cabinet, a prickly business with the Shiv Sena demanding a berth in place of former Union law minister Ram Jethmalani, who was elected to the Rajya Sabha on a Sena ticket.

Union parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan has, however, said the Sena would not get any Cabinet berth as Jethmalani was a minister before he became a Rajya Sabha MP.

According to the Prime Minister's aide, the meeting with Musharraf is expected to take place in Delhi by mid-July, though the exact date is yet to be finalised. The Pakistani military ruler might stay in India for two or three days at the most, the PMO official added.

Lodha said many e-mailers hoped the Prime Minister would recover quickly enough to have a fruitful dialogue with Musharraf. Some also advised him on his domestic compulsions.

Doctors at Breach Candy hospital, where US-based surgeon Chittaranjan Ranawat had yesterday successfully replaced the Prime Minister's right knee joint, said they hoped Vajpayee would start walking with a walker in a couple of days. Vajpayee today spent the day mainly reading newspapers and watching television.

No files were sent to him today, but the Prime Minister is expected to clear some soon. He was not permitted visitors.

...infotech here for India

THE TELEVISION

Brajesh may keep both posts after all

51-8
MILOVA ROY CHAUDHURY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE



Mr Brajesh Mishra

NEW DELHI, June 8. — Continuing for Mr Brajesh Mishra to give up one or both of his charges as principal secretary to the Prime Minister and national security adviser might actually be counter-productive in the context of getting the national security apparatus (NSA) off the ground. This seems to be latest wisdom in Delhi's ruling political establishment.

Senior officials say that Mr Mishra, whether his numerous detractors like it or not, retains the Prime Minister's complete confidence, and is probably the one person, outside Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee's adopted family, who has absolute access to him. Given these circumstances, and given the fact that the na-

tional security apparatus is in a fledgling state, any recommendations it makes does, perforce, have to go to the Cabinet committee on security and thence, for approval, to the Cabinet, which is accountable to Parliament. And, as the principal secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr Mishra would certainly be privy to any recommendations made and decisions taken.

Unlike the system of an executive presidency that, for example, is prevalent in the USA, with clear chains of command through its national security advisor, in India there is no clear command and control structure in place to coordinate the overall security apparatus, including the nuclear command. The National Security Council, (which today essentially consists of the members

of the CCS and Mr Mishra and Mr KC Pant, deputy chairman of the Planning Commission) is headed by the NSA, and is advised by the National Security Advisory Board, which consists of security experts from a variety of technical think tanks. Recommendations from the NSAB would have to go to the Prime Minister for approval, again through the principal secretary, making it actually easier for the decision-making process if the point person, in this case Mr Mishra, were the same. As pointed out in a recent statement by defence minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, there is no proposal from the group of ministers (GoM) on intelligence-related matters to divest Mr Mishra of his charge as NSA, probably for this reason.

If, as some have charged, Mr Mishra's charges have become too onerous for one man to perform, he would merely retreat to a more behind-the-scenes role, more in keeping with the sensitive nature of his posts. In fact, Mr Mishra already appears to have made a conscious attempt to keep himself out of the public eye.

Despite having a host of opponents, not least among them members of the Sangh Parivar, nobody has questioned the Prime Minister's prerogative to choose his own principal secretary. And despite endless speculation about his removal, he is among a handful of key officials who have accompanied Mr Vajpayee to Mumbai for his hospitalisation. As a top government official commented, Mr Mishra will leave when he wants to leave.

India keeps tabs on Nepal developments: PM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GANDHINAGAR, June 4. — India is taking "a serious look" at the developments in Nepal, the Prime Minister said today while rounding off his trip to Kutch.

"We hope that the situation there will improve. We have had talks with the Nepalese Prime Minister and promised help," Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said. When asked whether he saw a "conspiracy" behind the killings, Mr Vajpayee replied jokingly: "I can't see any conspiracy from here."

The Prime Minister visited Bhachau, Chhapdi and Ludiya villages before leaving Kutch. He had announced Rs 70 crores from the Prime Minister's National Relief Fund to make 300 villages

of Kutch "drought-proof". "This means that one-third of the villages will be covered under this scheme," he said.

Mr Vajpayee also announced that Rs 160 crore would be provided from the relief fund for reconstructing the damaged school buildings in the district. Thrice during the press briefing, he praised the NGOs for their work in the quake-hit district. The state government was not criticised, but praise for its contribution was totally lacking, specially when chief minister Mr Keshubhai Patel was sitting beside him.

When asked what had disturbed him during his two-day visit, Mr Vajpayee said: "Nothing has disturbed me, the state government has made plans

MEDIA CAUTIONED

NEW DELHI, June 4. — Even as the government declined to take a stand on the latest developments in Nepal in the light of the "still tense and delicate" situation, the ministry of external affairs today had a word of caution for the Indian media.

In one of the rare occasions, the MEA today urged the media to "respect" the institutions of Nepal and the sentiments of the Nepalese people in their hour of loss. While sharing Nepal's grief at the tragedy, the ministry recalled King Birendra's contribution to strengthen the cooperation and understanding between the two countries. — SNS

and is working on them". The Bhandari, whereby by paying Prime Minister didn't reply an "impact fee" unauthorised when he was asked whether a constructions are regularised, deadline had been set for debris Mr Vajpayee didn't comment. clearance, a suggestion he himself made yesterday.

On the controversial ordinance, and deficiencies in the relief recently signed by the state government, Mr Sunder Singh said: "The Centre and the state

government are ready to re-move them". He also advised people to join hands and work together for the development of the quake-affected areas. He added: "...stating that there is discrimination amongst castes and communities in the distribution of relief material should be avoided as it gives a wrong impression about the country in other parts of the world".

The Prime Minister praised the work of a Jain Sangathan from Pune, which has readied 363 schools in Kutch after the earthquake. He also appreciated the contributions of organisations like Self-Employed Women's Association. It is helping Bhachau women to become economically independent by marketing their handicrafts.

Reining in the PMO

By P. S. Appu

410-12
2575

AN OVER-GROWN, all-powerful Prime Minister's Office has been at the centre of a major political controversy. The attack on the present setup of the PMO has been spear-headed by the hard core of the BJP and some elements in the National Democratic Alliance. The gravamen of the charge is that all the executive power of the Government of India is concentrated in the PMO, and that the Prime Minister has become a prisoner in the hands of some officers. There is also the allegation that in certain matters the PMO acts in tandem with a relative of the Prime Minister living in his house and operating as the focus of extra-constitutional executive power. Newspapers and journals have commented copiously on the subject. An over-arching, all-powerful PMO is a grave threat to parliamentary democracy and subverts the Constitution.

It was after a thorough discussion and mature deliberation that the founding fathers of the Constitution opted for a parliamentary democracy of the Westminster type. Those wise men felt that considering the country's great diversity, supreme executive power should vest in a Council of Ministers representing diverse interests and regions. In their judgment, such a Cabinet could more faithfully reflect the aspirations of our plural society than the presidential system. Under our Constitution, as in the United Kingdom, all executive power vests in the Council of Ministers collectively responsible to Parliament. Concentration of all executive power in the PMO makes a mockery of the Cabinet system. And what is worse, there is absolutely no check on such concentration of power. The American President, arguably one of the world's most powerful chief executives, has to contend with powerful Congressional Committees and some of his decisions have to be ratified by the legislature. No such check exists in our system. Concentration of all executive power in the PMO undermines the collective responsibility of the Council of Ministers.

When Walter Bagehot wrote his "English Constitution" in the latter half of the 19th century, the Prime Minister was only the first among equals. Much water has

flowed down the Thames since then. Recent decades have witnessed enormous accretion to the powers of the Prime Minister of England. Winston Churchill during the Second World War, and in the post-war years Prime Ministers such as Harold Wilson and Ms. Margaret Thatcher exercised immense power. The accretion to the power of the Prime Minister was so vast that Mr. Richard Crossman in his Harvard lectures (1970) put forward the proposition that in England prime ministerial government had supplanted

British system is that we have evolved a method of enabling the civil service to have a continuing directive from the politicians, backed by a summary of the balance of argument on which each decision is made."

So, when a powerful Prime Minister uses the Cabinet Secretariat for discharging his functions no damage is done to the Cabinet system or the collective responsibility of the Cabinet. Furthermore, as the Cabinet Secretariat is manned by professionally competent and politically

The Prime Minister should, of course, have aides of high calibre to help him in the discharge of his duties. But they should not dabble in the formulation of policy or interfere with the functioning of the Ministries.

the Cabinet system. The Prime Minister of England, however, exercises his enormous power without having a high profile PMO. He relies primarily on the Cabinet Secretariat for assistance.

Before the Second World War, the Cabinet Secretariat in England was a small office. It expanded greatly during and after the war. The system of decision-making through the Cabinet and Cabinet committees has developed and stabilised over the years. The Prime Minister presides over the Cabinet meetings and over some Cabinet committees. Designated Ministers preside over other Cabinet committees. The Cabinet Secretariat records the minutes of the proceedings of the Cabinet and Cabinet committees and renders all necessary help in decision-making. Where expertise of high quality is needed it is secured by drafting talented persons on official committees. The Cabinet Secretariat thus functions as the nerve centre of the Government. It also maintains a faithful and accurate record of decision-making ensuring transparency and accountability, the two most important requirements of democratic governance. The Prime Minister relies on the Cabinet Secretariat for formulating policy, ensuring coordination and exercising control. In Mr. Crossman's words, "one of the greatest advantages of the

neutral civil servants, the change of government does not lead to dislocation. The Cabinet Secretariat in India performs practically the same functions as its counterpart in the U.K. Its functions include the preparation and circulation of the agenda for the meetings of the Cabinet and Cabinet committees, accurately recording the decisions and circulating them, assisting the Prime Minister and the Cabinet in the formulation of policy, overseeing implementation and ensuring inter-ministerial coordination. In short, it is expected to serve as the nerve centre of the Government of India.

While what has been stated above is the theory, during the last 35 years on a few occasions the role of the Cabinet Secretariat in policy-making was usurped by the PMO. It happened for the first time during Indira Gandhi's initial years as Prime Minister. The only saving grace was that Mr. P. N. Haksar, the then Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, was a person of unquestioned integrity endowed with vision and interested in questions of policy. There was never any suspicion of his having misused his position for personal gain. Yet, he was guilty of undermining the sound system of democratic governance that had been evolved over the years.

After Mr. Haksar's exit from the PMO

things deteriorated fast. With the emergence of the then Prime Minister's younger son as the power behind the throne, both the Cabinet Secretariat and the PMO were eclipsed. During the Emergency all semblance of democratic governance disappeared and a stunned nation helplessly watched the ruthless and arbitrary exercise of executive power by a small coterie headed by Sanjay Gandhi. After the general elections of 1977 the Cabinet regained its primacy. However, during the last 23 years there have been periods when the authority of the Cabinet was undermined and the PMO subverted the Cabinet system.

Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee heads a weak and unstable coalition. Even over his own party he does not have the kind of sway that Indira Gandhi or Rajiv Gandhi exercised over the Congress(I). And Mr. Vajpayee has to reckon with his coalition partners. This was an ideal situation for the emergence of the Council of Ministers as the sole repository of supreme executive power. If this has not happened and unchecked power is exercised by the PMO, the entire responsibility for the aberration must rest with the Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues. It is beside the point to direct all criticism against the present incumbents in the PMO. Personalities do not matter. What is totally unacceptable is the system of concentration of all executive power in the PMO. Such concentration of power, as pointed out above, is fatal to the Cabinet system of government and the collective responsibility of the Council of Ministers. The practice is repugnant to the basic structure of our Constitution and should, therefore, be ended.

The Prime Minister should, of course, have aides of high calibre to help him in the discharge of his duties. But they should not dabble in the formulation of policy or interfere with the functioning of the Ministries. In no circumstance should they be permitted to initiate important changes in policy keeping the Cabinet and even the Prime Minister in the dark.

(The writer is a former Director of the National Academy of Administration, Bangalore.)

THE HINDU

28 MAY 2001

Walk the high road with us, PM writes to Musharraf

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 25. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today formally invited Pakistan's Chief Executive, General Pervez Musharraf, and his wife to visit India at their "early convenience".

The acting high commissioner of India in Islamabad, Mr S Vyas, met the Pakistan foreign secretary, Mr Inamul Haq, this morning and handed over Mr Vajpayee's letter.

"For the welfare of our people, there is no other recourse but a pursuit of the path of reconciliation, of engaging in productive dialogue and by building trust and confidence. I invite you to walk this high road with us," Mr Vajpayee said in a letter.

(General Musharraf will not place any condition on his acceptance of India's invitation for talks, but he believes the people of Kashmir should also be included, Gen Musharraf's chief spokesman said today, adds AP from Islamabad. Pakistan tonight said it would reply to Mr Vajpayee's letter in two to three days.)

Recalling his Lahore visit in February 1999, Mr Vajpayee said in his letter: "I had said at the Minar-e-Pakistan that a stable, secure and prosperous Pakistan is in India's interest." The Prime Minister reaffirmed India's conviction to it.

He said: "We have to pick up the threads again, including re-newing the Composite Dia-

logue, to put in place a stable structure of cooperation and address all outstanding issues including J&K." On 23 June 1997 India and Pakistan agreed to have a Composite Dialogue within the framework of eight issues including Kashmir.

Pakistan yesterday condemned New Delhi's decision to scrap the ceasefire in Kashmir and termed it a "sham". It expressed surprise over the move to allow security forces to take action against terrorists as "they judge best".

Political parties in Pakistan have backed Gen Musharraf's decision to respond positively to India's invitation for talks but at the same time they sounded sceptical about the outcome.

"There is no harm in Gen

Musharraf visiting New Delhi. Let us see what he ultimately gains out of his visit", the Alliance for Restoration of Democracy (ARD) chairman, Nawabzada Nasurullah Khan, said. The ARD alliance includes Mrs Benazir Bhutto's Pakistan Peoples Party and Mr Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League.

Mr Khan said India's invitation to Gen Musharraf was loaded with "inherent contradictions". Mr Vajpayee had invited him for talks on Kashmir but had called off the ceasefire in the region, Mr Khan said. "I don't think any major breakthrough will be achieved mainly due to India's rigid stand on

■ See KASHMIR: page 8

KASHMIR: Benazir plans to visit India

(Continued from page 1)

this issue", he said.

The PML(N) chairman, Raja Zafarul Haq, said the Indian offer had put Pakistan to test and now everybody would be curious whether Islamabad holds talks with New Delhi on its own or involves the Hurriyat Conference in it. Keeping out the Hurriyat would send "wrong signals" to Kashmiris, Mr Haq said.

Bhutto visit: Mrs Benazir Bhutto plans to visit India to

promote peace efforts in the region, a PPP statement said today, adds AFP from Islamabad. "The PPP supports the process of dialogue between India and Pakistan. Mrs Bhutto will visit New Delhi some time this year," a spokesman said. But he did not sound optimistic on chances of a breakthrough in the Kashmir issue.

Militants oppose visit: Pakistan-based Islamic militant groups have openly opposed Gen Musharraf's proposed

visit to India. Former ISI chief, Mr Hameed Gul, has cautioned the General against undermining the importance of jihad during his talks in New Delhi, PTI adds from Islamabad.

A former chief of staff of Pakistan army, General Mirza Aslam Beg, has asked the Chief Executive to be extra-careful in his dealings with India.

He said India was playing a "very clever" game to gain diplomatic advantage.

CRPF JAWANS KILLED

JAMMU, May 25.— Five CRPF jawans were killed and two seriously wounded after militants blew up a CRPF vehicle with an IED in Udhampur today. This is the first major strike after the Centre called off the unilateral ceasefire in Kashmir. The Pakistan-based Hizbul Mujahideen claimed responsibility for the attack. — PTI

THE STATESMAN

25 MAY 1999

Tough reshuffle choices for PM

Jay Raina
New Delhi, May 19

IN HIS first endeavour to put together a dream team, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had caved in to stiff resistance from the Sangh Parivar and NDA partners. Three years and several political setbacks later, he is up against added pressure from within.

Besides softening the RSS hawks, the objective this time is to juxtapose a refurbished ministerial team with an Opposition emboldened by poll results in five States.

Vajpayee's quest for a new-look council of ministers is guided as much by the impact of Defencegate and the subsequent massacre on the Indo-Bangladesh border on public perception of the NDA regime and

his own leadership potential.

Sources close to the Prime Minister maintain that the contemplated Cabinet expansion is aimed at reclaiming the Government's lost sheen while strengthening the rainbow-coalition's parliamentary presence.

From all available indications, the expansion-cum-reshuffle could cover ministries such as Civil Aviation, Health, Tourism, Culture and Labour. The ministers holding these portfolios would not be axed but only be shifted within the fold in line with their performance and preference.

Sources indicated that even while inducting new faces from among fresh allies, Vajpayee does not intend to disturb the status quo in senior slots, including Jaswant Singh's dual charge as Defence and External Affairs

Minister. Towards his promise of reinstalling George Fernandes as Defence Minister after the conclusion of a judicial probe into the tehelka disclosure, the PM may appoint four ministers of state, two each in the MEA and the MoD, to lessen Singh's workload.

At the same time, the Cabinet expansion would hinge on the outcome of fresh political alignments and divisions in parties such as the Trinamool Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal.

On account of the PMK and the Trinamool's exit from the alliance, the NDA's strength in the Lok Sabha is precariously balanced at 277, just 4 above the half-way mark in the 545-member House.

In political terms, this means a heavier dependence on the Tel-

ugu Desam, the Vajpayee regime's outside supporter with a knack of demanding its pound of flesh for sustaining the ruling alliance. Amid the BJP leadership's all-out efforts to muster numbers from elsewhere, there is speculation about even the PMK's return to the NDA. But the prospects of it happening in the immediate future are belied by the ground realities of Tamil Nadu politics.

For the present, the best hope for augmenting the NDA numbers in the Lok Sabha is offered by Ajit Singh's RLD (two), Trinamool dissidents led by Ajit Panja, expelled RJD members in both Houses and Pappu Yadav's Lok Sabha grouping of independent MPs. The most enthusiastic ministerial aspirant of them, Panja, in fact, called on the PM here this evening.

involve Pakistan in the dialogue. Yesterday he said he would hold talks with Pant during his next visit to the Valley.

Shah said Kashmiri leaders across the globe, including in PoK, favoured continuation of the dialogue process.

But an aide of Shah, Hakeem Abdul Rashid, who had refused to be part of a three-member team nominated by Shah to hand over a letter to Pant earlier this month, yesterday resigned from JKDFP

and joined the J&K Muslim League, a constituent of the Hurriyat conference. Rashid, JKDFP publicity secretary, said he had "revolted" against Shah on the call of his conscience following the latter's inclination to enter into bilateral talks with Delhi on Kashmir.

PTI

Srinagar, May 19

JAMMU AND Kashmir Democratic Freedom Party president Shabir Ahmad Shah has written to Gen Pervez Musharraf about the peace process.

The letter will be delivered to Pakistani envoy Ashraf Jehangir Qazi in New Delhi tomorrow by a two-member JKDFP delegation, a party spokesman said.

The spokesman said secretary general Maulana Mohammed Abdullah Tari and chief organiser Syed Saleem Geelani would leave for Delhi tomorrow to hand over the letter. They would also discuss the current situation.

Shah had earlier sought clarifications from the Centre's chief interlocutor on Kashmir KC Pant on whether India was willing to

THE HINDUSTAN

1077

PMO asks ministers to declare assets

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 17 — The Prime Minister's Office sent a reminder to Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee's ministerial colleagues urging them to submit a detailed list of all their financial assets and liabilities, and those of their families, to the PMO at the earliest. The letter, signed by his principal secretary Mr Brajesh Mishra, coincided with the return of the Prime Minister from a tour of Malaysia yesterday.

The list of assets is sought from all Central ministers annually, PMO officials said today, to see if there has been any "accretion" of assets over the last

year. The declaration is supposed to be sent to the PMO by the end of March each year, but several lists do not reach, prompting the reminders.

The declaration of assets is supposed to include details of properties owned by the minister, including those in the name of his or her spouse, children and parents, details of cash and securities and jewellery in bank lockers and elsewhere, details of "movable" assets like cattle and other animals, details of commercial properties owned or leased by them, and details of their business interests like ownership of factories and so on. The list is also meant to comprise high value domestic items, including

the numbers of computers, VCDs, television sets, air conditioners and so on each of them owns.

There have been suggestions that Mr Vajpayee would use the forthcoming Cabinet expansion as a lever to ensure compliance with this directive of asset declaration, for both additions to the council of ministers and for omissions.

When Mr Vajpayee became Prime Minister in 1998, he urged his colleagues in central ministries to declare all their assets within 90 days, after which he proposed to make them public, in a bid to assure transparency and limit corruption.

However, a series of protests from

some of his colleagues, on possible harassment from tax and other authorities if they made their disclosures public, forced him to dilute the provision to a declaration of assets annually, which would be available with his office and which could be disclosed only with consent.

While most ministers are regular with their disclosures, some are not.

With the Tehelka scandal detailing corruption in defence contracts, and exposing corruption in high political office, the issue has again surfaced, but simple assets disclosure to the PMO is unlikely to stem charges of corruption against the government.

THE STATESMAN

18 MAY 2001

5-8 PM: 19/5
(Continued from page 1)

inaugurating the 37th Indian Labour Conference.

As for the reforms, he said India can't turn away from the global economy and live in isolation. It's, therefore, important to create an atmosphere that will help the Indian industry face international competition.

He assured the domestic sector that an open market, increase in FDI and lifting of QRs won't affect its business. "Don't think we indiscriminately open up the doors. We'll impose licences in those areas where we feel our interests should be protected". The upcoming chief ministers' conference will take some decisions in this regard, he said.

Mr Vajpayee assured the workers too that their interest wouldn't be overlooked while the government pursues disinvestment.

"The government is in favour of continuing with the public sector undertakings, but then what to do when some of them are running in perpetual loss?" he asked the audience comprising trade unionists and industry representatives.

"We've always been committed to the workers' interests. That'll not change just because we are in power now. Even when the labour laws will be sought to be amended, efforts will be made to protect the workers' interests and arrive at a consensus".

The Prime Minister rejected the demand from certain quarters that India pulls out of the WTO. "In fact, those who are not part of the WTO are now trying to be part of it. What's the point of asking us to withdraw from the WTO? How are we going to do trade in international market and earn foreign exchange?"

Highlighting the positive effects of economic reforms, he said a recent survey by the government's statistical organisation has shown the rate of employment has increased and the number of people below the poverty line decreased during the one decade of reforms.

About the controversy over the NSS findings, Mr Vajpayee said: "We all say often 'lies, white lies, statistics'. Yet it's necessary to try to reach a consensus on reforms."

"Reforms are not anti-labour. In fact, these are aimed at improving the standards of living, though there might be some initial problems. Workers and trade union leaders should look at the reforms in their totality and participate in them."

Insurance for unorganised farm workers

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & UNI

NEW DELHI, May 18. — The Prime Minister today announced an insurance scheme for agricultural workers in the unorganised sector even as he iterated his commitment to go ahead with economic reforms despite the united resistance from trade unions and some Opposition parties.

The Rs 150-crore khetibar mazdoor bima yojana, to commence on 1 July, will provide social insurance and pension to about 12 crore agricultural workers. The scheme was mentioned in the Union finance minister's budget speech, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said

■ See PM: page 8

THE STATESMAN

18 MAY 2001

Right leg pain and parivar arm headache welcome Vajpayee back home from Malaysia

Atal's other knee heads for scalpel

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 16: The same doctor will perform the same operation on the same patient in the same hospital. The only difference: this time, it will be the right knee.

US-based surgeon Dr Chittaranjan Ranawat is flying down in the first week of June to perform the second knee replacement surgery on the Prime Minister at the Breach Candy Hospital in Mumbai.

Last October when he had operated on the left knee, Dr Ranawat had hinted that he might have to come down and see his VIP patient again in 2001.

The last time Vajpayee was hospitalised, political circles were humming with speculation on the condition of the Prime Minister's health though he had been suffering from osteo-arthritis for quite some time and it is not a debilitating disease.

The second operation comes when the BJP and its allies have taken a knocking in the Assembly polls even before they could recover from the Tehelka revelations.

However, Vajpayee sought to delink the outcome of the just concluded Assembly elections from the fate of his government by ruling out a mid-term poll.

Agencies quoted Vajpayee as telling reporters on his way back from Malaysia that "the Lok Sabha polls will be held on time".

However, he admitted that the results were a "warning" to the NDA and that "it was high time the constituents girded up their loins for the polls".

Asked if this meant a mid-term poll was around the corner, the Prime Minister said: "I did not say that. Lok Sabha elections will be held on time."

Vajpayee was quoted as describing the results as "mixed". "It is neither victory nor defeat. This is the situation that has emerged," he said in what is being seen as an effort to console himself after two allies — the DMK and AGP — were voted out decisively and the BJP itself failed to register its presence both in Bengal and Kerala despite a no-holds-barred campaign led by the Prime Minister himself.

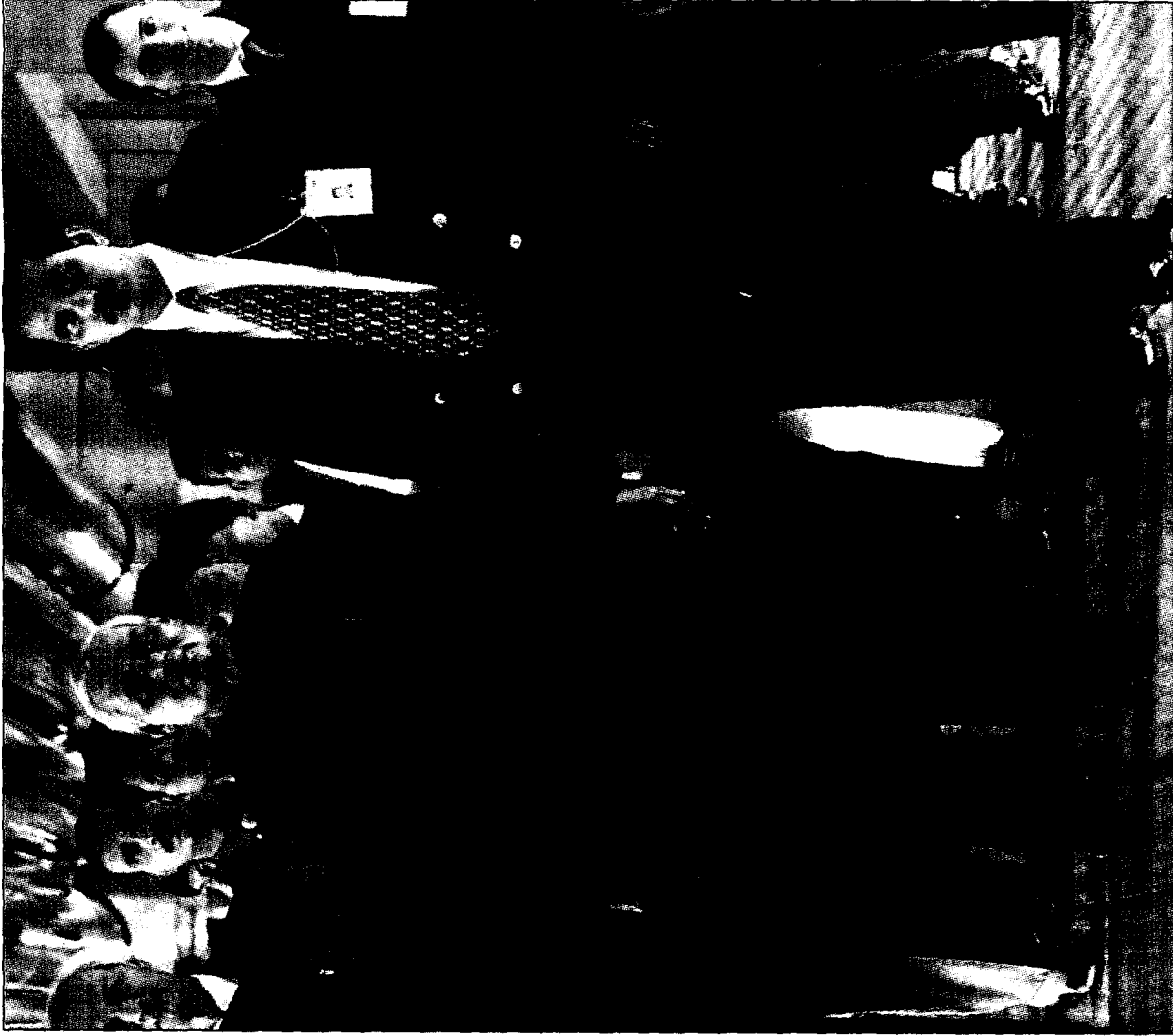
The BJP had to suffer the added humiliation of losing the Tiruchy Lok Sabha seat to the ADMK and coming fourth in the Shahjahanpur constituency from where the Samajwadi Party won.

To a question if this was an indication of tough times ahead for the BJP in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, Vajpayee said: "We are prepared for the fight."

In a wide-ranging exchange on the political scenario, Vajpayee said the question of Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee returning to the NDA was "not under consideration". Former defence minister George Fernandes had recently said in Patna that if Mamata was willing, the NDA could consider her return.

In Tamil Nadu, he seemed to attribute the DMK's wipe-out to the exit of the PMK and the MDMK from the broad-based alliance.

Asked if the BJP should go it alone because of its allies' poor performance, Vajpayee's reply was: "No". "Even after the alliance, one has to stand on one's



RIGHT IS WRONG? AB Vajpayee in Malaysia a day before he announced another knee surgery. (PTI)

own feet. Wherever necessary, alliances are forged."

But senior BJP office-bearers who are RSS whole-timers have sat down to a *chintan baithak* (introspective session) at Jhunjhoul on the Delhi-Haryana border to discuss whether their party should enter into alliances.

Ministry expansion
In what appears to be an exercise to strengthen his own hands after his position was undermined

defence minister following Tehelka and Mamata Banerjee quit as railway minister. Besides, the PMK walked out of the NDA.

BJP sources said Vajpayee has given himself time till June as he expects the present "political churning" to crystallise into "positive developments" by then.

The party hopes that Trinamul and RJD would split and Ajit Singh's Rashtriya Lok Dal would also become part of the ruling coalition.

Sangh labour lash on PM

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 16: The labour arm of the RSS, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, today described the Vajpayee government as "anti-national" and "anti-labour", but stopped short of demanding its resignation.

"It is for the Opposition to demand this government's resignation, but even if it doesn't, the government is bound to fall under the weight of its own contradictions," said BMS national general secretary Hasubhai Dave.

Unveiling the BMS' agitation agenda against defence reforms, Dave alleged that Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee was being kept in the dark about crucial disinvestment and economic decisions.

Referring to a meeting between Vajpayee and leading trade unions on May 12, Dave said Vajpayee was unaware that Hindustan Lever, which had bought the state-owned Modern Foods, had "referred" the matter to the Board for Industrial and Financial Reconstruction (BIFR), which deals with sick companies.

"When we asked him to clarify, he was not in a position to say anything. The labour minister (Satyanarayan Jatiya) replied on his behalf," he said.

Asked if the BMS considered Vajpayee unfit to rule, Dave paused and said: "We can't say if he is unfit or not, but he should at least keep himself informed of crucial policy matters. After all, Modern Foods is a Delhi-based company and if the Prime Minister does not know what is happening right under his nose, it is indeed unfortunate."

However, industry analysts said Hindustan Lever had only "reported", not "referred" as claimed by Dave, the financial status of Modern Foods to the BIFR as required under the rules. When half the net worth of a company erodes, the board has to be

informed. The analysts said the plunge was a direct fallout of the losses Modern Foods suffered during state control.

Dave said the BMS had told Vajpayee how the various economic ministries were "encroaching" on the labour ministry's jurisdiction. The context was Jatiya's unhappiness with finance minister Yashwant Sinha's unilateral announcement of a slew of labour reforms.

Dave confirmed that National Labour Commission chairman Ravindra Verma had offered to quit to protest Sinha's move, but said he was unaware whether Jatiya, too, had wanted to resign.

Dave said defence production units would go on an indefinite strike from July 3 to protest the move to let in the private sector and foreign investors. "Such an important decision seems to have been taken at the instance of a few bureaucrats who have vested interests," he said.

More important, from the Sangh's viewpoint, he said the move would "ultimately endanger sovereignty, integrity and security of the country".

Sinha stays firm

However, finance minister Sinha stood his ground. Addressing overseas investors in Hong Kong, Sinha vowed to press ahead with the reforms despite calls from RSS hardliners for his scalp.

Asked if opposition from the process, he was quoted as saying: "No it will not. The Prime Minister has come out very openly and forthrightly in favour of reforms. He is the leader of the government."

Brushing aside the criticisms, Sinha said: "Whether they come from the RSS or if they come from any other quarter, it is our duty to talk to them (the critics) and to carry conviction with them to the extent that is possible, which is what we have tried to do."

Prodipto Ghosh takes NK Singh's place in PMO

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 9. - The Prime Minister, it appears, did not take too long to replace the irrepressible Mr NK Singh, with the appointments committee of the cabinet deciding on a new appointment late last night.

Dr Prodipto Ghosh is the newest entrant to the Prime Minister's Office, it was officially announced today. An Indian Institute of Technology graduate, Dr Ghosh joined the Union Territories cadre of the IAS in 1969 and will be joining the PMO as additional secretary, essentially looking after economic affairs, the charge Mr NK Singh held before he was moved to the Planning Commission at the beginning of this month. Mr Singh was, however, more senior, having the rank of secretary in the PMO.

Dr Ghosh is no stranger to the Prime Minister, having worked as Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's private secretary when he was foreign minister in the Janata government, between 1977 and 1979.

He received his doctorate from the Carnegie-Mellon university.

Dr Ghosh is currently on deputation as a senior environmental specialist with the Asian Development Bank in Manila, and is expected to assume office shortly.

Dr Ghosh's wife, Mrs Meenakshi Dutta Ghosh, is also a "high profile" IAS official, working as a joint secretary in charge of policy in the department of family welfare.

Colleagues familiar with Dr Ghosh dubbed him a "highly-competent, non-controversial technocrat."

THE STATESMAN

7 MAY 2001

Centre defends Brajesh

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 8. - The government today said the Prime Minister's principal secretary, Mr Brajesh Mishra, taking the help of the Hinduja brothers to arrange a meeting with British Prime Minister Mr Tony Blair after the Pokhran nuclear tests was in "national interest."

Responding to the questions on the controversy, the external affairs ministry spokesman said, Mr Mishra was required to meet with top and senior personalities, particularly with the traditional five nuclear weapons powers, in May-June 1998, soon after the Pokhran nuclear tests to convey India's position and concern about the security situation.

"The Hindujas offered to facilitate some meetings and it was accepted in national interest," the spokesman

said.

The British media first reported that Mr Mishra, accompanied by the Hinduja brothers, had a meeting with Mr Blair on 4 June 1998, a month after the Pokhran explosions.

Regarding British media reports the spokesman said the reports were "basically in the context of the domestic political situation in UK."

He explained that after the nuclear tests, Mr Mishra was required to visit several countries to "establish contact at the highest possible level," to convey India's "perspective on the security environment" in the neighbourhood.

"There was an urgency in establishing such contact," he said, on being asked why there was any need for such facilitation in government-to-

government contacts.

On being asked if he could cite any such meetings in the past, the spokesman vaguely replied, "It has happened from time to time." While clarifying the "difficulties" with some countries, including Britain, in the aftermath of the nuclear tests, he said the meeting was necessary.

On whether any effort had been made by the Indian High Commission in London, foreign office or the Prime Minister's Office for the meeting other than depending on a business house which was under investigation in defence deals, he said, "These things are not mutually exclusive."

When asked what the Hindujas were doing at the meeting, the spokesman said "I don't have details. I'm not aware of who were present at the

meeting." Asked specifically if the Hinduja brothers were present at the meeting, the spokesman said "I'm not confirming or denying it. I'm not aware of it." On whether it was normal for the government to accept help from business houses under investigation, he clarified that "charge-sheets were not issued against them at that time."

The spokesman was not aware of whether any other business houses had made similar offers.

A similar response was given on whether the Indian government had requested the presence of the Hinduja brothers at the meeting.

On question whether it was a practice of the Indian government to arrange such meetings with the help of business houses, he, however, gave a general response saying, "just as we establish contacts, others also do so."

HINDUJAS' HELP TO MEET BLAIR JUSTIFIED

Vajpayee ready for dialogue with Pak

Kamarhati
6 MAY

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee on Sunday said India was still willing to discuss bilateral issues with Pakistan despite Islamabad's global propaganda to the contrary and its incursion in Kargil.

"Pakistan is going around the world saying that we are not willing to hold talks with them. But we say we still want discussions. It was with this aim that I rode the bus to Lahore. But then they waged war in Kargil," he said at a BJP election rally in this town in north 24-Parganas district.

India, he said, had displayed utmost restraint in dealing with the Kargil situation by keeping within territorial limits despite having the military might to move into Pakistan.

Expressing concern over ISI activities in India, he said Pakistan was sending militants and spies,



FRIEND IN NEED: The Prime Minister and BJP leader A.B. Vajpayee (R) with dissident Trinamool Congress leader Ajit Panja at an election rally in Kamarhati on Sunday. — AFP

besides a huge quantity of arms and ammunition into the country.

The PM asserted that his government will not compromise in any way with the country's security. In a reference to the recent border skirmish in Assam's Boraibari, where 16 BSF personnel were

killed by Bangladesh Rifles, Mr Vajpayee said Bangladesh Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had regretted the incident and ordered an inquiry. India would also have the incident probed, he said.

Slamming those who had advocated the use of the nuclear option, he said: "can we use the nuclear option to settle such a small dispute? There are some who want to create tension. We must be careful of them."

In the election campaign in Kamarhati, West Bengal, the PM shared the dais with dissident Trinamool Congress candidate Ajit Panja. Mr Panja had attended the rally on invitation from the BJP. The PM hinted that Mr Panja may become a Union minister again.

Lauding Mr Panja for attending the rally called by BJP in the North 24 Parganas town, Mr Vajpayee said the Trinamool leader was his former colleague in the NDA government. — PTI

The Economic Times

31 MAY 2001

27 MAY 2001

ABUSE OF POWER-I

From The PMO To The VIP Coterie

THELKA's startling disclosure is a testimony of corruption flourishing in high echelons of politics, abuse of power and authority by a few bureaucrats close to the Prime Minister and the excesses indulged in by an extra-constitutional authority. It indicates how the Prime Minister is surrounded by a coterie and how the PMO has been exercising de facto control over other departments.

All this has rocked Parliament, shocked sober people and given a handle to political aspirants. Indeed the tremor has affected the NDA government, the railway minister has resigned from the office and severed her party's links with the NDA, the defence minister has resigned, three ministers of the Samata party have submitted their resignation, the Lok Sakti has threatened to withdraw support and the RSS demanded removal of key persons from the PMO. Indeed, one crisis was piled upon another.

DEADLOCK

The deadlock in Parliament, the birth of the Third Front under Jyoti Basu's leadership, the alliance of the Congress and the Trinamul Congress in West Bengal, Sonia Gandhi's demand for the Vajpayee government's resignation on moral ground have put the government in a fix. Admittedly, political instability has increased, the power brokers are active, confusion and uncertainty know no bounds. The PM has already ordered a judicial probe by a sitting or retired judge of the Supreme Court, agreed to a discussion on the floor of the House, assured exemplary action against the guilty and has prepared to face a no-confidence motion on this issue.

The personal staff of ministers often exploit the situation, misuse power, oblige individuals or establishments against a consideration. Being in close proximity; they gain the VIP's trust and confidence either as a yes-man or by assisting in shoddy deals. They have the knack to adapt themselves to a sycophantic culture and thereby gain control over the master.

As the hiatus between the VIPs and the public increases, they play a murky role and operate as the major link between the two. Interestingly, individuals or establishments wanting undue favours adroitly

The author worked as Superintendent of Police in Keonjhar, and in senior capacities in tribal-dominated areas of Orissa; he is currently Director, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad Institute for Asian Studies.

By **BP SAHA**

watch out for those who can pull their weight and serve their purpose. If the VIP is dishonest, a golden opportunity knocks at the door. They zealously cultivate the linkman either directly or through the party men or middle men. Even many middle ranking party leaders contact the linkman for expeditious movement of files. Colleagues pamper them for

CBI registered a criminal case against PC Sethi and others for conspiracy, misuse of official position and violation of the provisions of the Company's Act. A separate case was registered against NK Singh for possessing assets disproportionate to known sources of income. Houses were searched in Delhi and Patna and incriminating documents, gold ornaments were seized. Prime facie charges were established.

Meanwhile, Mrs Gandhi returned to power in 1980 and Zail Singh became the Home minister. The CBI faced the wrath of the Prime Minister and her son. Unfortunately, the investigation was tampered with and final report was submitted.

Kanti Desai was Prime Minister Morarji Desai's private secretary. The PM used to go to bed sharp at 9 pm. Thereafter, junior Desai used to come out of his shell. A Delhi-based firm

was floated to perform the middleman's role and maintain contact with VIPs.

CONTRACT

It lured a firm from Kuwait to obtain a contract from the Ministry of Shipping for preparing a detailed project report valued at Rs 20 lakhs. The local firm secretly contacted Kanti Desai and the deal was finalised. Minister Chand Ram on the diktat of Kanti Desai obliged the firm after prolonged reluctance as he had another firm in mind.

At that juncture, the CBI cracked down, searched Chand Ram's houses in Delhi and Rohtak and the firm's office at Gold Link Delhi. Again, Kanti Desai brought motor parts for his Mercedes car and a substantial quantity of electronic goods from Germany. Using his influence the Mumbai customs were neutralised and the goods were cleared.

During the Emergency, there was a glut of newsprint in the country. Yet, the Union government decided to import newsprint and therefore, a global tender was floated. Ignoring a lowest tenderer, a Japanese firm, an indent was placed with a Canadian firm at a higher rate. The firm following the secret practice of the cartel, paid four per cent commission under the table which was collected by a trusted person of the then PM and kept in a Bank in Switzerland. Pursuing the investigation a senior CBI officer twice went to Switzerland and collected clinching evidence. Similarly, from the export of sugar through the State Trading Corporation commission was secretly collected by a loyal lieutenant of the then Prime Minister.

(To be concluded)



good assignments, transfers and foreign trips.

Significantly, such a culture is not new or an invention of the present regime. Indira Gandhi was imperious and laconic. Even cabinet ministers had no free access to her. They could go only up to RK Dhawan, the personal secretary of the PM who was then equivalent to rank and status of deputy secretary of the union government (up to 1977). Many senior secretaries of the ministry used to meet him on a flimsy pretext, just to keep him in good humour. In meetings or discussions if the personal secretary happened to enter the venue, many senior officers violating protocol would stand up and extend their arms for shaking hands. The CBI registered a case against RK Dhawan and several others on the allegation of abuse of official position. They were arrested and produced in court.

SOUVENIRS

The Congress party collected several crores of rupees from business groups during 1976-77 on the plea of publishing advertisements in the party's proposed souvenirs. The late PC Sethi had taken the lead and harshly compelled many business groups to subscribe. The then commerce minister DP Chattopadhyay joined PC Sethi in the drive. A few crores were collected and many firms paid by cheque. NK Singh, IAS working under DP Chattopadhyay, played a key role in the exercise. Indeed, the influence of NK Singh in the ministry and in political circles was the talk amongst bureaucrats. Critics quipped that even his minister treated him with abundant caution.

After the emergency during Morarji Desai's regime, the

THE STATESMAN

1 MAY 2001

Take III: Congress attacks PM criticism of Sonia

Oscar, Arjun say magnanimous party chief cheated by Vajpayee on demand for JPC

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 30: The battle between Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and Leader of Opposition Sonia Gandhi intensified on Monday, with the Congress virtually daring him to open any case against the party leaders. "We are willing to face any kind of threat," it said.

Reacting strongly to the Prime Minister's rejoinder to Mrs Gandhi's outburst in Lok Sabha on Friday, AICC general secretary Oscar Fernandes said: "Prime Minister cannot browbeat anybody, we are willing to face any kind of threat and we will not be cowed down."

Mr Vajpayee, in his concluding speech made at the end of the Budget Session of Parliament in the Lok Sabha, had said: "Hanne vivad khada nahin kiya lekin naitikta ki dhat dekar yah kaha jaya ki aapko tyagpatra dena chahiye, to aise bahut se mamle aaye hain aur aa rahae hain, jinme main naitikta ekpakshiya nahin hogi, dwipakshiya naitikta ka

prayog karna padega (The demand of my resignation is being made on the moral grounds in the controversy which was not created by us. But there are several cases which have come before and showing morality cannot belong to one party. We have to apply this yardstick to other parties also)." Reacting to Mr Vajpayee's veiled threat, Mr Fernandes said nobody can stop him (from raising such an issue in Parliament). But Prime Minister should have spoken as a statesman and acted with more dignity. However, he lowered the dignity of the House, he added.

Strongly refuting the charge that Mrs Gandhi lowered the prestige of Parliament by her outburst, he said, "We are sorry that Prime Minister is making this kind of statement in spite of her having agreed to allow formal passage of the Finance Bill despite the Congress demand for a joint parliamentary committee."

Mrs Gandhi was assured by the Prime Minister that the government had an open mind on her party's demand for a JPC to

probe the Tehelka issue. The Congress was prepared for a debate on the Tehelka expose affecting national security, he added.

According to him, the government made the Congress believe that the debate (on Finance Bill) should take precedence and the government would agree to a JPC. "Now Mr Vajpayee is saying that he meant an open mind and not an empty mind. But then he should have said it so then and there itself," he said.

Mr Fernandes said the Congress wanted Parliament to be adjourned till the May 10 elections and wanted it to resume after the results, but the BJP preferred to adjourn it sine die, as it was "afraid" of a discussion on the Tehelka expose.

He added that the Congress would not accept any statements by the Prime Minister against Mrs Gandhi.

Meanwhile in Jaipur, NCP chief Sharad Pawar commenting on Mrs Gandhi's outburst in the Lok Sabha said that the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition

were not persons but institutions in themselves. "As such, the dignity of these institutions should be maintained and whatever happened on the last day was not right," Mr Pawar added.

He said the Congress should have prepared a joint strategy on the national issues in cooperation with the other parties.

On the Tehelka episode, he hoped that the Union government would take a stern action against the guilty and added that there was a need to go deep into the Bofors case too. Asked if his party would support the NDA in Parliament if needed, he said instead it would prefer to go to the polls.

Avoiding a comment on Mrs Gandhi's leadership, he said that by disrupting proceedings in Parliament, her party had lowered the dignity of this august institution, and had failed in its responsibility as the main Opposition. "It was the responsibility of the Congress, a party that had been in power for long years, to have participated in the debate in the house instead of obstructing it," he said.

Senior Congress Working Committee member Arjun Singh lashed out at Mr Vajpayee for going back on his promise after securing the cooperation of Mrs Gandhi in getting the Budget approved by Parliament.

Mr Singh said that many in the Congress were sceptical about the declaration of this government that it has an open mind on the JPC and it was only Mrs Gandhi's decision to accept the statement at the face value led that to the Budget being passed in an orderly fashion. "Now, the truth is out. Mr Vajpayee used this phrase as a subterfuge to tide over a critical stage and has now come out in his true colours."

"The BJP and its cohorts — the RSS and the VHP — should clearly understand that the Congress will not sit by idly and allow them to go on merrily in the campaign of calumny against national leaders of the party. The time had come to highlight the shady character of the opportunist NDA government, which is being manipulated by the RSS," he said.

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

PM indulging in doublespeak: Congress House prestige lowered, says Vajpayee

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & PTI

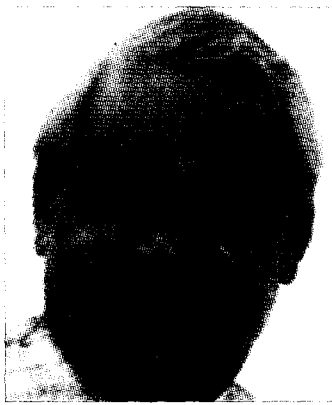
NEW DELHI, April 29.— Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today strongly reacted to Mrs Sonia Gandhi's angry outburst in the Lok Sabha on Friday, the last day of the budget session. The Prime Minister said "such episodes lower the prestige of Parliament."

In a statement the Prime Minister said he was pained by the emotional outburst of the leader of Opposition. Mr Advani had gone to greet her and other members of the Opposition, as was customary at the end of the session. It was not an occasion to express anger, Mr Vajpayee said.

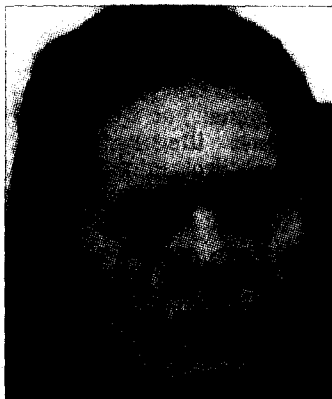
The Prime Minister asserted that he had said nothing objectionable in his concluding session speech in the Lok Sabha. "I fail to understand how my speech provoked such an angry and personalised outburst from the leader of the Opposition. I refute Mrs Gandhi's charge that we in the BJP allowed the kind of abusive language to be used against Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi, which several Congress MPs used against me in the House."

He described Mrs Gandhi's allegations as baseless and unfortunate. "It is unfortunate for Mrs Gandhi to have alleged that the government is vindictive towards her and members of her family. The allegations are completely baseless."

Appealing to members of all political parties in Parliament to put "this unfortunate" episode behind them, the Prime Minister said it was the duty of both treasury and Opposition benches to make a new beginning towards re-establishing high standards of debate in Parliament in the true spirit of democracy and



Mr Vajpayee and Mrs Gandhi: the temperature rises



mutual respect.

Mr Vajpayee said he was personally looking forward to "constructive dialogue with and cooperation from Mrs Sonia Gandhi both in and outside Parliament".

In a counter-attack, the Congress tonight assailed Mr Vajpayee for accusing Mrs Sonia Gandhi of lowering the prestige of Parliament and instead blamed him for "threatening" the Opposition and indulging in "doublespeak."

"We had to call his bluff as he was saying one thing and doing another," the AICC general secretary, Mrs Ambika Soni, said. Defending Mrs Gandhi's outburst in the Lok Sabha,

Mrs Soni said the Congress chief "went out of her way" to end the budget session of Parliament on a "positive" note but the Prime Minister, in his concluding remarks, "issued threat to the Opposition and also gave sermons."

Regarding Mr Vajpayee's looking forward to constructive dialogue with and cooperation from Mrs Gandhi, the AICC general secretary said his "provocative" speech in the Lok Sabha on Friday "did not show any cooperative approach."

The leader of the Opposition's outburst had come immediately after the Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr GMC Balayogi, had declared the House adjourned sine die. Mr LK Advani, along with Mr Pramod Mahajan, had gone to exchange pleasantries with her. A visibly angry Mrs Gandhi had said: "You crucified my husband and my mother-in-law and don't even spare my children and have a cheek to say you never did it. I will not take it again."

She later told media persons outside Parliament that what the Prime Minister spoke was "all rubbish and lie".

Later, releasing the Maharashtra Governor, Mr PC Alexander's book *India in the new millennium* here tonight, the Prime Minister hit out at the Opposition for making "wasteful noise" during the budget session of Parliament and sought "constructive and cooperative" criticism from it.

The Prime Minister also hit out at the Congress for opposing economic reforms initiated by the NDA government.

Addressing the Uttar Pradesh Vaishya community convention, Mr Vajpayee said there was need for consensus among all political parties for carrying forward the economic reforms.

9-P.M

N.K. Singh shifted

AD-1

By Our Special Correspondent

MSA

NEW DELHI, APRIL 27. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today appointed Mr. N.K. Singh, Officer on Special Duty in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), as a Member of the Planning Commission with effect from May 1, 2001. In his new post, Mr. Singh will enjoy the status of a Minister of State.

Mr. Singh, an IAS officer, retired from service as Secretary in the PMO on January 31 this year and was re-appointed Officer on Special Duty in the same office. Lately, however, his tenure became controversial with demands for his removal, especially from the Sangh Parivar outfits who wanted both Mr. Singh and Mr. Brajesh Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, removed for their pro-liberalisation policies. The demands gathered momentum after the Tehelka tapes expose, though there was no direct evidence against either of the two officials.

Mr. Singh has been in the limelight now. He was Revenue Secretary in the Finance Ministry till August 1998 when he, along with the then Finance Secretary, Mr. Montek Singh Ahluwalia, were moved out together. While Mr. Ahluwalia was shifted to the Planning Commission as Member, Mr. Singh moved to the PMO as Secretary (Economic Affairs).

In this position, Mr. Singh was instrumental in guiding economic policies to a large extent, dealing



with diverse issues like telecom, power and road construction. The involvement of Mr. Singh, along with Mr. Mishra, on matters economic was so much that talk about an "overbearing" PMO started doing the rounds and the two had to come before the press to clarify their role. Earlier this year, another controversy of sorts erupted with

speculation gaining ground that the general budget was shaped more by Mr. Singh than by the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha. The speculation gathered so much momentum that Mr. Sinha was forced to go on record to say "It is my budget." Mr. Singh, however, just kept mum on this issue but appeared on many TV channels to defend the budget.

Mr. Singh's movement to the Planning Commission is not directly linked to the fact that Mr. Ahluwalia would be leaving the Commission and taking up a new highly-paid job with the International Monetary Fund (IMF). He is likely to move out by the end of July while Mr. Singh is expected to join the Commission on May 1. There is no limit on the number of Members that the Planning Commission can have.

'No controversy': Page 13

THE HINDU

28 APR 2001

NK Singh shifted from PMO to Plan panel

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 27. — Mr Nandu Singh, the suave, quintessential bureaucrat, who has always managed to stay in favour with the powers-that-be, was finally moved out from the glamorous environs of the Prime Minister's office in South Block to the more staid offices of the Planning Commission.

The high-profile Mr Singh, officer-on-special duty in the PMO, practically overseeing the government's economic agenda, was moved out, as widely anticipated, as soon as the Budget session of Parliament ended. He will, from 1 May, become a member of the commission with the status of a minister of state, a move widely perceived as a "push upwards."

In recent months, and more

571 2894
specially after the Tehelka scandal broke, Mr Singh, and his colleague in the PMO, principal secretary Mr Brajesh Mishra, have been at the receiving end of a great deal of critical comment for being too pro-active in their involvement in a whole range of issues, from telecom to power deals and award of highway tenders, with people including the Sangh Parivar, clamouring for their removal.

Mr Singh, on extension as OSD overseeing economic affairs within the PMO since his retirement from service in January, was shifted out today. Mr Mishra, however, continues as both Principal Secretary and National Security Advisor to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Mr Mishra and Mr Singh held a joint press conference last

month to clear some of the charges levelled against them. In a five-page explanatory statement issued that day, they tried to clarify the PMO's role in a variety of allegations. These included a proposed increase in the limit of foreign direct investment in the telecom sector, the issue of provision of limited mobility by basic service operators, the issue of providing counter-guarantees for the Vizag project and the Hirma power project in which the Reliance group is involved, the National Highways Development Project and the Oman fertiliser project.

Mr Singh, a former revenue secretary to the government, is "looking forward to the challenges of the Planning Commission" which he will join from 1 May. According to Mr Singh, he

is "grateful for the opportunity the Prime Minister has given" him to use his expertise in the area of economic affairs within the country, "rather than some mission abroad". He said he would draw upon the experience of former finance secretary, Dr Montek Singh Ahluwalia, who was also moved to the Planning Commission, and managed to get a "great deal of very interesting work done," especially in the areas of telecom, power and infrastructure.

Yojana Bhavan, which houses the Planning Commission, received the news of the arrival of one of the most influential bureaucrats to its fold with notable coldness. Not because the men who matter in the commission are particularly

■ See SINGH: page 8

SINGH: 571

(Continued from page 1)

hostile to Mr N K Singh, but probably because they are so used to these "convenient postings".

The news of Mr Singh's posting to the commission did not surprise the mandarins there. In fact, the corridors of this office have been thick with speculation of Mr Singh's imminent arrival ever since he ran into trouble at the PMO. Officials were not over-excited about his arrival because the commission has got used to accommodating many "stars" of yesteryear, who had found their way, unwillingly, to the commission, for various reasons in the past.

Mr Singh, an official of the 1964 batch, first came into the limelight as special assistant to the then commerce minister, D P Chattopadhyay, in the early 1970s. Described by colleagues as "highly competent", his forte has been economic diplomacy, highlighted during his tenure in the Indian embassy in Tokyo.

THE STATESMAN

28 APR 2001

PMOCRACY

The heated debate, which is now going on about the role of the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) was bound to come up one day or the other. The PMO has always been a point of intense attention with every new Prime Minister and politician, bureaucrats and the public at large always watching with great interest and curiosity how the PMO of a new PM develops.

This is because the PMO has become a crucial part of the Central governmental bureaucracy and machinery. There is nothing unusual in this. Theoretically, under the Westminster type of Parliamentary democracy, the PM is the leader of his team and is first among equals. But over a period of years after Indian Independence the prime ministerial type of government turned quasi-presidential in nature, thanks to the towering personality of at least some Prime Ministers. Further, the Central government has expanded greatly since Independence both in complexity and scope. Because of India's geopolitical position and because of strong prime ministerial establishments in the world outside, our Prime Minister also has to have a strong secretariat to service him. Many a time, he is his own defence minister, foreign minister and finance minister. As I have said in my article of July 1997: "As the things stand today, the PM has to have a strong PMO. Yet it should only be a highly professional body rendering free and frank advice to the PM. It is not necessary for it to bypass the system or usurp the powers of the ministries or cabinet secretariat. The PM will also have to be careful that no Prime Minister's House (PMH) is allowed to emerge. There can then be no apprehension about the PMO becoming a high profile dominating body."

Rajiv Gandhi inherited a strong PMO when he became the Prime Minister in 1984. Apparently, for the whole of 1985 and the first half of 1986, he allowed the status quo to continue. May be he was trying to find his feet and get his bearings in politics and on the PMO. It is during this period that his PMO was given by the media and the public an unnecessarily high profile. Gopi Arora and Montek Singh Ahluwalia were called economic overlords and Ronen Sen *de facto* foreign secretary. But I can say, with full confidence, that these three bureaucrats never dictated to the finance and external affairs ministries. May be the PM's wishes conveyed by them might not have been fully accepted. But these

The Prime Minister's men have become all powerful in the field of governance. Is that desirable?

BY B.G. DESHMUKH



I got a firm impression that Rajiv Gandhi wanted to revive Panditji's

practice of using the Cabinet Secretariat. I was given a full tenure of three years and could see the PM whenever I wanted

PMO officials never threw their weight around but tried to work quietly sent a message around in the PMO. When he called me in August 1986 to become the cabinet secretary, I got a firm impression that he wanted to revive Panditji's practice of using the cabinet secretariat. I was given a full tenure of three years and could see the PM whenever I wanted.

As a matter of fact he started the practice of regularly meeting me once in a week or 10 days and consult me on many matters. Serla Grewal who was secretary to the PM and her senior colleagues in the PMO treated me with utmost courtesy. Whenever any secretary of the ministry or department, and many a time even ministers, found that the steps or policies suggested by the PMO were not practical or acceptable they used to speak to me. I then used to cross-check this with the PM himself during my weekly meetings with him.

I continued this practice when I became the principal secretary in the PMO in March 1989. I used to sit down with T.N. Seshan, my successor as cabinet secretary, to sort out and decide many important matters. V.P. Singh used to have regular joint meetings with me and cabinet secretary Vinod Pandey.

I must admit that I was not very **If the PMO is headed by a party worker, then there is every likelihood of the PMO's advice to the PM not being objective but often subjective. Added to this**



Controversy could have been avoided if the system introduced by Rajiv

Gandhi had been institutionalised. There should have been another element: that of V.P. Singh's when there was no PMH

much successful with the PMH. It continued to interfere in the governmental machinery and working in the name of the PM. But even here, my colleagues knew that I was having regular weekly meetings with the PM and therefore they used to come to me with their grievances with the PMH. I could then cross-check with the PM himself and send correct and proper messages to my colleagues. But I was aware that many a time my colleagues and



When Atal Behari Vajpayee became the PM for the second time, he

unwittingly introduced another side to the PMO, by appointing a party worker as his principal secretary

other senior officers found it difficult to stand up to the PMH and came to me for help and advice. One thing, however, was that the PMH never asked me to do anything in my capacity as cabinet secretary. There were, of course, some senior appointments which all of us knew were approved because of the PMH. In these and other matters I had established a practice with the PM that I could take back to him a file on which he had passed orders and with

was another factor: when the principal secretary (Brajesh Mishra) decided to become the national security adviser. He started making important policy



During P.V. Narasimha Rao's tenure, there was a succession of

cabinet secretaries with short tenures and the PMO came to have a rather domineering position. A PMH also crept in

which we did not agree; but that if he re-confirmed his order I could carry it out faithfully.

I think the cabinet secretariat and the PMO when I was in service, did not create much of a controversy. We did not deal with political matters at all and they were left either to the minister of state in the PMO or Rajiv Gandhi used to deal directly with cabinet ministers.

I think if this system of the cabinet secretary having a tenure of three years, he being called by the PM regularly, and he having the privilege of re-submitting any file to the PM were institutionalised by Rajiv Gandhi's successors, the PMO would not have become a point of controversy later on. Added to this should have been another element, as in the case of Mr V.P. Singh, when there was no PMH as such.

During Mr P.V. Narasimha Rao's tenure, there was a succession of cabinet secretaries with short tenures and the PMO came to have a rather domineering position. A PMH also crept in.

When Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee became the PM for the second time, he unwittingly introduced another side to the PMO, by appointing a party worker as his principal secretary. No doubt even without this element, the PMO is very finely balanced for its apolitical role, it never assumed a political hue as has happened now. Added to this, there is no minister of state in the

announcements, which should have been rightly made by the external affairs minister or the defence minister. This created another element of controversy

PMO who could have taken a major share of the PM's political work, as has been the practice in the past. This not only created an uneasiness within the NDA ministers and especially with the external affairs minister but even the Opposition became suspicious. The PMO advises the PM on various matters coming to him freely and frankly and without any political bias. If the PMO is headed by a party worker, then there is every likelihood of the PMO's advice to the PM not being objective but often subjective. Added to this was another factor: when the principal secretary decided to become the national security adviser. He based this new role on the American pattern and started making important policy announcements, which should have been rightly made by the external affairs minister or the defence minister. This created another element of controversy.

Added to this was the fact that the cabinet secretary's role which was already devalued, was further devalued and the whole system of government came to accept, though grudgingly, that the PMO was running the government. This was further heightened by the role of N.K. Singh who went on merrily announcing policy decisions which should have been announced by the finance minister or the commerce minister or the industries minister. Normally when the post-Budget discussion is arranged on television, the governmental bureaucratic team is led by the finance secretary. This time, however, the role was appropriated by N.K. Singh himself. It gave an impression that it was the PMO which has played a critical role.

There is also a general impression, which may or may not be true, in the public mind that there is also a PMH now working.

Only a principal secretary who is also a party worker in PM's confidence can dare publicly contradict the president of the ruling party after the latter stepped down from the presidency due to the Tehelka affair. Also only such a principal secretary can hold a full press conference arranged by the government to protest his innocence in that affair.

The PMO reflects the PM's personality and the way he works. It is entirely up to him to decide the type of PMO he wants and allows to develop. It is, therefore, for him to decide what steps should be taken. I have suggested a pattern based on the way it was when I was the cabinet secretary.

Vajpayee dares Cong. to bring no-trust motion

The Times of India News Service
LUCKNOW: Just a day before parliament is due to meet after a recess of three weeks, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Sunday dared the Congress to bring a no-confidence motion in the Lok Sabha against his government. "They can bring the motion even on Monday if they want," he said.

Reacting to the Congress boycott of the all-party meeting and its demand for his resignation, Mr Vajpayee said: "Why should the government resign? If the opposition has numbers, it should bring a no-confidence motion and defeat the government on the floor of the House."

He said, "The government is ready to give a statement on the issue on the floor of the House, and is even ready for a debate. But, the Congress should give up its undemocratic attitude."

Addressing an NDA rally here, the Prime Minister said that corruption had emerged as a "national disease". "And to fight it we need the support of the opposition. But, the main opposition party is not ready to support us to fight this menace. It is only asking for the resignation of the govern-

ment without citing reasons," Mr Vajpayee said.

Mr Vajpayee said that in a democracy one could not force a government to resign. The methodology adopted by the opposition smacked of a conspiracy, he said. Criticising the Congress for stalling the proceedings of parliament on the Tehelka expose, he said, "The Congress is the ruling party in many states and

many of our allies are the main opposition parties in those states. What would happen if they also stall the assemblies over trivial issues?" In the same vein, he said: "Wouldn't it be an undemocratic step which would open the doors to anarchy?"

Mincing no words, Mr Vajpayee said that corruption had pervaded all sections of society. The opposition should come forward with suggestions on how to fight this ill. "I assure the opposition that the government will

take all opposition suggestions in good spirit. But first, constructive suggestions should come from the opposition," he said. But at present, the Congress was opposing all government decisions just for the sake of opposition, he said.

PM will talk to Sonia Gandhi

LUCKNOW: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Sunday said he would talk to Congress president Sonia Gandhi to ensure the smooth functioning of parliament, paralysed over the Tehelka issue, when it resumes its budget session on Monday.

"I had spoken to 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 here.

The Congress president, in her capacity as the leader of the opposition, can help in ensuring smooth proceedings in the Lok Sabha, he said. Recalling his own tenure as the leader of the opposition, Mr Vajpayee said he had never allowed continued disruption of House proceedings. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

16 APR 2001

Boycott brings clarification on CBI probe

Vajpayee dash to douse Sonia fire

FROM RADHIKA
RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, April 14: Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee tonight clarified that the CBI had not launched a probe against Sonia Gandhi, capping a stand-off that saw the Congress president boycott an all-party meeting and cloud the government's drive to salvage the remaining part of the tumultuous budget session.

The Congress threw a fit when it was reported that the CBI had begun a probe against Sonia on the basis of allegations made by Janata Party leader Subramanian Swamy.

Vajpayee's clarification came on an evening of subtle twists and turns. Briefing reporters after the all-party meeting, O. Rajagopal, minister of state for parliamentary affairs and railways, said Swamy's complaint had been referred to the department of personnel but Vajpayee had no knowledge about it.

However, Vajpayee contradicted Rajagopal, telling a few reporters that he had been "aware" of the CBI's move. The Press Information Bureau later informed journalists of Vajpayee's denial of Rajagopal's statement.

5/1 1979
Corruption ✓
"The question of any inquiry does not arise at the moment. So far, no decision has been taken for any kind of probe," Vajpayee said.

Some reports had appeared that the CBI had taken cognisance of a "chargesheet" filed against the Congress president by Swamy. He had alleged, among other things, that Sonia had taken up a job as an insurance agent in 1972 when she was not yet an Indian citizen and that her mother and sister had "LTTE links".

Swamy sent his "chargesheet" to Vasundhara Raje Scindia, minister of state for personnel, who then referred it to the CBI after purportedly getting Vajpayee's go-ahead.

A section of the press reported that CBI special director P.C. Sharma had confirmed that his department was "examining" the document and the course of action to be taken.

Stung to the quick, Congress leaders met at Sonia's residence and decided to boycott Vajpayee's meeting.

But Opposition sources confirmed that Vajpayee had conceded at today's meeting that while he had "received and acknowledged" Swamy's "chargesheet", he had no intention of ordering a probe.

"Vajpayee quipped and said,

"You are all familiar with Swamy and his chargesheets. Once he even tried to trap me," a source quoted the Prime Minister as saying.

Sources said with key Bills to be passed in the second leg of the budget session beginning on Monday, Vajpayee needs the cooperation of the Congress, especially as the ruling alliance is in a minority in the Rajya Sabha. The Congress had stalled Parliament for several days over the Tehelka issue in the first leg of the budget session. But now the BJP cannot afford any more adjournments as a lot has to be squeezed into a 16-day session.

Before the Prime Minister's clarification, the Congress camp had made angry noises, with Manmohan Singh coming out with a vitriolic statement. "It is impossible for the Congress to cooperate with the government which has chosen to refer to the CBI for investigation the baseless charges." However, after the clarification, the Congress lowered the pitch. (See Page 6)

By pacifying the Congress, Vajpayee has rubbed some of his own partymen the wrong way. BJP spokesman V.K. Malhotra insisted that the Congress must not be allowed to "blackmail" the government whenever there is the smell of a scam in it is involved.

Ayatollah seal on Atal hand of friendship

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Tehran, April 12: Buoyed by a string of positive meetings with senior Iranian leaders, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today held an hour-long meeting with the supreme leader of the Islamic republic, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, in an apparent bid to garner all-round support for improved bilateral ties.

Vajpayee followed this up with a credit line offer of \$200 million to Iran. This is a huge amount by Indian standards and conveys its sincerity in strengthening ties with Iran.

Vajpayee's meetings in the last two days with Iranian President Mohammad Khatami and senior members of his government had been excellent. The two sides signed the Tehran Declaration, which, among other things, strongly criticises state-sponsored terrorism and expresses the desire to combat the scourge jointly.

The move was clearly aimed at Pakistan, which supports not only militants in Kashmir, but also the Taliban in Afghanistan — an area of concern to India.

Before his address to the Iran-

ian Majlis yesterday, Vajpayee was assured by Speaker Mehdi Kharroobi that the Majlis would actively support any initiative by the two governments to improve ties.

However, support from outside the parliament is crucial if any of this is to be translated into real terms. India does seem to have an edge in this regard. Its biggest advantage, perhaps, is that it does not pose any threat to Iran.

The two sides do not have any dispute over boundaries nor are they engaged in a cultural war. Though this was relevant even during P.V. Narasimha Rao's trip to Tehran in 1993, the last Indian Prime Minister to visit the country, the scenario is brighter this time because of recent developments in both countries.

The May 1998 nuclear tests have elevated India's status in the region. As a result, the outside world has started taking note not only of Delhi's growing power in the region, but also its leadership in other areas, particularly information technology. Iran's earlier desire to play a role in resolving the Kashmir dispute between India and Pakistan has also un-



Atal Bihari Vajpayee with Ayatollah Khamenei in Tehran. (AFP)

dergone changes, mainly because of the rise of the Taliban and reforms in Iranian society since Khatami came to power.

That India has managed to improve its relations with the US without losing its identity — demonstrated by its decision to go ahead with the Pokhran II tests despite opposition from key world

players — is also at the back of the mind of the Iranian leadership.

Iran can also look to India for help in maintaining security in the Gulf. This is all the more so as Tehran is keen to rework its equation with the West and does not want to be dubbed a rouge state like Iraq.

The two sides are also keen to

map a long-term arrangement on the supply of Iranian natural gas to India. This will give the former a major market to sell its product and help the latter meet its energy need. By setting up joint ventures, Delhi can also help Tehran to have access to technology in a number of key sectors and help revive its economy.

Terrorism and talks can't go hand in hand: Vajpayee

By Smita Gupta
The Times of India News Service

TEHERAN: In a carefully calibrated speech intended as much for the Iranian Majlis as well for a Muslim audience back home, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Wednesday underlined India's commitment to secularism—even paying a tribute to the contribution of Islam to Indian culture.

"We will never allow any external force to cast a shadow on India's secular fabric by seeking to damage our unity and territorial integrity," he said. Simultaneously, in a clear warning to Pakistan, he emphasised that "dialogue and violence cannot go hand in hand. We call upon those forces in our neighbourhood which have promoted confrontation and pursued the path of violence to recognise the futility of their ways and to abandon them. On our part we are

124 aware of our responsibilities and will always act with restraint."

And, of course, there was a reference to Afghanistan and the "dark forces of violence, terrorism and obscurantist ideologies which have emerged there". Without a hint of irony, Mr Vajpayee said, "It is tragic that an attempt is being made to obliterate its past through the destruction of its historic art, which is the heritage of all mankind."

Mr Vajpayee's speech came after a brief meeting with Majlis speaker Hojatul Islam Mehdi Kharoobi, after which he was ceremoniously escorted to the Majlis, which was in session and debating on a piece of legislation. There, in an amusing aside, when the chair asked all those in the House—in Farsi—to rise if they supported the bill, both Mr Vajpayee and external affairs minister Jaswant Singh, seeing the Iranian MPs standing up, rose too.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

12 APR 2001

Senior PMO officials on different tracks

NILOA ROY CHAUDHURY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

SF
a/a

NEW DELHI, April 8. — There's more trouble within the PMO than the volley of criticism directed towards it from outside. Internally, there are reports of two distinct lines of command within the PMO, one arising from the principal secretary, Mr Brajesh Mishra, and another from Mr NK Singh, the Officer on Special Duty overseeing economic affairs.

Despite facing the media together to combat accusations against them, the two seniormost officials within the PMO don't interact with each other regularly, preferring to send their recommendations and files directly to the Prime Minister, officials said.

While the chains of command are clear with Mr Singh looking after the eco-

nomie agenda, and Mr Mishra everything else, the latter prefers to let the more junior Mr Ashok Saikia handle routine administrative matters like transfers and postings and other such matters, while he concentrates on foreign and national security-related affairs.

Though acquiescing to the decision to allow Mr KC Pant to handle the Kashmir dialogue, Mr Mishra was closely involved in getting the Prime Minister to push for this initiative.

He was aided in this by former head of the Research and Analysis Wing, Mr A S Dulat (who was inducted into the PMO to give fresh impetus to the stalled Kashmir dialogue process).

SINGH DISMISSES CHARGES AS 'BASELESS'

Mr Mishra will closely monitor the progress of the talks when they begin. It is unlikely that he will be eased out of his charges in the PMO till after the talks process is well underway, officials said. Mr Mishra was unavailable for comment despite repeated attempts to contact him over two days.

Mr Singh, on the other hand, finds his high-profile, specially-created charges like the Strategic Management Group and the PM's economic advisory council — of both of which he is the convenor — in deep freeze, with an occasional query from a deputy secretary in the PMO checking with the finance ministry on the status of some of the pushed initiatives.

This is unlike the almost weekly meet-

ings the SMG would hold earlier this year to push one stalled item or other on the economic agenda, including tendering for the National Highways project and some power, telecom and other infrastructure projects. It is almost certain that Mr Singh's days in the PMO are numbered, and officials reporting to him are extremely wary, but have got stuck in the turf war between the two top officials.

Mr Singh, when contacted, however, denied as "completely baseless" any reports of differences between him and Mr Mishra, saying their duties were different, but they worked well and closely together. He, however, admitted that initiatives like the SMG had stalled because of criticism of "a too pro-active PMO," and that no SMG meeting had been held in some months.

9 APR 2001

Singh for Iran in last lap of PMO run

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 6: N.K. Singh may be going with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to Iran next week, but this is probably his last tour as part of the country's chief executive's entourage.

Singh's days as a key player within the Prime Minister's Office are numbered. According to sources in the PMO, Vajpayee has all but made up his mind to sacrifice his officer on special duty, who was earlier his principal secretary.

The suave, wily bureaucrat has looked after economic affairs and has helped pursue Vajpayee's reforms in partnership with the finance ministry. He had been brought in at a crucial stage in 1998, when the government was fumbling over the onion crisis.

But Singh has never been liked by many in the BJP and the Sangh parivar and his critics, mostly hardliners, have often bad-

mouthered him behind his back.

Sources say he is being sacrificed because the Prime Minister does not want to cede territory on his principal secretary Brajesh Mishra.

The Tehelka tapes had targeted Mishra and the Prime Minister's son-in-law, Ranjan Bhattacharya. Singh's

name cropped up when the RSS spoke out against both him and Mishra and when some Samata Party MPs joined the chorus.

Along with Mishra, Singh had been given a chance to defend himself. He did this with his characteristic élan, but it is now more than clear that with the PMO under pressure, Vajpayee has no alternative but to sacrifice him.

Vajpayee, who has come out to defend a comparatively junior official, joint secretary Ashok Saikia, has challenged Samajwadi



NK Singh

Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav to prove his phone-tapping allegations against Saikia. Mulayam has also accused Saikia of being under the scrutiny of the CBI.

Singh was not brought into the PMO because he was a known Vajpayee loyalist. The Prime Minister — known to be

a man who does not discard trusted lieutenants overnight — knew both Mishra and Saikia long before he was elected to the country's top job.

Singh, who was part of the budget-making exercise as revenue secretary during P. Chidambaram's tenure in the United Front government, is probably the least known to him.

The next posting of the official, who is already retired, is likely to be as a member of the Planning Commission.

THE TELEGRAPH

7 APR 2001

CALL FOR GLOBAL DISARMAMENT

We don't want to join arms race: PM

By Gargi Parsai

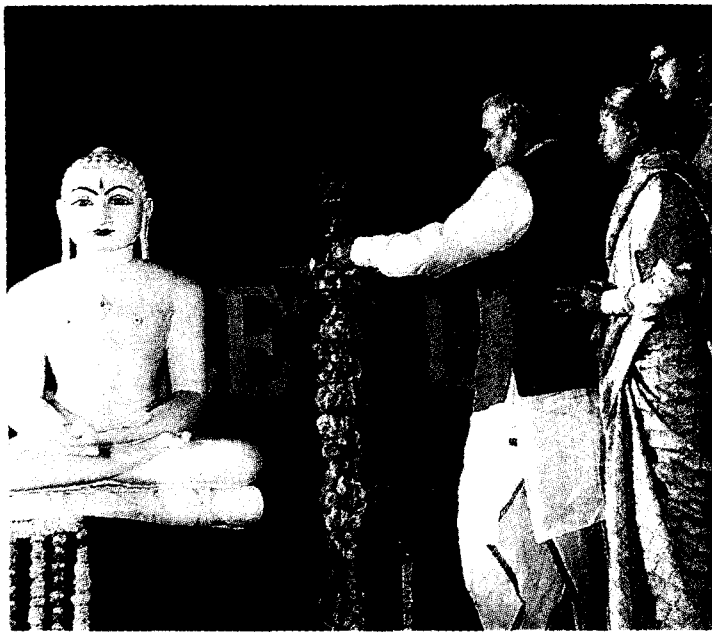
NEW DELHI, APRIL 6. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today asserted that India did not want to be part of the arms race. If other countries who had nuclear arms agreed to stop further manufacture and to destroy their arsenal, India would be willing to do the same.

Mr. Vajpayee's appeal for global disarmament came in the context of Lord Mahavira's teaching of ahimsa (non-violence) recalled on the occasion of his 2600th birth anniversary celebrations here.

"India has always stood for global disarmament. We have taken certain steps in self-defence but we do not want to join the arms race," he said while inaugurating the year-long celebrations, for which the Government will provide Rs. 100 crores as seed money.

He said Lord Mahavira's mantra of non-violence was never more relevant than now. In the nuclear age, there was no other way to save the world than through non-violence. But Mahavira's *ahimsa* was not that of a coward, but of a *vir* (brave), that was why he was called Mahavira and his teachings were of significance today.

"For us religious equity (*sarva dharma sambhav*) is a way of life. We believe in secularism. But secularism does not mean opposing religion. It means not linking any one religion to the government. Some days ago we celebrated the activities of the Khalsa panth and today we are commemorating the 24th Tirthankar of the Jain community," he said adding truth was one but its interpretations could



The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, at the inauguration of the 2600th anniversary celebrations of Lord Mahavira. The Delhi Chief Minister, Ms. Sheila Dikshit, is also present.— Photo: V. Sudershan

be different. However, the differences should be stretched only upto a point.

Appealing for a pledge to follow Mahavira's teachings, Mr. Vajpayee said in this day of consumerism the focus should not be on profit but on welfare. "This is what the Government is trying to implement." A commemorative stamp was released on the occasion by the Communications Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan.

Seer turned away

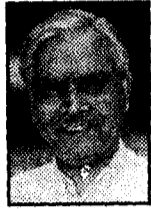
The function was marred by the security personnel turning away the head seer of the Digambar Jain community, Muni Vidyanand, who arrived at the jam-

packed Indira Gandhi Indoor Stadium minutes after the Prime Minister.

There were no organisers to receive the unclothed seer. Instead, witnesses said, he and his group of four were spoken to very rudely by the security personnel manning gate number 1. To make matters worse, the Muni was informed that no arrangements had been made for him to be seated on the dais where other Shwetambar Jain munis were present. The seer, who has renounced all material objects and does not use a vehicle to travel, turned and walked back to his camp in Daryaganj.

PMO: Indispensable, not indestructible

**At
RANDOM**

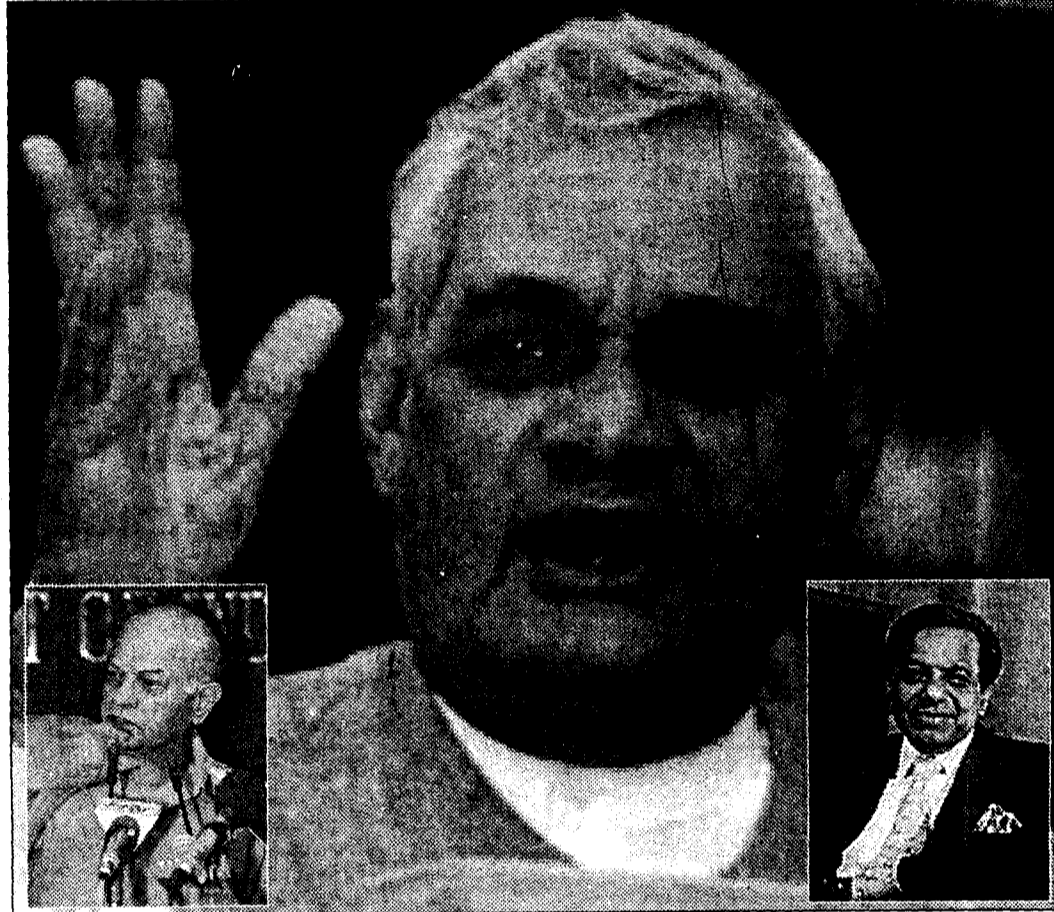


K. NATWAR SINGH

The central switchboard of governing ideas of the NDA government has all but packed up. Too many discordant voices, too many moral lepers, too many third raters, too many self-righteous loud mouths of the Parivar, are making life more than difficult for Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee. He must now be realising that our lives are not permitted unalloyed bliss. How long will this immensely likable man continue walking the political tightrope? The inner political landscape of the Sang Parivar does not present an inspiring picture. No shared goal or vision exists. Their phoney Hinduism is wrapped in quasi-religious jargon. Their debased rhetoric explains nothing and brings truth into disrepute. Their minds are rotted with false piety. Poor Atal Behariji, why has the Almighty forsaken you? He does what comes best to him — switch off and contemplate the dissolving horizon.

What is even more disturbing is his allowing the Prime Minister's Office to be dragged into controversy, thus eroding the authority of the most important governmental instrument for policy formulation and coordination. There exist a lot of misconceptions about the PMO. Prof. P.N. Dhar in his book, *Indira Gandhi, The Emergency and Indian Democracy* writes about the role of the PMO: "The Prime Minister's Office works in different ways under different Prime Ministers and secretaries, depending on their individual styles and the degree of collaboration with the Cabinet secretary and the ministries. But it is most productive when it is able to mobilise its resources in conjunction with those available elsewhere in the system. Thus the efficiency of the PMO is to be judged not merely in terms of its own performance but even more in terms of its contribution in the galvanisation of the entire Secretariat for better performance. If it functions in a manner that curbs initiative or lowers morale elsewhere in the system, then it weakens instead of strengthening the hands of the Prime Minister."

Jawaharlal Nehru had a one man Prime Minister's Secretariat. Since 1964 — the year of his death — the PMS or the PMO



THE PM AND HIS MEN — BRAJESH MISHRA (LEFT) AND N.K. SINGH: 'What is even more disturbing is the Prime Minister allowing the PMO to be dragged into controversy, thus eroding the authority of the most important governmental instrument for policy formulation and coordination'

has grown at an almost galloping pace. Today it probably has over 350 people under its roof. I worked in that establishment from 1966 to 1971. It was a

P.N. Dhar wrote: "The PMO works in different ways under different Prime Ministers and secretaries. But it is most productive when it is able to mobilise its resources in conjunction with those available elsewhere in the system. Thus the efficiency of the PMO is to be judged more in terms of its contribution in the galvanisation of the entire Secretariat for better performance. If curbs initiative or lowers morale elsewhere in the system, then it weakens instead of strengthening the hands of the Prime Minister"

small, well-knit outfit, which displayed amazing *esprit de corps*. Let me give the names of those who have been secretaries or principal secretaries to the Prime Minister. The name PMO was given by Morarji Desai. Till 1977 it was called Prime Minister's Secretariat.

L.K. Jha, P.N. Haksar, P.N. Dhar, V. Shankar, Krishnaswamy Rao Sahib, P.C. Alexander, Sarla Grewal, B.G. Deshmukh, S.K. Mishra, A.N. Verma, Satish Chandran, N.N. Vohra, Brajesh Mishra. B.N. Tandon was principal secretary for a few days during Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's 13-day tenure in April 1996.

Brajesh Mishra is the first principal secretary, to also hold the post of National Security Adviser. This has not gone down well. Of the 14 worthies, only a few are likely to be remembered. P.N. Haksar, P.N. Dhar, P.C. Alexander and B.C. Mishra. Among the other 10, all eminent bureaucrats and decent individuals, not all had the gravitas that such a job requires. In several cases, their tenures were far too short for them to make any kind of a mark of impact. L.K. Jha is a marginal case. He only held the job for one year. He had subtlety of mind but not the openness of character that made P.N. Haksar such a formidable and respected principal secretary (the post was created especially for him after he retired as secre-

tary). Let me give one example of Haksar's unique position.

In September 1970, Indira Gandhi attended the third Non-Aligned Summit at Lusaka,

The captain of the plane had just informed Joshi that one of the passengers called Patel was carrying a bomb! Joshi added that there were at least 30 Patels on the flight. Mrs Gandhi, however, pronounced, "It is a hoax. Let us keep flying to Nairobi." I then went to Haksar and told him what the PM had said. Haksar said something which I shall never forget: "Go back to the PM and tell her that in matters relating to her security, it is her secretary who decides and not the PM. This is not a personal matter. Tell her we are returning to Bombay"

Zambia. In those carefree days the Prime Minister used commercial flights. The only concession the airline made was to leave the seat next to her vacant. Half-an-hour out of Bombay B.L. Joshi, her sole security officer, came to me with a startling news. The captain of the Air India plane had just informed him that the Mumbai airport authorities had contacted him to say that one of the passengers was carrying a bomb! The name of the man was Patel. Before I could catch my breath, Joshi added that there were at least 30 Patels on the flight which was first landing at Nairobi. I got up and as calmly as I could told the PM that we had a serious bomb threat and should immediately return to Mumbai. Without even looking at me she pronounced, "It is a hoax. Let us keep flying to Nairobi." I then went to P.N. Haksar. "Have you told her?" "Yes, I have." "What did she say?" "It is a hoax. Let us keep flying to Nairobi". After a pause, Haksar said something which I shall never forget:

"Go back to the PM and tell her that in matters relating to her security, it is her secretary who decides and not the PM. This is not a personal matter. Tell her we are returning to Bombay."

And return to Bombay we did. Modern government is extremely complex. By and large our political elite (with a few exceptions) has not bothered to master or understand the technique of governance. They rely heavily on the bureaucracy. Bureaucrats are good at sizing up politicians. They have sized up the present crop and by and large have contempt for their political masters. The situation in the states is even worse. However, the PMO retains its high quality. It is both unwise and dangerous to target it for purely personal reasons and thus destroy an institution which is indispensable.

Mr William Jefferson Clinton is on his second passage to India. He is 54, with time on his hands. His presidential visit created a lot of good-will last year and the atmospherics were just about ideal. On the concrete side nothing much happened. Nevertheless, it is a nice feeling to know that a former US President is an Indo-phile. His eight years were an exceptional success story. He continues to make headlines. He is not good news with the Republican establishment.

We should treat his current visit with dignified warmth and not go overboard as some of us did in March 2000. Hospitality is one thing. Servility quite another.

Atal sidelines Brajesh in new J&K initiative

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 6 APRIL

POST-TEHELKA, the equa-
tions within the government
are changing: political man-
agement so far handled by bureau-
crats in the PMO is being taken
over by senior ministers.

A clear indication of this was
evident when Prime Minister Atal
Behari Vajpayee discussed his
Kashmir initiatives with home
minister L.K. Advani and Mr K.C.
Pant, the latest trouble-shooter in
the valley. Neither his principal
secretary Brajesh Mishra nor the
officer on special duty, Kashmir,
A.S. Dullat, was present at the
meeting. The latest Kashmir initia-
tive involves developing contacts
with all grassroots organisations in
Kashmir.

Government watchers attach
significance to this event as Mr
Mishra had virtually taken charge

of the Centre's Kashmir policy.
Besides, the secretary in charge of
internal security within the
Advani establishment had become
toothless after Mr Dullat's appoint-
ment.

Given this, Mr Vajpayee's deci-
sion to keep his aides out of the
exercise clearly indicate Mr
Advani's success in reclaiming a
turf that traditionally belonged to
the home ministry.

The negotiations by a political
leader — Mr Pant — belonging to
the BJP will also get the Sangh
Parivar's support. Although the
brotherhood has been demanding
firm responses from the Centre on
the Kashmir issue, it is unlikely to
stand in the way of negotiations
with the Kashmiri groups. The
PMO has so far been relying on
non-official contacts to resolve the
issue.

The selection of Mr Pant is also

dealing with the
Kashmiri groups.

This develop-
ment could also
help the Prime
Minister to
squash allega-
tions of excessive
PMO interfer-
ence (read
bureaucratic) in
crucial issues.

Although Mr
Dullat is regarded
as being best
suited to co-ordinate the Kashmir
initiative, it was felt that the politi-
cal heads should concentrate on
the issue and not leave it to the
bureaucrats' wisdom.

The Tehelka controversy has
also brought into focus the need
for a political buffer within the
Prime Ministerial establishment. It
is felt that the current attack on



Brajesh: Sitting out this round

significant as he was recruited into
BJP by Mr Advani. Mr Pant, an old
Kashmir hand — he was one of
Indira Gandhi's negotiators with
Sheikh Abdullah for the Kashmir
accord in 1975 — is a neo-convert
and does not carry the ideological
baggage of an average BJP leader.
This is expected to make things
easy for the government while

the officials within the PMO could
have been averted had the Prime
Minister enlisted the services of a
politician to co-ordinate between
his office and the rest of the gov-
ernment.

The other thing to watch out
for is Mr Advani's ascendancy vis-
a-vis Mr Vajpayee on critical
issues.

Already the home minister is
in charge of the anti-Tehelka
campaign and the manage-
ment of elections in poll-bound state.

was under Mr Advani's stewa-
rdship that the party expanded
geographical terms beyond the
Hindi heartland to other crucial
areas; in social terms from being
an urban-Brahmin-Bania party to
having a formidable rural base
extending into lower OBCs and
tribals; and in political-ideological
terms by winning the support of
non-saffron outfits.

PM proof challenge to Mulayam

FROM DIPTOSH MAJUMDAR

New Delhi, April 4: Atal Bihari Vajpayee today dared Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav to furnish facts on his phone-tap allegation and his accusation that the Prime Minister had appointed an aide against whom the CBI had started an inquiry.

Mulayam had charged the Prime Minister's Office with tapping telephones belonging to him and other politicians in the aftermath of the Tehelka disclosures and said that this was being done at the behest of Ashok Saikia, the senior-most joint secretary in the PMO.

The Samajwadi Party leader had yesterday sought Saikia's removal, claiming that he was fac-

ing a CBI inquiry when he assumed office.

Sources close to the Prime Minister said Vajpayee has been offended by the regular assaults on his office and has challenged Mulayam to make specific complaints. "If there is any complaint, then the PMO would definitely look into it and the guilty, if any, would be punished straightaway," the sources said.

They pointed out that it was "strange and unprecedented" that Mulayam had named a junior official in the PMO and not accused his "political master — the Prime Minister — himself".

Vajpayee has made it clear that no person in the PMO has the authority to order the bugging of phones without his permis-

sion. Allegations, therefore, must be levelled, not against any bureaucrat, but against Vajpayee himself.

The sources said the Prime Minister wondered why Mulayam "lacked the courage" to point his fingers against him and was instead pillorying "defenceless" bureaucrats who cannot respond because service conduct rules forbid them from doing so.

The PMO has been under attack from the RSS, some allies and the Opposition since the Tehelka expose. Opposition politicians and even the RSS had so far directed their firepower at Vajpayee's principal secretary, Brajesh Mishra, and his officer on special duty, N.K. Singh.

Sources said an angry Vajpay-

ee has questioned Mulayam's motive behind contesting the Prime Minister's prerogative in choosing his team, given that the Samajwadi Party leader has been defence minister and knows how the government functions.

Vajpayee insisted that not a single official in the PMO is tainted. "They are the cream of the service, chosen with extreme care and caution," the sources quoted the Prime Minister as saying.

The offensive does not imply that Vajpayee will retain the present set-up in the PMO and chances are that at least one powerful officer might be eased out. But what Vajpayee dislikes is the fact that a campaign is on to portray him as a non-entity in the PMO.

THE TELEGRAPH

APR 04

Mud flies at Atal's second lieutenant

FROM KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, April 3: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, under attack from the RSS, some allies and the Opposition for defending his officials in the wake of the Tehelka scandal, was today accused of appointing an aide against whom the CBI had initiated an inquiry.

Sucking another powerful official of the Prime Minister's Office into a controversy, Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav today sought the removal of Ashok Saikia, senior-most joint secretary in the PMO, claiming that he was facing a CBI inquiry when he assumed office.

The firepower so far has been concentrated on three aides — Vajpayee's principal secretary and national security adviser, Brajesh Mishra, the officer on special duty, N.K. Singh, and the Prime Minister's foster son-in-law, Ranjan Bhattacharya.

Mulayam, who had dubbed Saikia the "main conspirator" behind an alleged plan to tap Opposition leaders' phones, declined to elaborate on the nature of the CBI inquiry against Saikia. "I want to ask the Prime Minister how Saikia, who was facing CBI probe, was appointed in the PMO and how the inquiry against him ended?" he asked. The PMO refused to comment immediately. "I have not seen the report. We are trying to assess exactly what he said," an aide of Vajpayee said tonight. The PMO had denied the bugging charge as soon as it was levelled on Sunday.

While the Sangh parivar and the Samata Party are likely to keep up the heat on

Mishra and Singh, the Samajwadi Party is expected to target Saikia when Parliament reconvenes on April 16.

Saikia is the Prime Minister's closest aide after Mishra. Vajpayee's relationship with Saikia dates back to the officer's days in Ramjas College in the capital.

Vajpayee acted almost like a local guardian to the young Saikia. Saikia's ties with Vajpayee are so deep-rooted that even his personal secretaries Anantharajan and Ajay Bisaria do not enjoy the same clout. Second in command in the hallowed PMO, the Assam cadre officer, a north-eastern specialist, is Vajpayee's troubleshooter as well. Saikia's brief is personnel, administration and appointments of senior-level bureaucrats. He also accompanied Vajpayee during his sojourn in Manali and Kumarakam last year.

Mulayam had alleged that in the wake of the Tehelka disclosure, the Vajpayee establishment was trying to unearth unsubstantiated charges against Opposition leaders. Political circles were agog with speculation that the government may try to blunt the Opposition assault by probing several old deals, including the Sukhoi package initiated during the United Front regime when Mulayam was defence minister.

After levelling the bugging charge against Saikia in Lucknow, Mulayam had warned of legal action against those who made allegations against him on the Sukhoi deal.

Mulayam is also keen to take the lead in the tape offensive in Parliament, especially since the Congress has decided to lower the pitch and let the ruling coalition stew in its "inherent contradictions".

Sangh strikes at Brajesh dual post

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

2. Prime Minister

New Delhi, April 2: The last has apparently not been heard on the face-off between the Sangh and the Prime Minister's Office. Though RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan has reiterated support to the government, he is persisting with his tirade against "certain" PMO officials, particularly Brajesh Mishra.

In an interview to a weekly newsmagazine, Sudarshan has said it is not possible for Mishra to simultaneously handle the jobs of Prime Minister's principal secretary and national security adviser and reverted to his earlier demand for induction of "more competent" persons in the PMO.

"A single man is handling two important things: foreign affairs as well as national security, each of them requires 16 to 18 hours of monitoring. So one man can't handle them. Brajesh Mishra is adept at handling foreign affairs because he's been in the field for very long. Now, he has been given an additional charge. Will he be able to handle it?" Sudarshan asked.

He continued: "It's the Prime Minister's prerogative to choose his own team. But if two important matters are handled by a single man, will he be able to do justice to both? Therefore, some more competent persons should be inducted into the PMO."

Sudarshan had first raised this demand at a press conference before the RSS' delegates convention ended on March 18. He blamed "incompetent persons" in the PMO for the Tehelka scam and sought the removal of "extra-constitutional authorities" and "incompetent officials".

On the role of Vajpayee's foster son-in-law Ranjan Bhattacharya and allegations against him in the Tehelka tapes, Sudarshan said: "Extra-constitutional authorities should not be allowed to function in the PMO."

The next day, Mishra struck back and declared to the press: "If it ever helps the Prime Minister and it strengthens his hands, I will go." He described the charges against him in the Tehelka tapes as "baseless".

The PMO's public denial later forced the *sarsanghchalak* to withdraw his charge about the "extra-constitutional authority" in 7 Race Course Road and South Block, but the retraction is believed to have put off the Sangh cadre who felt Sudarshan ought to have stuck to his stand.

Soon after, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch made its dissatisfaction known with convener Murlidhar Rao claiming: "All non-political people who are not accountable to the people are responsible (for the Tehelka crisis and the general economic ill-health of the country)." This appeared to be a direct reference to Mishra and N.K. Singh, officer on special duty, for whom the swadeshi lobby had been gunning for some time.

Sudarshan's flip-flop is apparently an attempt to placate the cadre. But sections in the BJP were unhappy with his contradictory pronouncements: "It would help if he was a little reticent and kept away from the press for some time. The moral and political authority Sudarshan's predecessors Balasaheb Deoras and Guruji Golwalkar exuded came precisely from their keeping away from the press and the public gaze."

11

THE TELEGRAPH

3 APR 2001

Samata wants Brajesh, Singh out of PMO

'In all fairness, the PM must
remove the guilty officials'

BY PURNIMA S. TRIPATHI

New Delhi, April 2: The Samata Party continues with its tactics of running with the hare and hunting with the hound.

The party continues to build pressure, albeit unofficially, on the government for the "immediate removal" of PMO officials Brajesh Mishra and N.K. Singh, whose names figured prominently in the Tehelka tapes even as the party continues to be a member of the NDA, its senior leader George Fernandes continues to be the NDA convenor.

A senior Samata Party functionary, Dr Nirmal Kumar, who is also the editor of party's official newsletter, has in a statement issued on Sunday demanded the immediate removal of Mr Mishra and Mr Singh from the PMO since their names figured prominently in the Tehelka tapes as being "purchasable and open to bribery."

In the statement, Dr Kumar, who is also a national executive member of the party, said: "The names of the two key functionaries of the PMO, Mr N.K. Singh and Mr Brajesh Mishra, have been touted by the major players on the Tehelka tapes. They are being referred to as purchasable and open to bribery. Continuation of such people in the PMO is sad and equally dangerous for the country."

Dr. Kumar demanded that "they

must be removed immediately and distanced from every government activity." He added that the accusation of close corporate relations between Sterlite owner and Mr N.K. Singh are "most disturbing."

"In all fairness, the PM must remove the two guilty officials as their continuation is violative of its own decision not to give extension responsibilities to retired officers," Dr Kumar said.

He demanded that to be absolutely above board, the government should order a CBI inquiry against the duo.

"We are opposed to double standards on this issue of corruption. While our party president Jaya Jaitly and senior leader and former defence minister George Fernandes resigned on the same issue, why is it that these two officials are being allowed to continue," Dr Kumar said while talking to *The Asian Age*.

He said although Samata Party was not taking up the issue politically at the moment lest it be accused of disturbing the on-going judicial probe, it will raise it in the coming issue of the party newsletter, called *Samata Newsletter*.

"We cannot not raise it. It is too important an issue to be left un-addressed," said Dr Kumar adding the current issue of the newsletter, which was due on April 1, has been delayed because of the confusion over it.

THE ASIAN AGE

- 3 APR 2001

5/8 RSS: 23/4

(Continued from page 1)

Sangh circle claims has been finalised, was reportedly hammered out by the RSS joint general secretary, Mr Madan Das, who called on Mr Vajpayee after the RSS pratinidhi sabha and discussed the issue threadbare. Mr Vajpayee assured that some action would come before the session begins, a RSS source said.

In return the RSS has reportedly told the Prime Minister that it appreciated his concerns and recognised the difficulty he would face in easing out Mr Mishra as principal secretary. Mr Mishra has developed a good rapport with Mr Vajpayee and "it was difficult to find a person equally competent and close". The informal understanding mandated that Mr Mishra will continue till an adequate replacement is found.

After the understanding was reportedly reached, RSS affiliates have taken a strong stand against Mr Singh but left out the principal secretary. This was evident in the Swadeshi Jagran Manch's demonstration against the government recently.

At its pratinidhi sabha, the RSS had demanded ouster of incompetent officials from the PMO after the Tehelka tapes came out with disclosures about corruption in defence deals. However, it issued a delayed denial the same day under pressure of the PMO.

In the meantime, the RSS chief, Mr KS Sudarshan, has told a newsmagazine in an interview that Mr Mishra should not continue to hold two key portfolios, reports PTI. "Each one of them requires 16 to 18 hours of monitoring," he pointed out and questioned whether the same person will be able to handle both jobs.

Mr Sudarshan said it was the prerogative of Mr Vajpayee to choose his own team. However, he held that some competent persons must be inducted into the PMO, the magazine has quoted him as saying in its press release. He maintained his earlier stand that there should be "no extra-constitutional authority" and said that "every decision should be taken by the Cabinet."

PIL filed: A PIL, filed in Orissa High Court, has sought judicial intervention to relieve Mr Mishra from the post of national security advisor and principal advisor to the Prime Minister, adds SNS from Bhubaneswar.

PM & RSS agree on ousting PMO official

SUDESH K VERMA SFI 8/4
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 2. - There appears to be an understanding between the Prime Minister and senior RSS leaders for easing out the OSD in the PMO, Mr NK Singh, and divesting some of the responsibilities of the Prime Minister's principal secretary, Mr Brajesh Mishra. The latter is likely to be divested of his role as advisor to the National Security Council. RSS sources claim these two decisions are likely to come before the resumption of Parliament's budget session on 16 April.

The possibility of the decisions coming before Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's visit to Iran (10-13 April) is unlikely as both Mr Singh and Mr Mishra will accompany him.

A PMO source confirmed the assurance given by the Prime Minister to the RSS, but said that Mr Vajpayee did not assure the RSS about the timing as he wanted to retain some flexibility. The part of the assurance related to Mr Mishra could be fulfilled before Parliament session resumes on 16 April.

The part relating to Mr Singh might have to wait for some more time as he is tipped to be the ambassador to Canada. A PMO source ruled out Mr Singh's wings being clipped by not giving him a reward of a foreign posting, as the charges against him were not of personal nature and related mostly to policy decisions on economic issues.

The formula, which the

■ See RSS: Page 8

THE STATESMAN

- 3 APR 2001

After tapes, tap taint on PMO

OUR BUREAU

April 1: Midway through the battle to contain the Tehelka tape tremors, the Prime Minister's Office today found itself fending off charges of tapping Opposition leaders' phones, an issue that had once brought down a government.

Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav today claimed he had "conclusive evidence" that his and other Opposition leaders' phones were being bugged to implicate them to counter the Tehelka exposé.

Mulayam's allegations coincided with a newspaper report in which Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee was quoted as saying that her phones were being tapped as well.

The PMO moved with alacrity to deny the charges this evening. It said such charges are made almost in every regime.

"The allegations are completely baseless and unfounded. The PMO will look into every complaint it receives from Opposition leaders on either phone-tapping or harassment by the Central Bureau of Investigation. But the complaints should not be sketchy and off-the-cuff. They have to be specific," a

spokesman said.

The sense of urgency displayed by the PMO is not without reason. Rajiv Gandhi had withdrawn support to the Chandra Sekhar government on charges of vigilance by policemen at his residence and tapping his phone lines.

The PMO also denied the involvement of any of its officials. Mulayam had alleged that Ashok Saikia, an official in the PMO, was behind the tapping "conspiracy".

"Saikia is using the CBI to tap my telephone lines," Mulayam said, adding that the Centre should start investigating Saikia's role. He said Saikia, "who formed a trio along with Brajesh Mishra and N.K. Singh", had been "on the job for quite some time".

"Everyone is raising a hue and cry over the deeds of Mishra and Singh, but no one is taking notice of Saikia, who is the main conspirator," he added.

"My phones are being tapped by the government, which is using the CBI to do this dirty job," Mulayam said in Lucknow. He added that several other Opposition leaders were also on the tapping list, but refused to name them.

Mulayam said he would

release the list later.

"I have details which will put a lot of question marks on the government's clandestine activities. I will release all the information at the opportune time," he said.

The Samajwadi leader said the Centre was being forced to tap the phones because of the Tehelka fallout. "The government is doing all this to divert attention from the serious revelations made in the Tehelka tapes," Mulayam said.

Mulayam did not spare the Congress either. He said though the Centre had enough proof against "Sonia's George", it did not move against her private secretary for two years because "the Congress was helping the government at the Centre".

Now that the Congress has broken ties with the BJP, Vincent George is being used to penalise them, he said.

"No one knows what is happening at the Centre," Mulayam said. "There is absolute chaos. The finance minister wasn't aware of the raids on customs officials. The right hand doesn't know what the left is doing. These raids were aimed at diverting the attention of people from the controversy involving the government in defence deals."

THE TELEGRAM

Govt tapping Oppn leaders' phones, alleges Mulayam

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
LUCKNOW, APRIL 1

SAMAJWADI Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav today alleged that telephones of all main Opposition party leaders were being "bugged" on the instructions of Prime Minister's Office in the wake of the Tehelka expose.

"I have got the list of all such leaders and a definite information in this regard and will make it public at an opportune time," Yadav told a press conference here.

Terming the alleged tapping of phones as an attack on privacy and freedom of political leaders, he said the exercise began after the Opposition parties cornered the NDA Government on Tehelka tapes both inside and outside Parliament.



Yadav charged a senior PMO official with pressurising the CBI to implicate opposition leaders by framing charges against them and demanded his removal.

On raids on offices and

PMO denies charge

THE Prime Minister's Office today denied as "baseless and unfounded" allegations levelled by Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav that telephones of all main Opposition party leaders were being "bugged" and that the CBI was being pressurised to implicate Opposition leaders by framing charges against them. Reacting sharply to the allegations, a PMO spokesman said "the allegations are completely baseless and unfounded." "If any specific complaint of phone tapping or implicating an Opposition leader is brought to the notice of the Government, it will certainly be looked into," the spokesman said.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 2 APR 2001

Vajpayee axe on foreign tours of ministers

SHIVNATH JHA & NILOVA ROY
CHAUDHURY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 28. — In an effort to curb the tendency of Union and state ministers from winging their way to more salubrious climes abroad every time the legislatures are in recess, the Prime Minister ordered the foreign ministry to stop issuing visa notes without his permission.

Last month, a letter was sent on the Prime Minister's behalf by his principal secretary, Mr Brajesh Mishra, to all secretary-level officials at the Centre and all chief secretaries, sternly disapproving of the practice of ministers rushing abroad on any pretext. Since ministers travel on diplomatic passports, and at considerable cost to the national exchequer, this was one way to bring down what is being cited as an instance of wasteful expenditure.

Pilloried by the Opposition for

having a jumbo-sized ministry, and eager to be seen as cutting down government expenditure, Mr Mishra's letter clearly instructs the MEA that "no request for visa notes (a facilitating document issued by MEA to political appointees wanting to travel abroad) should be entertained until proof of the PM's approval has

■ NDA splits in Tamil Nadu, page 8

been produced." The MEA was asked to "scrutinise every proposal for a foreign visit in the light of its political and functional justification vis-a-vis the financial implications, before recommending PM's approval."

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee took serious note of "false" undertakings furnished by some senior government functionaries to obtain visa notes.

Debarring Union and state ministers from holding any

discussion with foreign governments either directly or through their embassies/high commissions, the PMO wanted to "impress upon Union ministries and state governments the need to exercise strict restraint in the matter of foreign ministerial visits."

"Except in exceptional cases, papers seeking PM approval should be initiated with the concerned ministries /departments at least two months in advance of the proposed visit," Mr Mishra's two-page letter said.

"Instances have come to our notice where visa notes have been obtained from CPV (consular, passport and visa) division from MEA on the undertaking that the visit would be undertaken only after PM's approval. Thereafter, the visits have taken place without such approval." Senior MEA officials said they had stopped the practice of issuing visa notes without the PM's approval since the receipt of the letter.

THE STATESMAN

23 MAR 2001

Panel should probe roles of PMO officials: Samata chief

CL MANOJ
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 27. - It seems the NDA government, scarred by Tehelka, has become prone to aftershocks from within.

Even as the government instituted a one-man probe commission, the new Samata Party president, Mr VV Krishna Rao, said: "The commission should look into the roles of controversial PMO officials, including Mr Brajesh Mishra and Mr NK Singh."

Mr Rao added that the Prime Minister "need not be pressured" to take action against these officials because "according to service regulations, the Cabinet Secretary can always act against PMO officials if they are found guilty".

When told of the Prime Minister's reported remarks that Mr Mishra was not holding "any office of profit" and so, proceedings against him were difficult, the Samata chief asked: "What about perks, official cars and accommodation? Those who avail of these facilities come under the regulations."

Mr Rao, who succeeded Mrs Jaya Jaitley, is a low-profile man but with a colourful past. Starting as a student leader, this Naxalite-turned-socialist cum trade unionist had gone underground during the Emergency, was put behind bars and charged under MISA. A longtime friend of Mr George Fernandes, he was the Samata vice-president.

Mr Rao still swears by Mr Fernandes's "integrity" and feels "anguished" by the "destructions caused by Tehelka" in the

CENTRE MISUSING MISSIONS ON TAPES: CONGRESS

NEW DELHI, March 27. - The Congress today accused the government of "misusing" Indian missions abroad to defend the ruling NDA in Tehelka expose and said the issue was an internal affair country.

"We've come to know of a strange and unprecedented circular issued to all the Indian missions to enlighten the governments and people of those countries that Tehelka is a non-existing deal. We object to the manner foreign missions are abused to defend the ruling front's domestic turf," the party spokesman, Mr S Jaipal Reddy said.

Referring to the TDP decision not to attend NDA meetings to defend leaders named by Tehelka news portal, Mr Reddy said Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's loud anti-tehelka campaign did not carry "conviction" even with his own coalition partners.

"The question is how this campaign would convince people. If one is to go by the number of their MPs in the Lok Sabha, then this government is in a minority", he said stating that TDP and DMK have not participated in the NDA rally in Delhi. - PTI

Samata. He attributes Mrs Jaitley's defending Ajay Jadeja and entertaining "arms-dealers" at Mr Fernandes's residence to her "political immaturity". He doesn't agree with Mr Nitish Kumar's view that he was made to propose Mrs Jaitley for the presidency by Mr Fernandes. He is also open to discuss the contentious issue of the Samata-JD(U) merger "if someone brings it up at next week's national executive meeting".

Though he did not say it in so many words, the sense of betrayal which many Samata leaders feel towards the BJP is evident. He said the party had decided to contest 32 seats "independently" in Assam.

Mr Rao added that the Samata Party, a "social democrat party", was determined to unite all "like-minded socialists", but

would protest if asked how Socialists could join hands with communal parties. "Where is the question of compromise? The Samata's ploy is to enter the BJP camp and become a pressure group to dilute the communal and rightist agenda".

Mr Rao said no political party can grow by using religion, because "productive forces" are fast advancing. He quoted Prof Stephen Hawking, saying: "Religion is living because of disparities in society, pain in individuals and death."

He supported the "LTTE's cause" and said the "Indian government should start talks with outfits like the LTTE and the pro-Sinhalese JVP". "Even the Congress is allying with the pro-LTTE PMK. This shows that no one can wish away the LTTE cause," he said.

THE STATESMAN

28 MAR 2001

Abolish the PMO

By Ajay K. Mehra

The controversy over the PMO is not merely with regard to its enjoying power disproportionate to its political location, the issue is that it has completely eclipsed the Cabinet Secretariat.

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THE REFERENCE in the Tehelka tapes to disproportionate influence wielded by certain officials in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has put this office with a history of dubious controversies in the eye of a storm all over again. Ironically, this time it is the PMO of Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee who had questioned Indira Gandhi's PMO during the 1970s and 1980s. As a prominent member of Morarji Desai's Cabinet, he had even been instrumental in cutting it to size. The Prime Minister has predictably denied that any officer has wielded extra-constitutional influence in decision making. However, his denials will not carry conviction because people are used to seeing misuse of power by the PMO.

Beyond the current and such other transient controversies that do not sustain in the short public memory, the issue deserves dispassionate debate in the context of the statutory status of institutions supporting the apex constitutional authorities. In this case, the larger discourse of the transformation of the cabinet government into prime ministerial government is the context. For, constitutional practice recognises the Cabinet Secretariat, not the PMO, as the supporting institution for the apex executive body. The controversy over the PMO, therefore, is not merely with regard to its enjoying power disproportionate to its political location, the issue is that it has completely eclipsed the Cabinet Secretariat. Unfortunately, the supporters of a Constitution review have completely overlooked this issue and it does not figure in the agenda of the review commission.

Crossman made his famous 'The Passing of the Cabinet Government' thesis in early 1960s. This passage began in India in the 1970s with Indira Gandhi. There have been notable reversals to Cabinet government during the Janata Party rule (1977-79), during Mr. V. P. Singh's Government (1989-90), the early years of Mr. Narasimha Rao's prime ministership and during the two United Front Governments under Mr. Deve Gowda and Mr. I. K. Gujral. The tenures of Charan Singh (1979-80) and Mr. Chandra Shekhar (1990-91) were political aberrations. The pressures from the coalition partners may not allow Mr. Vajpayee to lead a prime ministerial government, but for the time being his ascendance within the NDA is complete, as, protecting their regional turfs, the allies seem reconciled to basking in his political glow in the

absence of a charismatic leader in their own ranks.

With the ascendance of the Prime Minister, the Cabinet Secretariat too suffered an eclipse. Created at the instance of Viceroy Wavell as a small secretariat in October 1945 by Sir Eric Coates to service the Coordination Committee of the War Resources and Reconstruction of the Viceroy's Executive Council, it became secretariat of the Council. It was retained after 1947 as the secretariat of the Indian Cabinet. It was redesigned as the Cabinet Secretariat when the Constitution of India came into force on January 26, 1950. The role of the Prime Minister and the Cabinet Secretariat was now spelt out under the Rules of Business emanating from Article 77(3), the same provision that provides for the Cabinet, not mentioned in any clause of the Constitution, for convenient transaction of business.

The Cabinet Secretariat is meant basically to help the Cabinet in preparing and circulating its agenda papers, taking down the minutes at Cabinet meetings, circulating them, and monitoring implementation of the Cabinet's policy decisions. It is designed to play a coordinating role between the Prime Minister and his Cabinet colleagues on the one hand and among various Ministries on the other. It also acts as the crucial link between the Cabinet and the various Ministries and departments. The Cabinet Secretary, who heads the Secretariat, has traditionally been the senior-most civil servant, so that he or she not only commands the respect of the bureaucracy, but, as head of the Committee of Secretaries, also acts as a link between the bureaucracy and the political executive.

All the Prime Ministers from Jawaharlal Nehru displayed an inclination for an elaborate Prime Minister's Secretariat. Nehru, however, heeded the advice of Mountbatten, Sardar Patel and V. P. Menon to opt for a small one headed by a Joint Secretary. He never again raised the issue and worked with the Cabinet Secretariat. Due to his unfamiliarity with issues of foreign policy and finance, Lal Bahadur

Shastri enlarged his secretariat, putting it under the charge of a Secretary, L. K. Jha. Neither Shastri nor Jha, however, ever gave it precedence over the Cabinet Secretariat.

Indira Gandhi transformed the Prime Minister's Secretariat into a powerful PMO. P.N. Haksar, whom she brought as Secretary to the PMO, helped her in gradually eclipsing the role of the Cabinet Secretariat, as indeed she eclipsed the role of the Cabinet by constituting a 'kitchen cabinet'. The emergence of Sanjay Gandhi as an extra-constitutional force by 1974 transformed the PMO as well. The Prime Minister's household and the PMO merged. Naturally, the Cabinet Secretariat was trivialised and the Cabinet Secretary reduced to a non-entity. The seniormost bureaucrat, supposed to have unhindered access to the Prime Minister, had to wait for weeks to get an appointment. So much so that once the incumbent Cabinet Secretary kept himself busy by convening meetings of Joint Secretaries on the filing system and other trivial matters.

Her second tenure after the Janata interlude began in similar fashion, as Sanjay Gandhi as MP became a powerful force. The PMO retained its precedence over the Cabinet Secretariat after his death in an air crash in June 1980, but with Mr. P. C. Alexander at the helm it was less controversial. Morarji Desai did not considerably downsize the PMO, but he restored the dignity of the Cabinet and the Cabinet Secretariat. However, his initiative remained as short-lived as the Janata experiment.

Rajiv Gandhi's PMO acquired imperious powers and influence. Packed with his friends and trusted bureaucrats, it completely destroyed any semblance of Cabinet government. When Cabinet Ministers had to lobby with an officer of Additional Secretary rank for the Prime Minister's attention and no Minister was sure either of his or her tenure or portfolio, it was more an imperious government rather than any form of Cabinet government. Obviously, the Cabinet Secretariat had no role under his scheme of governance. It is a different matter that he could not close it down.

Neither the time, nor the political circumstances supported Mr. V.P. Singh in developing his PMO. The same was true of the Deve Gowda and Gujral Governments. In these cases, there was an effective PMO, but not controversial. However, the importance of the Cabinet Secretariat was not restored. Mr. Narasimha Rao established a strong PMO as he settled down.

Another factor that led to the decline of the Cabinet Secretariat was that the norms for appointment of the Cabinet Secretary, the seniority principle especially, were ignored for political expediency. In her post-1980 tenure while Indira Gandhi superseded one and three persons in each appointment of Cabinet Secretary, Rajiv Gandhi superseded more than half a dozen persons on both the occasions (1985 and 1989) he made an appointment to the post. The National Front superseded nearly a dozen civil servants in making this appointment. This has now become the norm. In spite of making this appointment on entirely political grounds, neither Indira Gandhi nor Rajiv Gandhi fully trusted the institution and the person and relied completely on the PMO.

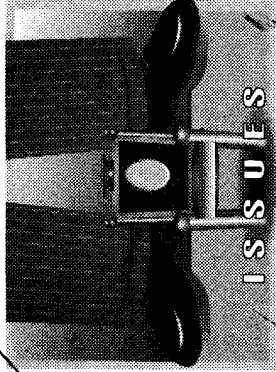
The Cabinet in 1957 had accepted the recommendations of the committee on the reorganisation of the machinery of government, under N. Gopalaswami Ayyangar, that the Cabinet Secretariat should be strengthened and the status and functions of the Cabinet Secretary should be redefined. An elaborate procedure under the Transaction of Business Rules was worked out to determine the working relation between Ministries and their links with the Cabinet.

The Cabinet Secretariat again came up for review in 1968 by the Administrative Reforms Commission, which submitted a report on The Machinery of the Government of India and its Procedures of Work. It recommended: "The role of the Cabinet Secretary should not be limited to that of a coordinator. He should also act as the principal staff adviser to the Prime Minister, the Cabinet and the Cabinet Committee on important policy matters". Obviously, the ARC sought to give the Cabinet Secretary and the Secretariat a central role as the link between the political executive and the bureaucracy. The idea also was to institutionalise this linkage beyond personal political whims. Unfortunately, the year it submitted the report was also the year the rot set in.

THE HINDU

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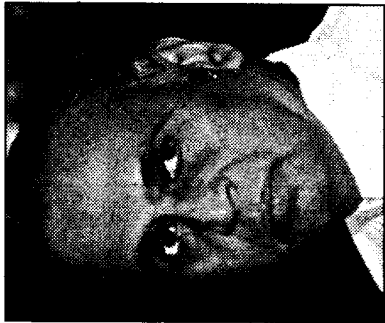
- Does cabinet government imply a 'super-ministry' like the PMO?
- Is it desirable to have unaccountable bureaucrats wielding enormous powers in offices such as the PMO?
- Would cabinet co-ordination be difficult without a powerful PMO? Or would it be easier?



ISSUES

T V Rajeshwar
Former Director,
Intelligence Bureau

WHEN you have a government of 23 parties, many of them with only a single MP, and each with its own agenda, the fragility of such a government is obvious. The problems faced by the NDA government in the matter of telecom policy, disinvestments, foreign capital participation, power projects, etc. are well known. The problems are as much with the constituents of the NDA as with the opposition parties. Ministers absent themselves when 'investments or projects' issues pertaining to their ministries come up. In such a situation the prime minister has to intervene to keep the obstreperous ministers in line. The prime minister's secretary or the PMO, *ipso facto*, becomes important and takes over the coordinating and decisive role.



The PMO owes its origin to Lal Bahadur Shastri. He chose a very senior civil servant, L K Jha, as his secretary. Amongst his successors the most important was P N Haksar during Indira Gandhi's time. P N Haksar with his ideological background became the political adviser as much as he was the administrative co-ordinator to PM. At the same time, Indira Gandhi's failure to clinch the Kashmir issue at Simla by falling in the trap of Z A Bhutto of the defeated Pakistan was also ascribed to Haksar's advice, according to some knowledgeable people. The moral is that the head of PMO is not infallible and could make serious mistakes impinging on the nation's destiny. During my time as Director, Intelligence Bureau, in 1980-83, I had the fortune of having Dr. P C Alexander as the principal secretary to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi and C R Krishnaswamy Rao Sahib as cabinet secretary. They were both seasoned administrators and known for their integrity. Dr Alexander had cordial relations with his secretaries and I was not aware of any instance of any secretary feeling pushed around or dictated to by the PMO. The Core Group which used to meet regularly in the cabinet secretary's office was presided over by the cabinet secretary and it consisted of the principal secretary to PM, the

Shiv Visvanathan
Editor: *Foul Play: Chronicles of Corruption*

THE parable of the seven blind men has always fascinated me. In fact, I always wanted to start a serial called 'seven blind men go to'. What if the magnificent seven were to land up at the PMO's office?

The PMO's office is dark. The first blind man crashes around and his fingers grab a face. It is Brijesh Mishra. The blind man screams "By Haksar", and laughs sadly, realising that Haksar to Mishra is a line of continuity. It was the honest Haksar who started the process of deinstitutionalisation by recreating a bureaucratic tool as a political agent. But Haksar at least had integrity, an ethics which everyone admired. Haksar wouldn't have tolerated such flunkies in the corridors of power. No way!



The second blind man bumped into a flunky who says, "don't you know who I am?" The blind man mutters, "I never made it to *corruption*". And added "lock kya jai?" A week ago, a Sunday supplement, had featured all of them in antiseptic splendour. He realised it was a parallel politics of the murkiest kind. This PMO's office was neither a kitchen cabinet nor a shadow cabinet but a parallel cabinet running the PMO into a kabadi market of decision makers. The blind man then wondered whether PMO was a degree or a galantry award like DSO.

The third blind man sat in N K Singh's seat not recognising the trademark cigarette or perfume. Singh straightened his tie. The blind man wondered what the bureaucracy had come to. The L K Jha's might have been powerful but they saw themselves as advisers, secondary to the Nehrus and Shastris. Here was a bureaucrat thinking he was a politician, half UN delegate, half fixer. Jha understood the power and limits of bureaucracy. It was an instrument for the democratically elected politicians. Singh never conveyed that creative sense of limits.

The fourth blind man crashed into Ranjit Bhattacharya fluttering behind a sofa. "Sanjay" he exclaimed and added "not quite". But the smell and

PMO: Overextending itself?

Socialism created a powerful centralised state, with all powers vested in the executive. Quite naturally, those close to the PM, such as senior officers of the PMO, acquired clout wholly disproportionate to their real importance. We turned to three seasoned experts for comment:

Pran Chopra
Former Editor,
The Statesman

THREE questions have been posed in this Tuesday's debate: Can "cabinet government" have a PMO as a "super ministry"? Are "unaccountable bureaucrats" wielding "enormous power" in PMO? And does "a powerful PMO" hinder "cabinet coordination"? Each needs to be answered first in the current Indian context, and next in the context of what has been happening to parliamentary democracy the world over, for decades.



Evidence against PMO is — for the time being — indirect, based on hearsay, on shady conversations, and thus lacks credibility — yet. Should it prove to be true the prime minister, as the minister in charge of PMO, would be no less accountable to Parliament for it than any minister for what his ministry does. Remember even the towering Jawaharlal Nehru had to sacrifice the once powerful M O Mathai though Mathai's official status was shadowy, his doings extracurricular, and therefore the PM's accountability was harder to define.

As for the power of the principal secretary to the prime minister, it has never been less than enormous since the late 1960s, as testified by P N Dhar's memoirs of his years as special secretary to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi. And as would have become irrefutable if Dhar's predecessor, P N Haksar, had also written his memoirs. He was a gentle soul but more powerful and over more domains than Dhar. PMO's power grows, and it becomes a "super ministry" (if it ever does) only in proportion as the power of the prime minister grows. But even the modesty loving PM Lal Bahadur Shastri's principal aide, L K Jha, became — was certainly seen as — a bigger centre of power and influence than any other luminary of the central secretariat.

If PMO oversteps into "cabinet coordination", which is more properly the domain of the cabinet secretary, it does so only when, and because, PM becomes more than "first among equals", more "equal" than

others, more the boss of the show. The blame for that lies, not at the door of PMO but, first, on the shifting power equations of the day between the PM and other ministers, and second, the tendency for all parliamentary systems these days to become prime ministerial, even presidential at times.

The PM's principal secretary has two irreducible functions. Both are legitimate as well as indispensable, and each enlarges his role. He is the conduit to and from the prime minister. Secondly, it is to him that the PM turns if he wants a second opinion on what has come to him from his ministerial colleagues through the cabinet secretary. Being closest to the PM, his principal secretary has the best opportunity to know his mind, to have his ear, and thus to offer the most persuasive and hence influential advice.

But over time, his influence also becomes, firstly, the envy of his colleagues in the service and then of the political colleagues of the prime minister; and then it becomes, secondly, the cause of much of the barbed comment about him. That is his crown of thorns if he is conscientious, and his bed of opportunity if his conscience is light.

But he can rightly claim, if he is truthful, that he plays a coordinating role only when requested, and in that sense supplements but does not replace the role of the cabinet secretary. That is what Brijesh Mishra has claimed. If the claim is incorrect, the PM's colleagues should take it up with the PM before seeking solace either in sycophancy or in leaks to the press. The fact that they don't means that in India too PMs have become Gladstonians.

But India also has a special, additional, and most tragic distinction: that thanks to the high sense of responsibility among so many of its own members, some of them senior cabinet ministers in their own more sensible days, Parliament's true role has been drowned in the wells of the two houses, with the able assistance of the media (I mean the way they cover Parliament.) It is that which makes room today for faceless bureaucrats and can make the same room tomorrow for faces in uniforms.

Atal discovers warning on tapes

Admission of system flaws

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 25: Slipping into his famous introspection mode, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has conceded for the first time that the Tehelka exposé had brought to the fore "shortcomings in the system" which needed to be rectified by evolving a mechanism.

The Prime Minister, who had asked the media to stay away from military matters after the Tehelka storm broke, also acknowledged its role in "alerting" the government. "There is need for introspection. A suitable mechanism should be evolved to ensure that such incidents (the shortcomings) do not recur," Vajpayee said today after the BJP's two-day national executive concluded here.

The admission was in sharp contrast with the orchestrated chorus within the BJP, which sought to condemn the sting operation as part of a "conspiracy" meant to destabilise the country's economic, social and political structures.

At the national executive yesterday, home minister L.K. Advani, too, had branded the exposé a "campaign of lies and slander" launched by the Congress.

However, with the haunting images of the Tehelka tapes touching a chord across the country and the tremors refusing to die down, Vajpayee said: "I do not blame the media as they have done their job. They have alerted us. There are some shortcomings in the system and these need to be rectified."

The Prime Minister had advised the media against interfering in affairs of national security at a seminar on the role of the military in democracies in the mid-

dle of this month.

The stirrings of a rethink of strategy within the government came last week when editor-turned-minister Arun Shourie justified the use of a spycam by the Tehelka team.

The conspiracy theory has been parroted by most allies, but not those which have a bigger stake outside the government at the Centre. The ruling coalition's solidarity meet failed to draw two key allies from the south. The DMK, which is facing an impending election in Tamil Nadu, and the Telugu Desam skipped the show of strength.

At the national executive, too, Vajpayee tried to rise above partisan politics and underscored the need to make party funding more "transparent" because elections were becoming increasingly expensive. His political rival and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi has also been talking about cleaning up the funding process ever since the corruption scandal erupted.

Vajpayee pointed out that while individual spending on elections was monitored and accounted for, there was no provision for vetting the expenditure incurred by political parties.

He dwelt at length on the BJP's "ajitwan sathyogi nidhi" scheme. He explained that it was based on the philosophy of decentralisation of political funds to minimise the dependence on big money. The scheme hinges on the principle of collecting small amounts from a large number of BJP sympathisers.

However, BJP sources were sceptical. "Mainly modest amounts of up to Rs 10,000 are deposited through this system. Those who want to make huge donations prefer not to do so by cheque," a leader said.



LOOK, OUR HANDS ARE CLEAN: Manohar Joshi, L.K. Advani, A.B. Vajpayee, George Fernandes, Farooq Abdullah, O.P. Chautala and Ram Vilas Paswan at the NDA rally in New Delhi. Picture by Rajesh Kumar

PM to go on taint-wash yatra

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, March 25: The BJP-led coalition has decided to send Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on a cross-country tour to address public rallies and counter the Opposition's "disinformation campaign" on the Tehelka tapes.

Vajpayee will speak at four meetings in Mumbai, Bhubaneswar, Bangalore and Lucknow, his constituency, between April 1 and 15.

Former defence minister George Fernandes, who remains the convener of the coalition, and home minister L.K. Advani will address the meetings along with Vajpayee.

Fernandes and Advani are ex-

pected to attend rallies in other major cities. The alliance has shortlisted 50 leaders, including Central ministers, chief ministers and party leaders, to participate in the meetings and tell people the "truth".

The coalition is keen to cover the country before Parliament reconvenes on April 16 to fortify the government. The Opposition had managed to stall the House for much of the first lap of the budget session following the Tehelka disclosures.

The decision to hit the road was taken during an emergency meeting of the alliance held at the Prime Minister's house shortly after today's Delhi rally, whose turnout also helped crystallise the proposal.

"The idea is to counter the

Opposition's disinformation campaign and tell people how in spite of the government's best efforts and all the good work it is doing, the Opposition is saying all this. Tehelka is only a part. The Opposition is boycotting Parliament and rejecting the judicial probe. The people must know all this," rural development minister M. Venkiah Naidu said after the meeting.

Fernandes said the campaign would cover all state capitals and major population centres.

"We will carry the campaign right down to the districts," he said. The full schedule of places and dates will be released tomorrow.

Asked whether the thrust of the attack in the nationwide blitzkrieg will be on the Congress,

as it was today, and not include the Left and others, Fernandes said: "Left is the tail of the Congress. When you have attacked the head where is the need to attack the tail?"

At the alliance meeting, Orissa chief minister and BJP leader Naveen Patnaik is believed to have raised the issues of inadequate allocation to his state in the railway budget and the parlous fiscal position after the super cyclone.

Playing down the DMK's decision to skip today's rally, Naidu said: "The party was preoccupied with election preparations and finalisation of candidates. They said Vaiko (the MDMK chief) will represent the NDA on behalf of Tamil Nadu."

See Page 6

PMO under attack

WHO IS TO BLAME?

Vishal Thapar

THIS WAS before Tehelka blew up in its face NK Singh, officer on special duty in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO), appeared triumphantly on Star TV immediately after this year's Budget was presented. By convention, the Finance Secretary and his colleagues ought to have been the principal medium to explain the Budgetary provisions, and answer questions. But a smiling NK Singh appropriated to himself this role, in open admission that the PMO - that is he himself - had played a pivotal role in the drafting of the Budget.

His senior colleague, Brajesh Mishra, the prime minister's principal secretary, is even more the superman. He's, reportedly, the principal mover and shaker in matters of defence, national security, foreign policy, and represents a single-window clearance for power, telecom, fertiliser, highway projects, the works, not to talk of defence deals, as alleged by middlemen and touts. Together with Singh, Mishra represents the amassment of power by the PMO. Politically speaking, the current flak faced by the PMO is the first protest against the amassment of state power after the Emergency.

Why is there a clamour against the exercise of power by the PMO? In the Rules of Business of the Government of India, there's no mention of the PMO. It is intended only to provide secretarial assistance to the Prime Minister. So, what's happening? The PMO has usurped, many a time, the powers of the Cabinet Secretary and actively interfered with the working of various ministries and departments. It has not only come to represent the power of the PM but those who have acquired power and authority on their own in the name of the PM, observes a pensive BG Deshmukh, who's had the distinction of serving as both Cabinet Secretary and Principal Secretary to the PM, apparently in better times.

The Cabinet system of parliamentary democracy, while conceding to the PM the status of first among equals - or a moon among lesser stars - works on the principle of autonomous ministries, and collective responsibility of the Cabinet of Ministers. The intended fulcrum of

the Cabinet system is the Cabinet Secretariat, which is the liaison agent for the implementation of all Cabinet decisions, and the filtering of parliamentary opinion to the Cabinet.

Former Economic Affairs Secretary EAS Sarma, who recently resigned in protest against being transferred, allegedly at the behest of a business house, claimed in an interview that "ministries have stopped applying their mind and begun to depend more on directives from the PMO".

Again, Mishra is credited with masterminding the ceasefire initiative in Kashmir, despite objections by the Home Ministry.

Is the office of the Prime Minister as a parallel secretariat, then, outgrowing its intended role as leader of the Cabinet to the ruler of the Cabinet? Are the accepted institutions of cabinet governance being marginalised and the PM increasingly usurping spheres of decision-making which were the realm of the Cabinet?

"At the operational level, there's an increasing trend towards executive supremacy. The PM is becoming more like the US President, and is increasingly liberating himself from collective responsibility," says political scientist Aswini Ray. "So much is done without the legislature knowing about it," shrugs Congressman Mani Shanker Aiyer, himself a PMO veteran. Deshmukh calls it the "Prime Ministerial type of government".

The ascent to administrative autocracy has been gradual. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had a democratic instinct about institution building, and he chose not to make the PMO distinctly superior, and operated through the Cabinet Secretary rather than his personal office, which comprised a small secretariat staff headed by a joint secretary, the first of whom was HM Patel, ICS. "This was the ideal structure," comments Deshmukh. "The importance of the Cabinet Secretariat was no way affected. With a joint secretary heading the PM's office, authority and precedence of the Cabinet Secretary (as head of the civil service) was assured," he explains.

The PM Secretariat assumed some importance under Lal Bahadur Shastri, who established a full-fledged establish-

ment headed by LK Jha. Stepping gingerly into the shoes of Nehru, Shastri wanted to establish his authority through this set up. But the office assumed supremacy under Indira Gandhi. Initially, it ran parallel to the Cabinet Secretariat, but gradually supplanted it as the most important office of decision making and liaison with the Cabinet. All proposals and legislations were vetted in the PMO first, and the Cabinet Secretariat became a rubber stamp.

The face of this office was Indira's principal secretary PN Haksar, who succeeded Jha in 1967. Haksar was one of the two 'progressives' (the other being G Parthasarthy) referred by Communist leader PC Joshi to Nehru, who wanted them to counter the ICS-dominated foreign service. Haksar became Indira's ideologue, and shaped policy and politics of the time. Unlike Nehru, Indira needed to establish herself as a leader of her party and she used the government for the purpose. Later in the Rajiv and Rao eras, Ministers of State were appointed in the PMO, overtly politicising the institution. The process of politicisation of the office was complete with the appointment of Brijesh Mishra, who had worked in the BJP office after his retirement from the foreign service.

Deshmukh feels the prime minister's power to check corruption in a powerful PMO may be circumscribed if the principal secretary is a political appointee. "Had Mishra not been a party worker, it would have been easy for the PM to ask him to go on leave pending an enquiry in the Tehelka case," he reasons.

And starting with the advent of Sanjay Gandhi, the element of the Prime Minister's House (PMH) emerged as an extra-constitutional authority, of which even people like Chandraswami were a part. The same phenomenon now reportedly looms in the form of Ranjan Bhattacharya.

"The powerful yet invisible force which drives the PMO". The nannies too begun disappearing. During Rao's prime ministership, Deshmukh observed that the administrative interference had increased manifold. "The Foreign Investment Promotion Board for no good reason continued to be directly under the principal secretary (AN Verma)," he recalls. A



Vajpayee with Brajesh Mishra: Troublesome Man Friday

senior officer shudders at the treatment meted out to those officials who did not fall in line with the PMO's diktats. Piyush Mankad, who was then additional secretary in-charge of industrial approvals was shunted out after he raised objections against a project; it took him two years to be rehabilitated. "The message was that if you don't do it, we'll get someone else to do it," recalls an officer, who claims

that Verma was a "terror". "NK Singh claimed on TV that the PMO does not interfere. Everybody knows how the PMO can pressure the ministry to put up a proposal wanted by the PMO and then call it the ministry's proposal," says Deshmukh. The greater danger in a dominant PMO, warns TSR Subrahmaniam, another former cabinet secretary, is that "the voice of

the system gets lost". He argues that the principal advisor to the PM must be the cabinet secretary and not his principal secretary. "Otherwise there's danger of advice getting packaged to meet the PM's political needs, as his secretary is identified with his political interests. The cabinet secretary can give independent advice in national interest," he says. "Paswan was Railway Minister

and he wanted large allocations for railway projects. I resisted it on the grounds that projects already sanctioned would take 80 years to complete. The prime minister agreed with me," illustrates Subrahmaniam. This phenomenon, he points out, has taken deep root in states as well with the chief minister's secretariat riding roughshod and the chief secretary being rendered redundant. "This is

also happening in ministries where secretaries are being bypassed by personal staff of ministers. This is an extra constitutional way of doing things. If you think main secretariats are not required, do wind them up, but this backdoor method is the worst way of governance," concludes Subrahmaniam. Let the reality of the de facto presidential system be an honest one, he pleads.

The Emergence of the PMO



Jawaharlal Nehru: He operated through Cabinet Secretary. The personal office of the PM was headed by a joint secretary.

Indira's third tenure started with Sanjay dominating the PMO, till his death. It was a much mellowed PMO under its new head PC Alexander.



Lal Bahadur Shastri: He vested the PM secretariat with importance by appointing top civil servant LK Jha as secretary.

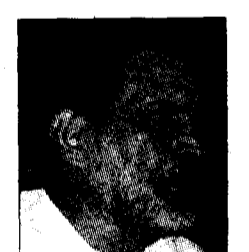
Moraji Desai and Charan Singh: More democratic style of functioning, and hence, low profile PMO.



Indira Gandhi: PM Secretariat became PM Office. Headed by principal secretary P N Haksar the PMO became all powerful. Also, an alternate, extracabinet power centre emerged under Sanjay Gandhi as the Prime Minister's House (PMH). Decline in the office of Cabinet Secretary.

Rajiv Gandhi: Packed the PMO with friends and trusted aides. Arun Singh made minister of state, PMO. The office took initiative on economy, industry, science, technology and defence. Rajiv settled for Serla Grewal as his principal secretary. Later succeeded by BG Deshmukh. ML

Fotedar and Satish Sharma represented the PMH.



VP Singh and Chandrashekhar: Deshmukh continued with Singh, who wanted the PMO to be a more effective professional body. No PMH during Singh's tenure. Chandrashekhar's tenure too short for the PMO to make any impact.

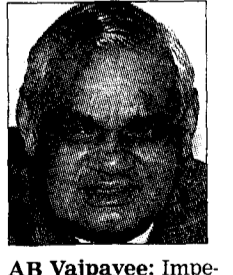


PV Narasimha Rao: The PMH virtually merged with PMO. With MoS Bhuvnesh Chaturvedi in the PMO dealing with political matters, the office got overly politicised. But the man calling the shots was principal secre-

tary AN Verma. Controversial godman Chandraswami did his bit too.



Deve Gowda and IK Gujral: Low profile PMO with seasoned bureaucrats Satish Chandran and NN Vohra at the helm. The PMH was very active during Deve Gowda's tenure.



AB Vajpayee: Imperial power centre under Brijesh Mishra, who also assumed the post of national security adviser. Key economic, security, foreign policy and political initiatives taken by this office. It conducts negotiations with foreign dignitaries, and addresses press conferences, sometimes to defend itself.

It sure is lonely at the top

Sunday Bureau

IT WAS the last straw for the embattled Prime Minister, chief K S Sudarshan too went on television, as has been the flavour of the season, expressing dissatisfaction with the way the Prime Minister's Office has been conducting itself. He toned down that observation by the night the same day but the damage had been done. The Parivar had struck again.

It's one parivar Atal Bihari Vajpayee knows he cannot trust but he can do nothing about it. Actually as Prime Minister, he may want to head this family like any paterfamilias but has to often behave like its youngest and throw tantrums to make it fall in line. Sudarshan's retraction wasn't ordered as much as it was extracted with an orange-till-quit.

But the message has gone home: the Parivar wasn't happy with the PMO. It's no coincidence that the next day the Prime Minister's principal secretary Brajesh Mishra and officer on special duty NK Singh found themselves before the press defending the PMO against a whole range of scam allegations.



The Parivar is not at all happy with the PMO. It's no coincidence that the next day the Prime Minister's principal secretary Brajesh Mishra and officer on special duty NK Singh found themselves before the press defending the PMO against a whole range of scam allegations. "The Parivar is not at all happy with the PMO," admits a top functionary of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh. The reason: the PMO is too bureaucratic and doesn't accord the Sangh the right access. A very senior RSS functionary, it was said, called the Prime Minister seven times before he got through. And when he did, the man, being a one-time friend of Vajpayee, lectured him on the benefits of a friendlier PMO.

But an unfriendly PMO is not all that stands between the PM and his parivar. The basic problem is this: the Sangh knows Atal Bihari Vajpayee, not the Prime Minister but the man, is

its best visiting card. And is most happy when Vajpayee is doing just and only that. But when Vajpayee over-steps his brief the Sangh is annoyed. He is not expected to use the visiting card himself to do his own things. And there is a lot of that he is being doing lately. Especially on economic reforms. The Swadeshi Jagran Manch and Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, parivar's strike formations on economic issues, have been unsparing in their criticism of opening the economy to foreign players, disinvestment - Balco was the last battlefield, for instance. The government cannot hope for a reprieve on this front at all, warns a Sangh functionary. In fact, the view taken in the Sangh is that there can be no compromise on swadeshi even if it was a Sangh favourite such as L K Advani or the sarsangchalak, Sudarshan, himself calling the shots. The Parivar has taken a principled stand on the issue.

And the Prime Minister needn't feel unnecessarily aggrieved on this issue. But the impression of a lonely PM ploughing ahead despite disension in his family grows stronger with every criticism, most of which is timed badly enough to make the Sangh look part of the opposition. Sudarshan's observations on the PMO couldn't have come at a worse time for Vajpayee as he had just lost the support of an ally, Trinamool, and a cabinet colleague, George Fernandes, who resigned in the wake of Tehelka.

Vajpayee's isolation, rather loneliness, in the Parivar looked complete. The few friends he has in the government are equally high on the hate-list of his baiters - such as Jaswant Singh and Brajesh Mishra. Pushed into a corner he did what he had to and used himself as the weapon and as he must have figured it worked. But the question is how often is going to use this weapon and will it not at some stage just

irritate his detractors more rather than scaring them? For the moment, however, his my-way-or-quits strategy doesn't look like running out of usefulness. Sangh sources admit realises it hasn't only failed in taming him, but has also probably contributed to his growing stature by creating problems for him. It's like more you attack him, the bigger he grows.

No wonder then that the Parivar has decided to rally behind Vajpayee and announced as much at a function at a Panchajanya (RSS mouthpiece publication) function on March 23. The great show of solidarity - Vajpayee and Sudarshan together on the same stage - was borne more out of the Parivar's need for peace than Vajpayee's. "He is the best PM for coalition politics," Sudarshan said. There, the Parivar must have told itself, it's been said now reciprocal.

The question is will he? And what? Here is what the Sangh wants: 1) speak the same language if you cannot say the same things as us and 2) give us more access to you. Actually, the Parivar wants a compromise: you give some (read: make some changes in the PMO) and we give some, something like hold fire. And that process may have actually started when Sudarshan stayed back after the post-function dinner at 7. Race course Road on March 23. A BJP source says, "Sudarshanji and Atalji must have spoken for a while after the guests left." Did they actually speak? There is no confirmation of that; there are only indications such as this, "If Sudarshanji actually stayed that late, even after most guests had left, they must have spoken." The Parivar clearly is in a reconciliatory mood. Why else would it blame the press for creating misunderstanding between it and the Prime Minister. Sudarshan's statement condemning the PMO is attributed to the same "tendency to twist statements to keep the pot boiling" so to say. Facts, however, may not be as the Parivar might want the world to see. The RSS chief was indeed answering very pointed questions put to him by reporters and he could have easily avoided his "general" responses if he did not want them misconstrued or misrepresented. But he didn't, so why blame the press. It was as much afterthought as anything can be as Sangh sources claim "everything the chief says is the stated and considered position of the organisation. Don't expect loose comments from him, they maintain. The long and the short of it all really is that the parivar appears to be taking a position that if you cannot fight the man join him, resume the fight at some later stage when he is really weak and not just appears weak."

Sangh in a fix over PMO

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 22. — Sangh Parivar outfits seem undecided about what their attitude towards the Prime Minister's Office should be after the Tehelka expose and the clarifications given by Mr Brajesh Mishra and Mr NK Singh. Privately, they attack the PMO officials whose names have figured in the Tehelka disclosures as fixers. But they seem chary of saying anything publicly, fearing it could go against the Prime Minister. They still consider him the RSS's last bait.

The VHP today refused to comment against the PMO officials. But it said the RSS was the only organisation involved in national character building.

The VHP working president began speaking on morality but soon changed tack. Mr Ashok Singhal said now stability was more important than morality. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee is the right person to lead the nation. There is none of his stature, Mr Singhal said, alleging that some parties were trying to destabilise the government and force a mid-term poll.

"I'll tell Atalji to ensure that the guilty are punished even if they are in the PMO," the VHP chief said. There's not a single taint in his political career and he will do the needful, he said. The Swadeshi Jagran Manch, an unpleasant terms with the

PMO for some time now, did not say anything against the Prime Minister's principal secretary, Mr Brajesh Mishra.

The march attacked the Officer on Special Duty, in the PMO, Mr NK Singh, and former PMO official, Mr Montek Singh Ahluwalia.

These officials are responsible for the present crisis, the SJM organisational secretary, Mr Murlidhar Rao, said. The PMO was manned by people "insensitive to national interests".

The RSS outfit criticised the Balco disinvestment deal, saying it was "undervalued." The Balco crisis was created by some bureaucrats, not accountable to the people, Mr Rao said. When these people took policy decisions, such problems were bound to crop up, he added.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee was not involved in any corrupt practices, but he has given governance to "bureaucratic leadership," Mr Rao said. The government's lack of political direction was also on this count and the SJM had always pointed this out to the government, he said.

The RSS chief, Mr KS Sudarshan, had on Sunday blamed "incompetent" officials in the PMO for the crisis. It drew an instant rebuttal from the PMO but the two officials, Mr Brajesh Mishra and Mr NK Singh, addressed a press conference to clarify their respective positions.



Congress MPs with placards shout slogans against the government outside Parliament on Thursday. — API/PTI

Bagai to probe Tehelka tapes

NEW DELHI, March 22. — The defence ministry today appointed a joint secretary, Mr RP Bagai, to probe its officials' involvement in the Tehelka scandal. Mr Bagai, the ministry's chief vigilance officer, has asked the Tehelka CEO, Mr Tarun Tejpal, to submit copies of his tapes. He will investigate the procurements cited by Tehelka and see if the existing procedure could be manipulated. If he finds anything wrong with the procedure, he will suggest modifications. Mr Bagai will submit his report in a month.

The Prasar Bharati board member, Mr BG Verghese, will be the information consultant to the defence minister. His appointment ensures that he won't be made a regular employee of the ministry. He'll get an honorarium. If he be-

comes part of the ministry, it would clash with his post as Prasar Bharati board member. Prasar Bharati is an autonomous body and no board member can work for the government. **Lok Sabha stalled:** Opposition members, led by the Congress, stalled Lok Sabha proceedings for the seventh day today. Raising slogans, they demanded that the government quit after the Tehelka expose. BJP members countered this by saying that Mrs Sonia Gandhi should resign after the CBI registered a case against her private secretary, Mr V George. The Speaker's plea to restore order was ignored. Seeing the belligerent members, he adjourned the House till tomorrow, the last working day of Parliament before a three-week break. — SNS

PMO hands in show of innocence

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, March 19: The Prime Minister's two-most influential men, Brajesh Mishra and N.K. Singh, today refused to quit their posts despite mounting pressure on them to do so following the Tehelka revelations.

The two men, who wield enormous clout in the Prime Minister's Office, confronted the media and said they were here to stay because they still "enjoyed" Atal Bihari Vajpayee's confidence.

Mishra, principal secretary to Vajpayee and national security adviser, and Singh, officer on special duty in the PMO, have been sucked into a storm following the sting operation. The Opposition as well as the BJP's allies have demanded their removal for their alleged involvement in defence deals. The Sangh parivar, too, had dubbed the PMO a super power-centre, but later toned down its criticism.

The shift in the RSS' stand has given the PMO officials a shot in the arm. Vajpayee's team members are trying to send the message that they are a cohesive group and are far from "incompetent" or vulnerable to corruption.

Mishra explained that they had to call a news meet because Parliament had been crippled and the government had not been able to clarify the PMO's stand.

Mishra, who spoke first at the unprecedented news conference, denied any wrongdoing and said allegations that he fixed defence deals and helped fund the BJP were "baseless".

He said he has been the Prime Minister's principal secretary for three years and the national security adviser for over two years, but Vajpayee had never discussed any defence deal with him.

In a one-page statement, Mishra said: "Bangaru Laxman has never spoken to me about any defence deals or about funding his political party with my help or that of the PMO. I do not know Mr R.K. Gupta (the arms sales middleman who features in the Tehelka tapes) or his son and have not

had any contact with them."

Like Vajpayee and George Fernandes before him, Mishra took potshots at the press. The statement said: "Media ethics demand that before allegations against a person are made public, he or she is given a chance to rebut them. It is regrettable that in the present case, ethical values were not observed."

Asked if he would follow the path taken by Fernandes and resign, pat came the reply: "I shall go if it helps strengthen the Prime Minister's hands." He asserted that he had not been asked to quit nor had he offered to do so.

Mishra defended the Prime Minister's son-in-law, Ranjan Bhattacharya. "Bhattacharya does not work in the PMO. I have never seen him in the PMO in the last three years that I have worked there," the principal secretary said.

"My family lives with me in my house. Is that extra-constitutional?" he added.

On the criticism from the Sangh parivar, Mishra was quick to point out that two different statements had been attributed to RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan on the "inefficiency" in the PMO. He did not know which one was being referred to and so would not like to comment on either.

Mishra reminded reporters that in his resignation letter, Laxman had said he had never spoken to the Prime Minister or with anyone else in the PMO about defence deals.

Mishra agreed that the defence establishment had been penetrated by middlemen, but he denied that he was a superpower in the PMO.

Both Mishra and Singh sought to send the signal that the PMO was not a super-office that dabbled in everything.

The officials took pains to assert that the PMO did not interfere in the running of ministries and involved itself only in case of specific requests. They pointed out that there a system of checks and balances was in place which did not allow the PMO to take a dictatorial posture.

■ See Page 4



Brajesh Mishra (left) and NK Singh addressing the news conference. Picture by Prem Singh

No justice for Vajpayee

FROM R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, March 19: In a setback to the Vajpayee government, Chief Justice A.S. Anand today refused to spare a sitting judge of the Supreme Court to head a commission of inquiry into the Tehelka findings.

Anand has "turned down" a personal request from Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee that a sitting judge of the apex court be nominated to investigate the transactions in the tapes, legal sources said.

A letter from Vajpayee was delivered to the chief justice on Saturday, a day after the Cabinet decided to set up a one-man commission of inquiry, "preferably headed

by a sitting Supreme Court judge". In the letter, Vajpayee is understood to have requested Anand to spare a sitting judge "in view of the seriousness" of the matter, the sources added.

Immediately after receiving the letter, the chief justice "consulted" his colleagues and the "unanimous view" was that no sitting judge should be spared for "such inquiries", the sources said.

The decision is a blow to the government as the Prime Minister was hoping to restore his credibility by getting the investigation conducted by a sitting judge. The administration believes that a probe by a retired judge or any other person will not have the same impact as that by a sitting judge.

In his reply today to Vajpayee, Anand wrote that "in principle", a sitting judge of the Supreme Court should not be nominated for such investigations.

Later, a government release said the chief justice agreed to nominate a retired judge of the apex court.

Legal sources feel that the apex court did not want to involve itself with an inquiry on how defence deals can be struck by bribing the high and mighty. Moreover, they pointed out, reports submitted by several such commissions in the past have been put in the cold-storage and this could also be one of the reasons why the court preferred to stay away from an inquiry.

Under the Commissions of Inquiries Act, any panel constituted does not have powers similar to that of a court of law and the majority of such reports have been put on the backburner.

The chief justice's letter was delivered to the law ministry today. Sources said the ministry, headed by Arun Jaitley, itself can go ahead with the job of finding a retired judge as the chief justice's permission is not needed in such a case.

Supreme Court corridors were agog with reports of the purported telephone conversation between Vajpayee and Anand, who was "actually guided by the collective wisdom of his fellow judges", lawyers said.

Atal dodges Brajesh stepdown

FROM KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, March 21: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee was today ambivalent on the resignation of his principal secretary, Brajesh Mishra, who has come under a cloud after the Tehelka expose.

Vajpayee, who is under increasing pressure from hardliners in the BJP and the Sangh parivar to remove Mishra, gave conflicting answers to reporters on the issue.

Asked if he would tell Mishra to quit, Vajpayee said: "He (Mishra) does not hold public office." Subsequently, the Prime Minister claimed he had not said that Mishra should not quit.

Asked again whether Mishra should not resign, Vajpayee said: "Maine aisa nahin kaha (I did not say that)." He was talking to reporters after a civil investiture ceremony at the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

To a question if the Shiv Sena had demanded the resignation of Mishra and N.K. Singh, officer on special duty in the PMO, he said: "They (the Shiv Sena) did not tell us this. It is only in the media."

The Prime Minister's remarks came a few hours after Ram Jethmalani, a friend of the Sena chief and former law minister who was asked to quit by Vajpayee, said the government was following "double standards" on the Tehelka expose.

The government had pressed

the panic button while reacting to the situation, he said. "It has gone into a funk."

"If a minister is asked to resign and leaders of two political parties are made to resign on the basis of the tapes, then the same standard should apply to others," Jethmalani told a news agency.

The criminal lawyer said "the tapes obviously refer to Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Brajesh Mishra's name has been taken. There cannot be double standards in this unless there is some method of distinguishing between the cases of George Fernandes and Mishra".

The former law minister said Vajpayee has not come out with any particular method of distin-

guishing between the two.

Defending Fernandes and Jaya Jaitly, Jethmalani said: "If the government has gone by the tapes, there is hardly any reason why George should resign."

The Prime Minister blamed the Opposition for the impasse in Parliament. Asked if the government was planning to initiate talks with the Opposition to break the stalemate, he replied: "We will consider your suggestion."

He said even though those named in the expose have resigned, "no guilt has been proved".

Lamenting the Opposition's conduct, the Prime Minister said the government was prepared for a discussion on corruption in Parliament.

THE TELEGRAPH

22 MAR 2001

PMO ultimatum angers Mamata

By Our Special Correspondent

KOLKATA, MARCH 20. The gap between the BJP-led Government and its estranged ally, Trinamool Congress, further widened today with the former Railway Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, ignoring the ultimatum issued by the Prime Minister's Office. The PMO had sought a clear statement, within 24 hours, from the Trinamool on whether the party was willing to extend support to the National Democratic Alliance.

"We have taken exception to the way the BJP leadership has tried to force our party to pledge support to the NDA... If the need arises, we may even oppose the Vajpayee Government in Parliament," Mr. Sudip Bandopadhyay, Trinamool MP and chief whip, said. He told reporters that the Trinamool chief, Ms. Banerjee, had received a fax message from Delhi on Monday signed by Mr. Sudheendra Kulkarni, officer in the PMO, asking her to spell out her stand on the NDA Government within 24 hours. Till the other day, Mr. Kulkarni was acting as coordinator between the Trinamool and the BJP.

The message read: "(The) Trinamool would have to make a public statement reaffirming faith in the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, as well as extend support to the NDA Government from outside, like the TDP so that the country is not pushed into the vortex of instability by the machinations of the Congress and the communists."

Conveying Ms. Banerjee's mind to the media on the ultimatum, Mr. Bandopadhyay said she would not even bother to reply for two reasons. First, the Trinamool had already made known its position vis-a-vis the NDA when it announced the withdrawal of support on March 15. "In what way has the situation changed between then and now that we

would be required to issue a fresh statement?"

Secondly, the message, according to Ms. Banerjee, was in bad taste because its framing sounded almost like a threat. "We are a political party and so cannot be expected to change our position every now and then," Mr. Bandopadhyay said. "The tone of the letter is uncivilised."

With this, the possible emergence of new political configurations in West Bengal has brightened. With Ms. Banerjee almost putting an end to Trinamool's relationship with the BJP — at least for now — a new equation with the parental Congress, once dubbed by her as the B-team of the State's ruling Leftists, seems imminent.

Almost certain that the BJP leadership would now scrap the seat-sharing agreement with the

Trinamool, Ms. Banerjee and her aides are busy holding parleys within the party as well as with the Congress high command in Delhi. The Trinamool had allotted 39 seats to the BJP. "We will not consider the BJP's demand for changes in the existing seats," Mr. Bandopadhyay said.

Ms. Banerjee, it is believed, firmly told the Congress leadership in Delhi that she would like to discuss seat-sharing with the party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, and none else. The meeting is likely to take place in Delhi around March 25. "If it's the Congress, she (Ms. Banerjee) will talk to Ms. Gandhi and if it's the BJP, she will prefer to interact with the Prime Minister himself," Mr. Bandopadhyay said. Significantly, the last clause indicates that Ms. Banerjee has not exactly shut the door on the Prime Minister.

BJP begins firefighting

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 20. The BJP today rushed to protect the Prime Minister's Office from the attack by its former ally, the Trinamool Congress, which has alleged in Kolkata that a communication received by it from Mr. Sudheendra Kulkarni in the PMO, was "uncivilised". Mr. Kailashpati Mishra, BJP vice-president in-charge of West Bengal affairs, clarified that he had sent the communication to the Trinamool chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, asking her to clarify the party's stand towards the NDA Government at the Centre. "Our written proposal to the Trinamool Congress has been sent by me," Mr. Mishra said. "The PMO had nothing to do with our party's communication to Ms. Banerjee."

(According to PTI, Mr. Mishra, being rushed to Kolkata tomorrow, would try to save the electoral alliance between the two parties in West Bengal by discussing the fallout of the Trinamool threat with the State unit leaders.)

The BJP leaders confessed that they had virtually given Ms. Banerjee a 24-hour ultimatum, threatening to call off the seat adjustment with her in Bengal unless she agreed to support the NDA Government. But, so far, the BJP leaders have not made their stand clear — after the Trinamool rejection are they still in the mood to tie up with Ms. Banerjee? It seems that if the BJP wants the alliance, it may have to eat humble pie.

THE

PM smells power-grab plot

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 20: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has decided to meet the Opposition's challenge head-on and charged it with whipping up the defencegate controversy as a "bogey" to get rid of his government and manoeuvre itself to power.

Countering Sonia Gandhi's allegation that the BJP-led government had compromised with the country's security for a "fistful of riches", Vajpayee told a meeting of the BJP parliamentary party: "I do not need a certificate of patriotism from one and all because all my life I have fought against corruption. But efforts are on by the Opposition to grab power in the name of corruption."

Jaswant Singh, who has been given charge of defence after George Fernandes' resignation, said anybody who questioned defence deals was an "anti-national".

BJP spokesman V.K. Malhotra quoted Vajpayee as expressing concern at the Opposition stalling Parliament. "India is the world's biggest democracy but what message does the Opposition want to send? That governments here are toppled by disrupting and stalling parliamentary proceedings?" the Prime Minister asked.

According to Malhotra, Vajpayee sought to make a distinction between why the BJP had paralysed Parliament's working when it was in the Opposition and why the Congress was doing it now. "There is a difference. We had demanded a discussion and a

probe but the Congress had rejected both," Vajpayee said.

He picked up the gauntlet thrown by the Opposition and said the people will decide who is innocent and who is not. "People will give their verdict after the Lok Sabha's five-year term ends and the truth will be out before that. The Opposition is making efforts to defame us but we will not allow them to succeed," the Prime Minister was quoted as saying.

Vajpayee picked on the Congress as a potential saboteur. "The Congress never allows a non-Congress government to function. It has been the party's history. It wants to show that the Congress alone can run a government for five years. It has pulled down governments which it had propped up. But the Congress has been un-

successful in bringing down this government because our coalition is intact and we have a majority in the House," he said.

Vajpayee urged his MPs to tackle the Congress' public campaign on Tehelka with "confidence". "Go and tell the truth to the people, tell them there was no corruption in any deal and no minister was involved. Tell them we have ordered a judicial probe and this will establish the truth."

Jaswant, said Malhotra, explained the "factual" position on the defence deals involving the NDA government. He pointed out that the Sukhoi deal was initiated during P.V. Narasimha Rao's regime and Mulayam Singh Yadav, the defence minister in the United Front government, had signed on the dotted line.

I do not need a certificate of patriotism from anyone: Vajpayee

PM asserts himself, says no wrong done

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 20. - It was back to business as usual for the government today. Almost. A prolonged Cabinet meeting was held this evening, clearing a slew of proposals, and earlier in the day, the Prime Minister confidently urged his partymen to go to the people and defend the government's record. He said they had nothing to hide.

"I do not need a certificate of patriotism from anyone," Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee strongly asserted, criticising the Congress for taking to the streets after failing to divide the National Democratic Alliance.

Mr Vajpayee assured party legislators that the government had done nothing wrong, that there was no corruption in any deal, and that no minister was involved. And told them that when they returned to their constituencies, they should tell people the truth.

The defence minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, made a similar point, suggesting that raising the kind of questions, being asked, were not in national interest. He referred in some detail to the major defence deals in which fingers had been pointed at the government. It was wrong to raise questions and debunk defence deals when national security interests were involved, he said.

The Congress charged the government today with muzzling public opinion building up against the government. It is unlikely to take kindly to Mr Singh's advice.

Referring to Mr Vajpayee's speech at a seminar organised by the Asia News Network last week, where he told the Press to "exercise restraint while reporting stories related to the country's de-

Congress, which had a history of toppling governments, wouldn't succeed this time. "We've a majority in the House and the attempt to divide us has not been successful."

After being rejected by the people in the last elections, the Congress wants the the bogey of corruption to haunt the ruling alliance and come to power. "They will not be allowed to succeed," he said.

LOK SABHA PASSES VOTE-ON-ACCOUNT

NEW DELHI, March 20. - In a gesture for constitutional obligations, the Opposition in the Lok Sabha today allowed the passage of supplementary demands for general and railway budgets and also cleared the vote-on-accounts sought by the finance minister to draw from the consolidated funds of the government pending passage of the Money Bill for 2001-2002.

But in doing so, the Opposition members raised slogans demanding the resignation of the Prime Minister following the Tehelka tapes revelations. The Speaker, Mr GMC Balayogi, hurriedly sought the approval of the House through voice vote. The supplementary demands and vote on accounts were passed finally by voice vote amidst slogan shouting and uproar. The House was adjourned soon after. - SNS

fence and the defence forces," the Congress spokesperson, Mrs Ambika Soni, said the Prime Minister was not the sole arbiter to question the media's patriotism.

Launching an offensive against the Congress at the BJP parliamentary party meeting, Mr Vajpayee asked party MPs to do the same in their constituencies during the three-week parliamentary recess. Mr Vajpayee said the

Mr Vajpayee said it was the Congress regimes which had 'commercialised' defence deals and the BJP would continue to fight corruption. People were the ultimate masters and they would give their verdict when the parties go before them after completing the term.

In an apparent reference to the Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi's speech in Bangalore, describing Mr Vajpayee and his colleagues as a "bunch

of traitors," the Prime Minister said he did not need a certificate from anyone to prove his patriotism. "I have spent my life fighting corruption and will continue to do so."

He sought to highlight a "qualitative" difference between the stalling of parliamentary proceedings by the BJP in the past, and the present impasse created by the Congress-led Opposition. When the BJP was in Opposition, it stalled proceedings when the government was either not willing to discuss various scandals that rocked the nation, or initiate probes into the allegations.

The NDA was ready not only for a discussion in Parliament but also was eager to order judicial or joint parliamentary committee investigations. The Opposition was shying away from discussion or probes because it knew there was no truth in the allegations.

Sonia demand on DD airtime: Mr Vajpayee today forwarded Mrs Sonia Gandhi's letter to the I&B minister, Mrs Sushma Swaraj, asking her to look into the Leader of the Opposition's demand that she be allowed to address the nation on Doordarshan on the Tehelka controversy.

- Editorial: Rogues' gallery, page 8
- More reports on pages 4 & 6

21/3 All the PMs' Men 51-12

When a week after the Tehelka disclosures Brajesh Mishra finally broke his silence on the allegations against him, the media quizzed him on the delay in going public. But no one in the media answered the counter-query of the principal secretary and national security adviser: What happened to the journalistic ethics of checking out allegations with the accused person? There is an American journalistic adage which says "If your mother says she loves you, check it out". That there is a prima facie case for investigating serious allegations about corruption and deal-fixing in the ministry of defence is beyond all doubt. The welter of contradictory comments in the press only underscores the lack of transparency around defence procurement. However, there is a problem here. As experts have pointed out, there is rarely any deviation in official procedure even in corrupt defence deals; political corruption takes place outside the official framework in surroundings where the politician-middleman-supplier nexus operates freely. The Tehelka tapes do not deal with an actual transaction. What they do have are a lot of boastful references to certain deals having been clinched by middlemen influencing the defence minister. Given the overall impact of the tape and specific allegations against those connected with the defence minister, he had to go pending a full investigation. But to accept every hearsay in the Tehelka tapes as gospel truth could be to undermine democracy. Tehelka's record on Manoj Prabhakar's disclosures should be borne in mind. That there was match-fixing was established but charges against particular individuals were not.

In this instance, a simple option was available to the Opposition which has been shouting itself hoarse, demanding the resignation of the government: To file an FIR using the tapes as evidence. Instead, all they can do is to hold Parliament to ransom, thereby taking the fight to the streets. The logical extension of this course would be to abandon even the pretence of democracy and settle all issues in a wrestling match. No doubt the present ruling party resorted to the same kind of tactics when they were in opposition. But to make a habit of obstructing Parliament can only consolidate authoritarian trends and values. The present crisis has thrown up a number of relevant issues, including complaints about the PMO having accumulated vast powers of decision-making on all major deals, cutting across all ministries. There is merit in the charge but to expect the PMO to disappear overnight is to betray a lack of understanding of how the system works. The strength of the PMO is a reflection of the prime minister's equation with the rest of the cabinet. Ever since Indira Gandhi, our cabinet form of government has increasingly come to resemble a presidential system with the cabinet ministers constantly looking to the prime minister for advice. The poor calibre of the ministers has inevitably led to power gravitating to the prime minister's office over a period of time. Procedurally, the ministries are accountable for decisions. If they abdicate that responsibility that is a reflection of our political culture and the defect cannot be cured by rules of procedure. The PMO will disappear only when a prime minister has ministers of calibre and stature and a team united in implementation of an agreed programme.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

21 MAR 2001

PMO denies any wrongdoing

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March. 20. - It was business as usual for the government today. But there was, in government offices, an undercurrent of unease.

Reclusive PMO officials, increasingly under attack for excessive interference in the functioning of economic ministries, came forward to defend themselves against specific charges at a packed press conference yesterday.

Before the tehelka.com tapes were made public last week, a newsmagazine had levelled specific allegations against the two most senior bureaucrats in the PMO, Mr Brajesh Mishra and Mr N K Singh, on the basis of disclosures from a former official, Dr EAS Sarma.

Dr Sarma quit government service in disgust after being eased out of a top finance ministry job late last year, a few months before his official retirement was due.

He was the architect of the Fiscal Responsibility Act during his terminated tenure as secretary, economic affairs.

He said the duo in the PMO showed "undue interest" in Reliance's 3,960 MW power project at Hirma in Orissa and were "in

a position to influence decisions," in favour of particular business houses. The PMO was also charged with arranging a government counter-guarantee for the project.

Dismissing the charge with a cursory "we do not get involved in inter-corporate warfare," Mr Mishra left it to Mr Singh to go into more details. He circulated a 5-page rejoinder to specific allegations.

"The government of India has not agreed to give any counter-guarantee to the Hirma project," the PMO statement said. A payment security mechanism was being worked out for the Power Trading Corporation, "with the clear understanding that there will be no government of India guarantee."

The PMO official team came in strength and included, besides Mr Mishra and Mr Singh, media advisor Mr H K Dua, and joint secretaries Mr Jarnail Singh and Mr Javed Usmani. The latter three went largely unnoticed, although their appearance on such a platform was unprecedented.

The issue of raising sectoral caps for FDI (foreign direct investment) in the telecom sector to 74 per cent had generated controversy recently, with the telecom ministry complaining it had been left out of the decision-making process.

"No proposal for increasing the limit for FDI was either sponsored or emanated from the PMO," the PMO statement said.

The point at issue was between the department of telecommunications and the commerce and industry ministry's department of industrial policy and promotion and placed for consideration of the group of ministers (GOM) on FDI under finance minister Mr Yashwant Sinha. "As it happens, the proposal to increase the cap on the telecom sector was not approved by the GOM and was dropped," the statement said.

Mr Singh oversees the economic agenda, convenes the Strategic Management Group, set up by the Prime Minister, to facilitate the passage of stalled vital infrastructure projects.

He talked of the National Highways Development Project and the Oman fertiliser project, stressing all the while that none of these decisions was taken at the behest of the PMO, but on approval by the Cabinet.

The PMO, the statement said, "is meant to assist the Prime Minister, and, at the request of concerned administrative ministries, often plays a role in resolving inter-ministerial differences."

THE STATESMAN

21 MAR 2001

PMO 'resolved' matters only on request

By Our Special Correspondent

110-15
2001

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19. The Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, and the Secretary in the PMO, Mr. N. K. Singh, today maintained that the PMO had not interfered in the affairs of any Ministry and had merely "resolved" matters on request when inter-Ministerial issues led to difference of opinion. Addressing a press conference this evening, the two senior officials refuted allegations made in a news magazine some weeks ago that the PMO had taken the initiative in a number of economic issues and had intruded into the "domain" of individual Ministries.

They said that the proposal for increasing the limit of foreign direct investment in the telecom sector had not emanated from the PMO but from the Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion with the approval of the Commerce Minister, Mr. Murasoli Maran, and the correspondence on the subject was entirely between this Department and the DoT. The proposal from the Industry Ministry was meant for the consideration of the Group of Ministers (GoM) on Telecom, headed by the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha. It was also emphasised that the proposal to increase the cap on the telecom sector was not approved by the GoM and was eventually dropped.

In the matter of migration of the existing private telecom licencees from a fixed licence fee regime to a revenue sharing arrangement, the two officials gave a detailed account of the various Cabinet meetings held in this regard, the opinion of the Attorney-General and discussions in the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Information Technology and in Parliament itself. In short, the point made was that the decision to permit existing licencees to migrate to the revenue sharing regime was "implemented based on approval of the Cabinet on two occasions and after careful consideration of the advise of the Attorney General, in the interest of the development of the telecom sector."

Also refuted was the charge that the PMO was behind the move to allow basic service operators to provide limited mobility to customers and made out a detailed case that this was based on the recommendations of the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI). "The TRAI's recommendations have been accepted by the Government and suitable guidelines have been issued. The Standing Committee of Parliament on Information Technology also agreed for lim-

ited mobility to be given by basic service providers, keeping in view the consumers' interests and reduced tariff costs to customers." The PMO note also makes it clear that the issue was considered in the full Telecom Commission and the decision was taken with the approval of the Communication Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan. About the counter-guarantee proposal for the Hirma power project, which was alleged to have emanated from the PMO, Mr. Mishra and Mr. Singh gave out a detailed sequence of events but admitted that because this project figured in the list of major U.S. power projects encountering difficulties in India, the matter was considered in inter-Ministerial meetings in preparation of the Prime Minister's visit to the U.S.

They said the Power Ministry had developed alternative payment security mechanism for the Hirma project which came up for discussion in the inter-Ministerial meetings. However, it was felt that counter-guarantee could not be accorded to an individual project and the Government did not give any counter-guarantee for Hirma power project. The present status was that further inter-Ministerial discussions are being held to finalise a payment security mechanism for the Power Trading Corporation with the clear understanding that there will be no Government of India guarantee.

About counter-guarantee to the Vizag power project, promoted by the Hindujas, they pointed out that the project formed part of the eight fast track power projects to be accorded counter-guarantee, for which a decision was taken by the Narasimha Rao Government. Subsequent decisions on fuel risk and related arrangements were taken by the Government, based on recommendations of concerned Ministries, the two officials said also pointed that till date, the conditions precedent to the guarantee have not been fulfilled and the period of the guarantee has expired and has not been renewed.

Similarly, they claimed that the PMO had not interfered in any road development project and that these projects were awarded by the National Highway Development Authority of India (NHAI). "At no point of time has any specific contract come up for discussion in the PMO," they maintained. The same was said about the Oman fertilizer project, initiated by the previous Government, and it was emphasised that the matter had come up for consideration of the full Cabinet on more than one occasion and was approved by the Cabinet after careful consideration

THE HINDU

20 MAR 2001

I will resign if it helps PM, says Brajesh

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NILOVA ROY CHAUDHURY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 19. — The arena of attack has now shifted from the government to the Prime Minister's Office (PMO). Mr Brajesh Mishra, principal secretary to the PM who has been named in the *tehelka.com* tapes as the person through whom most government business is transacted, with mention being made of him as the "real PM", said today he would not resign in the wake of the present controversy.

"If my resigning ever helps the PM, by strengthening his hands, I would do so immediately," Mr Mishra said. So far he has not offered to resign, nor does he have any intention to do so.

Even the RSS, the mentor organisation of the BJP, has sought cleansing of the PMO of supposedly "incompetent" people. Mr Mishra refused comment on the RSS observations. However, observers agree that whatever senior officials at the PMO might be, incompetent they are not.

Take the case of Mr NK Singh, a secretary-level official

now on extension as officer on special duty in the PMO, post-retirement, overseeing all economic decisions. He has been around in the commerce and finance ministries for as long as anyone can remember, irrespective of the ruling dispensation. With his open advocacy of and fondness for

but a large number of officials privately admit that they cannot fathom the source of his immense clout, which earned him an extension.

Today, seniormost officials of the PMO faced journalists but could not explain why they were being targeted. Mr Singh said it was an "unfair insinuation" to suggest that the PMO initiated what he called "suo motu action".

Since its inception, the PMO has, as a formal, separate, power-wielding entity, been the cynosure of all eyes, largely because it is seen as the epicentre from which all power flows.

It was largely non-existent during Jawaharlal Nehru's tenure as chief executive, with the cabinet taking precedence. The institution of the PMO, though in existence during Lal Bahadur Shastri's tenure, was primarily Indira Gandhi's creation. It is widely perceived as having brought about a gradual decline in the influence of the cabinet.

Power came to be concentrated in the PMO mainly during the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi, when Mr Arun Singh



Mr Brajesh Mishra

the good life, senior officials say he has survived on the basis of his competence in interpreting and carrying out orders that he considers "suitable", if not nationally, certainly personally.

It appears unlikely that the government's economic agenda would not proceed without him,

■ See BRAJESH: page 8

PMO

By K.K. Katyal

NEW DELHI, MARCH 19. It is too conspicuous to be missed — the convergence of the offensives against the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, by the Congress and by the RSS, on the one hand, and the thelka exposes. For different objectives though. The Opposition seeks to dent the credibility and the moral authority of Mr. Vajpayee and, thus, deprive the ruling National Democratic Alliance of its biggest asset to make it defenceless against a major strike. The RSS, however, would not like Mr. Vajpayee to be disturbed from the top post but, nonetheless, is keen to contain him.

That also explains the differing lines of attack in the two cases. The Opposition has mounted a frontal onslaught on the Prime Minister and the Government, headed by him. It is a no-holds-barred assault — the Bangalore Congress plenary, for instance, was used by the party president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, for the severest yet indictment of Mr. Vajpayee. She charged him with continuing to protect the guilty, made fun of his television address last week-end, calling it a "betrayal of the country (for which) the people will never forgive them".

The RSS directed its attack on the Prime Minister's Office, in particular against the Principal Secretary, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, and Mr. Vajpayee's foster son-in-law, Mr.

Rajesh Bhattacharya. The RSS chief, Mr. K.S. Sudarshan, spoke of the importance of appointing only competent officers in the Prime Minister's office, adding in so many words that Mr. Mishra did not fill the bill. The RSS chief carried his charge right inside the Prime Minister's household when he disapproved, again in so many words, of Mr. Bhattacharya's emergence as an extra-constitutional authority — a charge levelled against the PMO as well.

Mr. Sudarshan had not made any secret of his unhappiness with the policies of the Government and those who, in his opinion, were the real architects of major decisions — the Prime Minister and his Principal Secretary — right from the time he became the head of the RSS. The thelka exposures came handy to him in renewing his attack. The tapes showed the BJP president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, accepting wads of currency notes from the "representatives" of arms dealers, while Mr. Mishra figured in oblique references to his clout in the administration and his role in key decisions. But Mr. Laxman was let off with mild disapproval, the harshest epithet against him being "the failed swayamsevak", while the PMO and its officers were directly censured.

A firm message to RSS

There was no ambiguity about Mr. Vajpayee's response — to the extent it was

an extra-constitutional

made public till yesterday — though there was a difference, not so subtle, in the way he dealt with the Opposition offensive and the RSS criticism. In the first case, he countered the call for his resignation with a challenge to his detractors to bring a vote of no-confidence against him in the Lok Sabha. The response to Mr. Sudarshan came in the form of the decision to give the charge of Defence to the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh. Mr. Singh, it was an open secret, was not quite a darling of the Sangh Parivar but enjoyed the confidence and trust of the Prime Minister. By giving him the additional charge of defence and demonstrating continued faith in him, the Prime Minister conveyed a firm message to the RSS. Mr. Vajpayee let it be known that, in the exercise of his prerogatives and authority, he would not be guided by the likes and dislikes of the RSS.

In the recent past, many stories were doing the rounds on the role and undue interest of Mr. Bhattacharya in decision-making processes, especially in the finalisation of important deals. Mr. Vajpayee did not realise the potential for damage of this talk and did not take remedial steps. Apart from the Opposition which would not let go any opportunity to damn the Prime Minister, his critics in the Sangh Parivar felt vindicated in regard to Mr. Bhattacharya in the wake of the thelka expose.

As regards the PMO, there was a tenden-

power?

cy to mix up two aspects — the rights and wrongs of establishing such a set-up and the conduct of those manning it. The PMO, or the Prime Minister's Secretariat as it was first called, was established by Mr. Lal Bahadur Shastri. Realising that he lacked the stature of Jawaharlal Nehru, he felt the need for this arrangement. Later — especially during Indira Gandhi's tenure, it was often described as a super-cabinet. To the extent, it represented a departure from the hierarchy of the past, with the Cabinet Secretary as its head, it was seen as a new centre of authority — in the eyes of some now, an extra-constitutional authority. The real question to be examined is whether or not there was a need for such a body.

If the need is recognised, it is for the Prime Minister to choose his top aides. In this case, Mr. Vajpayee appointed Mr. Mishra, who had occupied senior positions in the external affairs set-up and, after retirement, was the head of the foreign policy cell of the BJP. Mr. Vajpayee's right could not be questioned. Once in the past, the Prime Minister of the day was criticised by his opponents for appointing a friend in the PMO: He turned round to rebut the charge with a query: "Does one appoint one's enemies?" The question of the powers and the authority of the PMO could, however, be examined to ensure against imbalances in the apex administration. But that was a different matter.

PM prepared to face no-confidence motion

RSS targets PMO, Vajpayee unfazed

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE &
Agencies

NEW DELHI, March 18. — The Prime Minister today rejected the Opposition demand for his resignation, saying he was prepared to face a trial of strength in Parliament even as the RSS blamed “incompetent” officials in the PMO for the Tehelka expose.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee was attacked by the Congress too. Mrs Sonia Gandhi declared a “war to liberate” the country from the “shackles of shameful corrupt and communal” NDA coalition. At its Bangalore plenary session, the Congress said it would announce its plan of action in Delhi tomorrow to expose the government.

“We have not demanded the Prime Minister’s resignation but we want all incompetent officials in the PMO to go,” the RSS chief, Mr KS Sudershan, said. He didn’t name anyone but his obvious targets were the Prime Minister’s principal secretary, Mr Brajesh Mishra, and foster son-in-law, Mr Ranjan Bhattacharya.

“We’ve been telling Mr Vajpayee to appoint only competent people to the PMO. Had they been competent, it (the crisis) wouldn’t have occurred,” he said on the last day of the RSS’s three-day national

general council session.

Is Mr Bhattacharya acting as an extra-constitutional authority? Mr Sudershan said: “There should be no extra-constitutional authority. Those not accountable to the people should not have any power.”

The PMO reacted to the RSS charge, saying: “The reports are totally baseless... The PMO is functioning within the parameters of the Constitution and there’s no question of extra-constitutional authorities functioning from there.”

Counter-move: To counter the Opposition tirade against the government, Mr Vajpayee and NDA leaders will address a rally in Delhi on 25 March as part of a nationwide campaign against “disinformation and attacks” on the ruling coalition.

Tapes concocted: Mr George Fernandes today charged *tehelka.com* with “manipulating and concocting” the tapes that exposed the shady “defence deal”. He hinted at initiating legal action against it.

But *tehelka.com* said it stood by its story. “This is a typical reaction politicians come up with when faced with authentic criticism and serious evidence,” *tehelka.com* CEO Tarun Tejpal, said. Mr Fernandes was welcome to file a suit against the portal, he said.

Govt probe?: The govern-

ment today said it would look into Tehelka’s allegation that Mr Brajesh Mishra has masterminded a slander campaign against it if the news portal produces prima facie evidence.

House proceedings Parliament meets tomorrow, but the Congress and Samajwadi Party have indicated that they would disrupt the proceedings, like in the past few days, demanding the government’s resignation.

But Mr Vajpayee told a BJP rally in Rawatbhatta, Rajasthan, that he would not resign. He, however, was ready to face a no-trust vote in Parliament but the Congress was shying away from it.

“They wanted a probe and wanted resignations. After Jaya Jaitley, Bangaru Laxman and George Fernandes resigned, they said the probe is over and now the government should resign... Without facing a trial of strength, they want a *paka-pakaya khana* (meaning to form a government). But this is not possible,” he said.

Jaswant defence minister: Two days after Mr LK Advani said Mr Fernandes would be back in the ministry Mr Vajpayee gave additional charge of defence to Mr Jaswant Singh. But the government didn’t give a hint who’d fill the railway minister’s slot vacated by Miss Mamata Banerjee.

RSS chief launches broadside against PMO officials

New Delhi, March 18

RSS CHIEF K S Sudarshan today described some top bureaucrats in the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) as "incompetent" and blamed them for the crisis facing the Government.

He also attacked the Prime Minister's foster son-in-law Ranjan Bhattacharya, and suggested that there should be no "extra-constitutional" authorities.

"We have been telling Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee that only competent people should be appointed to the PMO. If there were competent people (in the PMO), it (the current crisis) would not have taken place," he told reporters on the third and last day of the RSS national general council here.

Asked about the current PMO officials, including the principal secretary to the Prime Minister, Brajesh Mishra, he said: "They do not have the competence they are expected to have."

He, however, did not name anyone. Replying to a question on the Prime Minister's response to his advice, the RSS chief said: "We have advised him and it is for him to act on it."

Asked whether Ranjan Bhattacharya has been acting as an extra-constitutional authority, he said: "There should be no extra-constitutional authority. Those who are not accountable to the people should not have any power whatsoever."

Sudarshan said the RSS was concerned over the "Congressisation" of the BJP and has repeatedly conveyed to the party leadership that "we should be different and not follow the same path". He, however, said that there was no need for the Government to resign following the website expose, for it has ordered a judicial inquiry and promised

action against the guilty. The RSS chief attributed the corruption in Government to over four decades of one-party rule which had made the system "rotten".

PMO denial: The PMO on Sunday described as "totally baseless and unfounded" reports that extra-constitutional authorities were functioning within it.

"The reports are baseless and unfounded. PMO is functioning within the parameters of the Constitutions and there is no question of extra-constitutional authorities functioning in the PMO," a spokesman for the PMO said when asked by reporters to comment on Sudarshan's charge.

PTI

SUDARSHAN CLARIFICATION

Sudarshan later clarified that he hadn't made any remarks against the PMO's functioning, a late night PTI report said. He said a reporter had asked him about Ranjan Bhattacharya.

"This should by no means be interpreted that I implied that there is extra-constitutional centre in the present PMO," he said. Referring to the PMO, he said the officers were competent in a general way.



SUDARSHAN

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

19 MAR 2001

111
D. P. N.

Vajpayee sermon to military and media

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 17: After yesterday's there-has-been-no-bad-deal-yet-there-is-corruption-in-the-system address to the nation, the Prime Minister today warned the armed forces to "constantly raise" the "standards of probity, transparency and accountability" while at the same time asking the media to keep off the military.

Addressing a seminar on the Role of Military in Democracies, Atal Bihari Vajpayee warned the media to stay away from military matters because "national security overrides all other considerations".

Vajpayee clarified that national security "is given a higher level of protection against external oversight to prevent interference in its functioning".

Vajpayee appeared more re-

lieved this morning after having ordered an inquiry last evening.

Participants at the seminar were eagerly waiting to hear what the Prime Minister had to say after the Tehelka exposé forced him to sacrifice defence minister George Fernandes, BJP president Bangaru Laxman and Samata Party chief Jaya Jaitly, besides having to do without the Trinamul Congress in the National Democratic Alliance.

After briefly focusing on the role the military should play in a democratic society, the Prime Minister minced no words in telling the media not to interfere in national security matters.

He implied that the government could do without the media's supervision in military affairs and that the Fourth Estate could be the watchdog of any institution

but the armed forces.

"Because national security overrides all other considerations, it is given a higher level of protection against external oversight to prevent interference in its functioning. Even the press, which normally plays the role of a watchdog on other institutions of a democracy, has to accept restrictions in covering military matters," Vajpayee said.

The subject of his speech, though chosen by the organisers of today's seminar long before the Tehelka bombshell landed on the government, appeared to have been scripted last night.

Vajpayee did not want "military decisions (read signed transactions) to be dragged into political controversies in a democracy", obviously referring to the political use of the Tehelka investigative story by the Opposition, much to the embarrassment of his

government, which stood for *su raj* (good governance).

However, the Prime Minister, aware that not everything was right with the armed forces, wanted the "men in uniform" to "constantly raise the standards of probity, transparency and accountability".

In other words, he was not happy with the "cancer" of corruption that had spread in the military. This was an admission that the Tehelka tapes were an eye-opener and that the armed forces needed to set their house in order.

Vajpayee also took the opportunity to attack Pakistan and its unfinished agenda to inflict terrorism on India.

"Terrorism is a global menace and becomes deadlier when it is combined with religious extremism and receives cross-border support," he said.

18 MAR 2001

We will uncover the complete truth, says Vajpayee

Following is the text of the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee's address to the nation on Friday:

My dear countrymen,

I have taken this opportunity to talk to you at a moment of intense controversy — and much noise.

As you know, grave allegation have been made. Issues of great moment have arisen.

I have been in full view of all of you for fifty-two years. At no point have such allegations been made against my colleagues. That is by itself sufficient to make them of the gravest concern to me.

That they have erupted when after years of uncertainty, stability has been restored to the country, when we are implementing far-reaching reforms; when our economy has been growing rapidly in spite of what is happening elsewhere; when the world has once again come to look upon our country with respect makes me all the more concerned.

It makes me wonder too.

Parliament is in session. It is the forum in which these allegations should have been dissected. Unfortunately, Parliament has not been allowed to discuss them.

I am therefore here to talk directly to you to whom Parliament and all of us are responsible.

The noise and dust of controversy, the din of allegations and explanation should not be allowed to obscure essential principles, and the interests of the country.

These are three:

- That the interest of our nation are paramount;
- That the security of our country must remain inviolate;
- That our Government, and beyond that our political system, must be cleansed, that it must function to the highest standards of propriety.

Each of these is of the highest concern to Government.

That is why the Government has acted decisively, and swiftly;

Some officials have been suspended. Action against them is well under-way.

In the highest traditions of the country, to safeguard the morale of our forces and the security of the country, my esteemed colleague, a stalwart of the NDA, Shri George Fernandes has left office.

The two political leaders who figured in the videotapes have resigned their posts.

That all this is in sharp contrast to the way others simi-

larly placed reacted in the post is incidental. The important point is that action has been taken immediately because the interest of our country, because the security of our country, because the norms of good governance required that these steps be taken.

Even as we pursue every lead in the videotapes, we must be ever alert that the security of the country is not jeopardised in any manner.

We live in perilous times. We live in a perilous environment. For that reason, the morale and combat effectiveness of our valiant forces must not be allowed to suffer.

Decision-making in the Ministry of Defence must not become a shuttlecock tossed between allegations and explanations.

It is the duty of Government to uncover the complete truth about every single allegation that has been made. The Government is determined to do so. But there is a corresponding duty on each of us as citizens; focus on the facts, do not be swept away by everything that is alleged. Throughout the hours of recordings, no deal is actually struck. No Minister is involved. The boasts and allegations which the actors hurl are patently false, even the slightest effort would have revealed them to have been completely contrary to facts.

Hurling such allegations is criminal. Giving heed to them is just as destructive.

It isn't just that this way our security is undermined. Our economy too can be imperiled; if confidence is shaken much — from stock markets to the Rupee — can be shaken. Many a country has been destabilised by such gales.

But as the allegations have been made, as they have been broadcast far and wide they cause grave concern. The facts in regard to them must be nailed. If any one has done wrong, he must be brought to book — swiftly and with the fullest force of law.

Parliament, as I said, is the forum that must discuss and dissect the issues and allegations — It must deliberate upon every ramification of every fact and allegation. From the very first moment the Government had been anxious that the two Houses discuss the matter, I appeal to all parties, allow Parliament to function, allow to debate the issues threadbare.

But as such an important matter cannot be allowed to drift, as it cannot be allowed to become a football of political calculations, as facts need to be nailed, Government has decided to institute an inquiry by a sitting or retired Judge of the Supreme Court. Government is consulting the Chief Justice of India in this regard.

As the controversy needs to be brought to a swift conclusion, we are requesting that the inquiry be completed within 4 months. Government will extend the fullest assistance in pursuing the inquiry.

The Government shall do everything necessary to bring everyone guilty to account — howsoever high or low. Its only concerns are

- That the country's security apparatus remains strong as ever;
- That our soldiers retain the fullest confidence in it;
- That institutions of government and our political system regain their health;
- That our people's trust and faith in them are fortified.

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 for she cancer has spread. The revelations are therefore a wake-up call to all of us. Leaders of all parties should sit together and initiate reforms across the whole range of our political and administrative life our electoral system, the system of funding political parties the way cases against officials and those in public life are to be investigated and processed.

In a word, my countrymen, let us rise above our day-to-day preoccupations. Let us, by joining hands, convert this into an opportunity — to make the defence of our country even stronger to cleanse our political life, to cleanse our administration.

I shall spare no effort in this regard. You have my word,

- That I shall do everything towards ensuring these wide-ranging reforms. I shall get to the bottom of the allegations which have been made;
- I shall work to clean up the dirt that has come into view;
- I will ensure that all this is done in such a way that the security of the country comes out stronger.

Let us begin the inquiry.

Let us have a thorough discussion in Parliament.

Let us get back to work. /

THE HINDU

17 MAR 2001

1191 'Clean up PMO'

17/3
By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 16. A section of Samata Party MPs today went on the offensive demanding that the Prime Minister "clean up" his office even as the party leader, Mr. George Fernandes, distanced himself from it.

The MPs including Mr. Prabhunath Singh and Mr. Raghunath Jha told reporters here that the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, should remove his Principal Secretary, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, if he was keen on showing that his Government was clean. They were also critical of Mr. Vajpayee's foster son-in-law, Mr. Ranjan Bhattacharya.

Mr. Singh said the party MPs would write to the Prime Minister expressing their sentiments and claimed that his views were shared by his party colleagues.

However, before attending the NDA meeting, Mr. Fernandes said he was neither aware of such a demand being raised by party MPs nor was it the Samata's view.

Apparently, the issue was discussed by the party members at a meeting held here last night at

the residence of Mr. George Fernandes after he resigned from the Cabinet and three other Ministers followed suit.

Another party MP, Mr. Arun Kumar said that while such a decision was taken, it was not clear whether the MPs would write a joint letter or send individually letters to the Prime Minister.

ALL IN THE GAME



Somnath asks Vajpayee to speak up on PMO deals

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 8. — Launching a frontal attack on the Prime Minister's Office, Mr Somnath Chatterjee today asked Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee to break his silence and reply to the serious allegations that his office "has become the centre of interferences" in the functioning of ministries under the influence of some business houses.

The CPI-M parliamentary party leader was speaking in the Lok Sabha on the motion of thanks to the President's address. He said serious allegations against the PMO amounting to shady business deals involving a couple of senior bureaucrats and business houses like Reliance and Hindujas have been levelled. He then referred to a detailed

report in an English weekly about how the PMO was "interfering with the functioning of various ministries to push the business interests" through.

"These bureaucrats by using the so-called Group of Ministers, are influencing every decision of the ministries and in fact are hijacking the policy decisions. This is a very serious and damaging allegation. I take strong objection to the Prime Minister's absence in the House during the discussion. I demand Mr Vajpayee should reply to the allegations levelled against the PMO."

Quoting from the interview of former senior bureaucrat, Mr EAS Sarma, who recently quit from the service in protest, Mr Chatterjee said, "Here is a senior bureaucrat who says he was shunted out as the secretary, department of power, at the behest of

TECHNOLOGY MEET

BANGALORE, March 8. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee will address over 600 delegates from India and abroad at a three-day meet on the future of technology in Asia.

The meet — organised by the USA-based Asia Society in association with Dow Jones and company, the CII and the Karnataka government — begins here on Sunday. It will focus on the impact of technology on business and society in Asia. — SNS

the Hindujas. This is a very serious allegation that calls for an explanation."

Linking it to the Centre's economic policy Mr Chatterjee said, "Now we have been told about the second

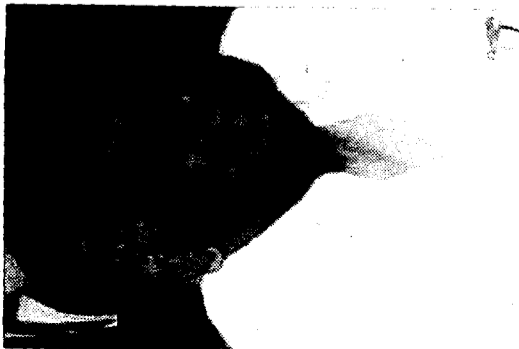
generation reforms. The government, especially the finance minister, should explain when did the first generation reforms end and how did it improve the life of the vast majority of Indians?"

He said new "phrases like second generation reforms, strategic sales and partners" were being used to promote the "vested interests of small sections of business and other affluent classes". These "so called reforms have in no way helped the common man. As if this was not enough, the budget has proposed anti-poor policies like changing the labour laws that will hit 90 per cent of the workers, cutting the interest rates of small savings, downsizing the government even while the Vajpayee government has no single programme to generate jobs".

Mr Chatterjee also asked for an explanation from the government on what has been done to "correct the technical error" in the CBI chargesheet on the Babari Masjid demolition case. "The government's silence is the reflection of the efforts to let Mr LK Advani and two other Union ministers off the hook", he said. He asked the government to explain what it intends to amend in the Constitution by forming a body without taking Parliament into confidence.

He criticised the government's handling of the Kashmir issue as well as its foreign policy.

"The President's address lacks direction just like the Vajpayee government. This is in no way a reference to the President, since he has to read out whatever is the product of the government", he said.



Mr Somnath Chatterjee

THE STATESMAN

- 9 MAR 2001

'N-option only for protection'

By Rajesh Ahuja ¹⁰¹

KURUKSHETRA, MARCH 6. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today asserted that India wanted peace and development but would not hesitate to use "atomic weapons" for the country's protection and safeguarding its territorial integrity.

At a public meeting in the holy city, he said, "India will never use the nuclear option for destruction." He made these comments while talking about the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and its impact.

The WTO had changed trade norms and India had to keep pace with the changing situation. The Centre was imposing heavy duties on imports under the WTO stipulations to protect the indigenous

²¹³ industry. But since globalisation was a reality, Indian producers should maintain quality to be internationally competitive.

The rest of the world was surprised at India's achievements in the recent past, Mr. Vajpayee said and dismissed the Opposition "bogey" that the country was being sold to multinationals. India was a nation of brave soldiers and hard-working farmers and no one could "deprive us of our hard-earned freedom". The Centre was strong and prepared to offer a helping hand to others. At the same time, "we neither intend to occupy the territory of any other country nor will we let our territory snatched by others," he said amid a thunderous applause.

The crowds, which started gathering at the Theme Park here

since early morning, grew restive when Mr. Vajpayee did not give any concrete assurance on specific issues raised by the Haryana Chief Minister, Mr. Om Prakash Chautala.

Referring to inter-State disputes, Mr. Vajpayee suggested that Mr. Chautala convene a conference of Chief Ministers of the northern States to solve long-standing issues. He himself would like to attend the conclave.

The farmers were disappointed that Mr. Vajpayee, instead of announcing a minimum support price for wheat, just held out a general assurance that the package would be "handsome". He urged them to diversify and take to oilseeds and pulses.

**Haryana seeks
loan waiver: Page 9**

PMO deaf to Cabinet opposition

NILOVA ROY CHOUDHURY & S. S. SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 19. - The Prime Minister's Office is confident about pushing through many reform measures despite opposition from Cabinet ministers.

The PMO has been increasingly proactive in setting the tenor of economic reforms and pushing them through, often incurring the wrath of the ministers involved.

The ministers often do not attend major meetings at which crucial decisions are taken concerning their charges. The PMO or its organs like the Strategic Management Group and the PM's council on economic affairs in that case issues directives and announces decisions and the minis-

ters may not be privy to these. While nobody is willing to go on record criticising the PMO, it is increasingly being seen as "too proactive".

Mr NK Singh's recent open-ended contract extending his tenure as OSD in the PMO is to ensure that the thrust on the economic reforms agenda continues unhampered. He is divested of his earlier administrative charges, now handled by Mr Ashok Saikia, leaving him free to pursue the economic agenda.

Moreover, the Parivar, especially the RSS, is focussing on the WTO as a source of visheshi evil. But PMO officials say that the opposition from the Parivar won't be allowed to stall reforms. The Sangh Parivar's resistance to evils of globalisation is fast dissipating in the face of Mr AB Vajpayee's

commitment to ensure that the reforms are carried ahead as the only viable means to end poverty.

The RSS is finding ways to force the government walk out of the WTO. Senior RSS leaders have apparently concluded that this is one of the few steps left to protect national interests. Various RSS affiliates have already started working on this. The Bharatiya Kisan Sangh has launched a mass awareness campaign against the evil effects of the WTO obligations. The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh has decided to hold a rally at New Delhi on 16 April in this regard.

Convenors of various organisations associated with the swadeshi movement will meet on Sunday to work out a new strategy to oppose the govern-

ment on the WTO. Its plan to boycott foreign goods at the Kandla port after 31 March ran into trouble after the Gujarat earthquake.

Swadeshi hawks firmly believe that India must find an alternative to the WTO or it must try to become a part of the WTO decision-making process rather than being a mute spectator, Mr KN Govindacharya said today. The only course open to the government to protect India's industries and agriculture during the interim period was to raise tariff barriers, he said.

Within the RSS, there is a general perception that evil impact of the WTO is evident both in agriculture and industries. A senior leader even blamed the WTO obligation for the current glut in agriculture and farmers' plight.

THE STATESMAN

20 FEB 2001

PM favours global fund for poverty

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 7

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee today called for the imposition of an international levy on capital flows between developed countries and all capital repatriations from developing countries.

Inaugurating the first Delhi Sustainable Development Summit organised by Tata Energy Research Institute (TERI), he said it was high time that the imposition of an international levy on capital flows and repatriations was considered. Proceeds from such a levy could be credited to a Global Poverty Alleviation Fund.

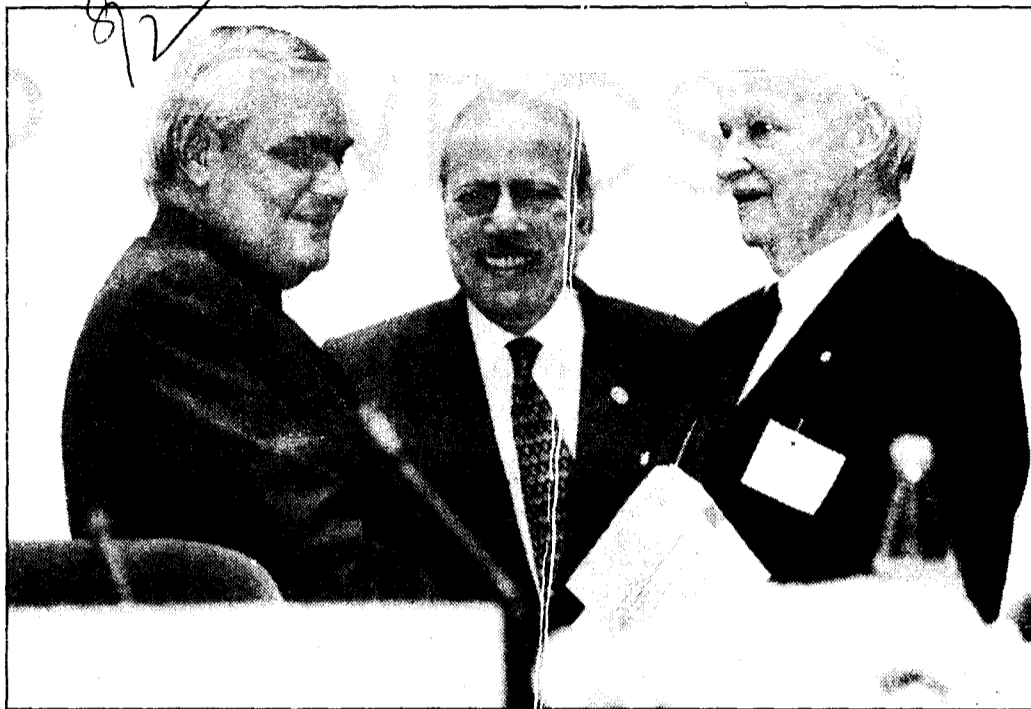
The Fund could be aimed at (a) an accelerated liquidation of all public external debts of low-income countries, (b) poverty alleviation programmes specifically targeted at those who had lost their livelihoods in economic crises brought about by the reversal of external capital flows in developing countries, (c) enhancement of skills and increased access to finance needed by the poor to compete effectively in the global economy, and (d) placing technologies that saved

lives, increased food yields, generated renewable energy for rural areas and facilitated the adoption of clean production in the public domain, for use by developing countries.

He also urged greater global cooperation to deal with natural calamities, especially in developing countries.

"The poor always lose proportionately much more than the rich in natural calamities," he added, noting that information and critical technologies that could prevent disasters, contain their damage and help in better management of relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction, should be available to all countries.

Pointing out that there was a need to increase substantially the resources of governments in developing countries to pursue developmental projects and programmes aimed specifically at



Prime Minister Vajpayee, chairman of TERI Dr Ramachandran and president of United Nation University for Peace Maurice Strong at the TERI Sustainable Development Summit 2001 at Vigyan Bhavan on Wednesday. Photo: Arvind Yadav

poverty eradication, he said that the resources of multilateral and bilateral development agencies also required to be significantly enhanced, calling for a far higher level of political will in industrialised countries than was manifest.

"In particular," he said, "I would like developed countries to cooperate in a speedy conclusion of the international agreement on climate change."

He also called for global action in bridging the gap between Information technology haves and have-nots in order to obviate the "legitimate" fears about a digital divide. "In this context," he said, "India is ready to offer our expertise to others. We are also willing to learn from others' successful experiences."

Conscience of global environment Maurice

Strong, presently President of the United Nations University for Peace, Costa Rica, expressed apprehensions over the continuing and unchecked environmental degradation even as the "Rio plus 10" summit was to be held in Johannesburg next year.

He talked of the "ominous signs" around the world as the developed countries were failing to meet their commitments. The poor people should not become victims of development, he pointed out.

Environment and sustainable development, he said, were integral to poverty reduction. As India went on to become the fourth largest global economy in the next 50 years, he said it was imperative that the poor became beneficiaries of economic development and not its victims.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

PM, Musharraf may meet

■ Continued from Page 1

from a neighbouring country told *The Asian Age*, "We badly need the Saarc process to succeed as it is important and very beneficial to all countries."

He said it was unfortunate that India had not allowed the last meeting to be held as scheduled in Kathmandu, pointing out that all other member nations had been working hard to ensure that a summit is held as soon as possible.

The technical committees of Saarc have been meeting and, according to the senior diplomat, "have made all preparations" which could facilitate an early meet. The standing committee has not met, nor has the council of ministers but this, diplomatic sources said, "could be easily rectified." Not much time is required to hold a summit, according to the sources, "and any country which is keen to host it can offer to do so, subject, of course, to agreement by the other members." If the alphabetical principle is used then Bangladesh would be the next in line after Nepal, which missed the opportunity, despite all preparations.

Sri Lanka is also expected to hand over the chairmanship of Saarc as its three-year period is over.

Nepal is next in line although, as the sources pointed out, these details have to be worked out. Asked how soon a heads of state summit could be organised, a senior envoy of a Saarc member nation said, "In our business, we do yesterday what we can do today so there should be no delay once India agrees."

THE ASIAN AGE

THE ASIAN AGE

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16 FEB 2001

16 FEB 2001

16 FEB 2001

President calls for clean politics at EC function

PM wants fixed House tenures

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 17. — A fixed tenure for Parliament and state legislatures is "essential for India's democratic system to become mature and deliver good governance", the Prime Minister said here today at a function to launch the golden jubilee celebrations of the Election Commission.

The President expressed concern over criminalisation of politics at the function.

He said the problem of criminalisation could be effectively dealt with by parties by not giving tickets to individuals with criminal background. "Is this expecting too much from the political parties?"

Elections are becoming prohibitively expensive and frequent, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said. Frequent and unscheduled elections, according to him, increase the "dependence" of candidates and parties on "moneybags" with all the attendant negative influence on the polity. "The growing menace of money and muscle power" is the greatest challenge to Indian democracy, he said.

He expressed happiness that the Constitution Review Committee had initiated a public debate on the subject.

There have been several suggestions to bring about electo-

ral reforms. State funding of elections on the basis of a transparent formula has been touted as a workable solution, he said, stressing that it had become necessary to take a holistic view of these reforms and implement them urgently.

Mr Vajpayee said it was "natural" for criminals to find a foothold in the electoral process when elections become contentious and confrontational. The "malignant" trend of corruption and criminalisation in the electoral process has to be checked and reversed, he said, adding that it was high time political parties evolved a consensus on this.

"Money, muscle power and mafia play an unhealthy role in our elections, but legislation may not be the solution," Mr KR Narayanan said, referring to the EC's recommendation to amend the Representation of People's Act to bar undesirable elements from entering the legislature.

Referring to a High Court order making it mandatory for the poll panel to make voters aware of candidates' background, Mr Narayanan said it would further burden the already "overburdened" commission, but will "help rid the many malpractices that are plaguing the elections and distorting the will of the voter".

The Chief Election Commissioner, Dr MS Gill, also expressed concern at the role money and muscle power were playing and asked Parliamentarians to give the country "a clear lead and effective solutions". On election violence, he called upon parties to draw a *Lakshman rekha* of self-restraint and bring down such incidents.

Mr Vajpayee promised to agree to any EC directive on this, adding in a lighter vein: "We have the (Bangaru) Lakshman. You drawn the *rekha* and we will stick to it."

Lauding the EC, Mrs Sonia Gandhi said it was time for introspection. Electoral reforms was a much discussed subject. "It is time for concrete action now," she said, listing reduction of election cost, curbing the menace of defection and preventing questionable characters from entering the polity as areas that needed to be addressed immediately.

The law minister, Mr Arun Jaitley, described the role of money and muscle power and entry of people with dubious antecedents into the electoral process as the challenges for democracy. Political parties, he said, would have to join hands to cleanse the system.

■ On the same dais but poles apart, page 8

THE STATESMAN

18 JAN 2000

Farooq questions usefulness of Hurriyat's visit to Pakistan

Arun Joshi
Jammu, January 13

JAMMU AND Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah has questioned the usefulness of All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) delegation to Pakistan in sorting out problems in Kashmir and said that only direct talks between Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Parvez Musharraf would be purposeful for bringing peace in the region.

"Kashmir is part of India and only the Prime Minister can represent us in any dialogue," Mr Abdullah said at a function held here today. He, however, added that "no authority, even the Prime Minister, can never afford to think of parting with an inch of Kashmir, which was, is and will remain proud part of the nation."

The Chief Minister said Hurriyat lacks mass support and exists only at the strength of militants' guns. Once that support dwindles, the amalgam of various outfits

will shatter like pack of cards. "I fail to understand whom and what they will talk in Pakistan," he said, adding that they are always in touch with Pakistan through their embassy. Who doesn't know that they are their (Pakistan) creation. While we have taken peace initiative, Islamabad continues to push in infiltrators and perpetrating violence. If the neighbouring country sincerely wants peace, all this must be stopped," he said. He said Pakistan after failing to "annex Kashmir in four wars, has switched to proxy war for the past about 12 years". He said mercenaries are attacking security pickets and targeting nationalist forces.

Mr Abdullah pointed out that everyday National Conference workers, village defence committee members and SPOs are killed. They are also after those who have laid their arms after realising the futility of gun". "Pakistan is out to eliminate those carrying the tri-colour in Kashmir. "Even if Farooq is killed, Kashmir will never go to Pakistan," he declared.



2 grenades hurled at J-K Minister's house

Srinagar, January 13

MILITANTS ATTACKED the house of Minister Ali Mohammad Sagar and made an abortive bid on the life of a police officer in Jammu and Kashmir where six militants were among eight people killed in separate incidents since last night.

Pro-Pakistan Al-Umer-Mujahideen ultras hurled two grenades at the house of the Minister for Works at Nawab Bazar in downtown Srinagar last night, in the second such attack on a Minister's house in the past three days in the State, official sources said.

Mr Sagar was not at home when the grenades exploded. No one was injured in the incident. Deputy Superintendent of Police Vinay Kumar Gupta escaped

unhurt when militants detonated a landmine at Palhahan in north Kashmir this morning damaging his vehicle, the sources said. Elsewhere, two Lashker-e-Tayyeba militants were killed in an encounter with security forces at Sutrakote in Poonch district.

The slain ultras hailed from Afghanistan, sources said, adding some arms and ammunition were also recovered from the scene. N another incident, two militants were killed in a gunbattle with Rashtriya Rifles personnel at Turkpora.

A Pakistani intruder was killed when army troops foiled an infiltration bid in Nowshera sector. Tension gripped the Hatmurah forest area when a body was found there and residents alleged the person was killed by security forces. (PTI)

HD-1

'PAK. TROOP REDUCTION NOT SIGNIFICANT'

9nd pak

Extend ceasefire: Army Chief

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 12. India should extend further the Kashmir ceasefire to help in initiating a "peace process" in the State, the Chief of



Army Staff, Gen. S. Padmanabhan, has said.

"Extension of the ceasefire is a decision which the Government of India has to take. My advice, if I am allowed, would be 'yes' as it is a good thing to continue with," he said to a question at a press conference this evening. Gen. Padmanabhan said the advantages of continuing the ceasefire far outweighed its disadvantages. It had generated a "burgeoning of hope" in the Kashmir Valley and had resulted in dramatic political developments in the Subcontinent towards peace.

The Army Chief acknowledged

that the ceasefire had slowed down military operations in Kashmir. Only non-Kashmiris spear-headed by foreign militants, belonging to the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad, were now keeping militancy alive. The Army was undertaking precision strikes on militant strongholds after acquiring accurate intelligence. Pakistan had not pulled back its forces from the frontline but had thinned them down in some areas in the rear, he said. Troop reduction was not significant as only those additional troops which Pakistan had pushed ahead after the Kargil war

or had been positioned there for training had been pulled back.

Sources said that after Kargil, Pakistan had pushed in its 22 Brigade and 111 (I) Infantry Brigade belonging to its Eleventh Division in the high altitude area. Besides, two brigades of Pakistan's 19 Division, belonging to its Rawalpindi based 10 Corps had been posted in an area facing the Poonch-Rajouri sector, mainly for aiding infiltration. According to Gen. Padmanabhan, India had pruned down forces in certain areas. But the process would be time-consuming and would have

to be commensurate with operational requirements.

Stricter vigil had reduced infiltration in Kashmir. The guns had fallen silent in all areas along the Line of Control and, for the first time, in the Siachen glacier area.

On the appointment of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS), he said "As India had become a nuclear State, there was a need for creating a post which could render single point advice." The Group of Ministers was deliberating on the creation of such a post and was likely to announce their decision soon.

Pak. pleased with Hurriyat team

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 12. Pakistan tonight urged India to facilitate the travel of "all members" of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) to Islamabad for consultations to prepare the ground for a peaceful settlement of the Kashmir issue.

The emphasis on clearance of travel documents to all the five members named by the APHC Chairman, Prof. Abdul Ghani Bhat, is significant. Unlike the militant organisations that have been insisting on the visit of all the seven executive members, the Pakistan Government has been silent on the subject. Pakistan appears to be clearly pleased with the composition of the delegation, particularly the inclusion of pro-Pakistan leaders, Syed Ali Geelani and Sheikh Abdul Aziz. But at the same time it is keeping its fingers crossed on whether or not India would issue the travel documents to the two leaders.

The following is the text of the statement issued

by the Pakistan Government. "The Government of Pakistan welcomes the decision taken by the Executive Council of the APHC at its meeting in Srinagar yesterday to send a five member delegation to Pakistan. It may be recalled that the Government of Pakistan, on December 2 last year, had called upon the Government of India to allow the APHC to visit Pakistan for consultations. The Government of Pakistan calls upon the Government of India to enable all members of the APHC delegation nominated by the Chairman of the APHC to proceed to Pakistan for consultations with the Government of Pakistan to prepare the ground for a tripartite process of negotiations for a peaceful settlement of the Jammu and Kashmir dispute."

While the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen chose to wait for clearance from its supremo, Syed Salahuddin, before giving its reaction to the composition of the Hurriyat team, the Lashkar-e-Taiba praised the APHC Chairman for his choice of the team.

THE HINDU

13 JAN 1991

40-1 'No invitation to Musharraf'

18/1

By Amit Baruah *gndv fan*

BALI (Indonesia), JAN. 12. No invitation had been extended to the Pakistani Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, to visit India, the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee's Principal Secretary, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, said here this evening.

Mr. Mishra also said a summit meeting between India and Pakistan was not being considered "at this moment", a phrase he used a couple of times while talking to a group of reporters accompanying the Prime Minister.

"I think we can truthfully say that we are reviewing the situation on the Line of Control on... our side of the LoC and how to proceed further," he said making it plain that further steps on the India-Kashmir-Pakistan triangle were possible.

Speculation about the summit has mounted after a report in the *Pakistan Observer* that Mr. Vajpayee had invited Gen. Musharraf to New Delhi. The Prime Minister himself was quoted as telling Reuters in Jakarta that he had seen the newspaper report, "but no date has been fixed as yet". Asked whether Gen. Musharraf would go, the Prime Minister had said: "Even that is not final". "This is a question that should be directed at him. How do I know when he will come?" During his briefing, Mr. Mishra, howev-

er, said: "So far as I am aware and I should be aware of various things, there is no consideration at this moment of any summit-level meeting between India and Pakistan."

To a hypothetical question on a possible role for the Rawalpindi-based JKLF leader, Mr. Amanullah Khan, in the new developments, the Principal Secretary said: "I just can't talk about it at the moment."

Mr. Mishra, who also doubles as the National Security Adviser, said a decision on issuing passports to individual leaders of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference or all the leaders and their travel to Pakistan would be taken after the Prime Minister returned to New Delhi on January 14. Given the new perceptions about the Hurriyat in New Delhi and the fact that a visit to Pakistan will be a major departure in the country's foreign policy for the past decade, some more steps on Kashmir and Pakistan appear imminent.

Asked whether he ruled out a future India-Pakistan summit level meeting, the Principal Secretary said: "How can I say that some months hence or next year, it will not take place... of course, I don't rule out a summit between India and Pakistan sometime in the future."

PM in Bali: Page 13

THE HINDU

1 3 126 20

Brajesh dismisses reports on invitation to Musharraf

By Manoj Joshi

BALI: Prime Minister's principal secretary Brajesh Mishra has said that no invitation has been issued to Pakistani military ruler Gen. Pervez Musharraf to visit New Delhi "as of today". In a press briefing shortly after the arrival of Prime Minister Vajpayee here on the last leg of his official tour, Mr Mishra clarified that "at this moment" no plans for an Indo-Pak summit were under consideration.

Mr Mishra, who is also the national security adviser, took considerable pains to emphasise these points several times over, following the appearance of media reports suggesting a Musharraf visit to India. On Friday morning, a news agency put out a report implying that the visit was under consideration. It cited Mr Vajpayee as saying at Jakarta that "I have seen the report (on the Musharraf visit), but no date has been fixed as yet."

Mr Mishra's remarks indicated that the government's position has hardened following reports that Gen. Musharraf had refused to condemn recent terrorist attacks or restrain jihadi elements from issuing threats against India.

Mr Mishra said the statements claiming authorship for the attack in the Red Fort and the threat to

attack the PMO and other targets in India coming "from the soil of Pakistan have given us cause to think." He said that a newspaper had cited Gen. Musharraf as saying that he could not comment on the Red Fort attack since it was an internal matter of India. "This is strange logic," said Mr Mishra, "considering that the claim (acknowledging the authorship of the attack) was made from the soil of Pakistan."

India, he said, was now reviewing the situation on the Line of Control and in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and "we'll soon come to a decision on how to proceed". On this point, Mr Mishra cited the prime minister's December 20 statement in Parliament noting that a "conducive atmosphere" was necessary for things to proceed towards a dialogue on the Kashmir issue. Asked about the situation in the valley, he said the government was disturbed by the increase of attacks on civilians since the onset of the unilateral ceasefire.

Asked about the issuance of passports for the Hurriyat executive members to enable them to go to Pakistan for the proposed talks with militant groups and others on Kashmir, Mr Mishra said a decision would be taken only after the

PM's arrival. Asked whether this was linked to the Musharraf issue, he said "No". "Permitting anyone, some or all, to go is something that is yet to be decided," he clarified.

Mr Mishra said there was considerable warmth and informality in the talks between Mr Vajpayee and President Wahid. He said India was expecting a visit of vice-president Megawati Sukarnoputri sometime in April and that Mr Wahid was also expected to come in the latter part of the year to receive an honorary degree from Vishwabharati University.

Referring to the bilateral defence agreement signed on Thursday, he said details were not available to him, but his understanding was that the cooperation was likely to be mainly "on the naval side".

Meanwhile, according to a PTI report, the Hurriyat Conference on Friday made it clear that its delegation would not go to Pakistan unless all the five members were given passports. "We are not going for a pleasure trip to Pakistan. The delegation of Hurriyat will not go to Pakistan if the passports are not issued to all the five members announced by the executive of the 23-party alliance yesterday," Hurriyat chairman Abdul Gani Bhat said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

13 JAN 2001

Hurriyat names 5 for talks in Pak

Two hawks in team ● Centre still undecided

Arun Joshi
Jammu, January 11

THE ALL-PARTY Hurriyat Conference today formally announced its five-member delegation to Pakistan, effectively throwing the ball into the Centre's court again by choosing two hardliners — Syed Ali Shah Geelani and Sheikh Abdul Aziz — in the team.

The passports of Geelani and Aziz are yet to be restored. Union Home Minister L. K. Advani had stated three days ago that the government would not issue passports to all the seven executive council members of APHC.

In a brief statement read out by JKLF chairman Yasin Malik at the end of a five-hour meeting, it was stated APHC chairman Prof. Abdul Ghani Bhat has nominated five members for the delegation to Pakistan.

Those nominated are: Peoples Conference chief Abdul Ghani Lone, Jamait-I-Islami leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani, Peoples League chief Sheikh Abdul Aziz, Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen chief Moulvi Abbas Ansari and Awami Action Committee chief Mirwaiz Umar Farooq.

Mirwaiz Umar Farooq said the decision showed the Hurriyat was united and there were "no differences" in the conglomerate. Asked whether the delegation would travel to Pakistan on January 15, he replied: "We are preparing as per the schedule of January 15" and hoped the passports for all the delegation members would be issued before that.

Sources said the APHC chairman and JKLF leader Yasin Malik had a detailed meeting with Mr Geelani last night before finalising the delegation. Bhat and Yasin, considered to be moderates, have kept themselves out of the delegation. Now, the delegation can travel when the government issues passports to Geelani and Aziz. Geelani and Lone did not attend the meeting.

Anil Anand
New Delhi, January 11

THE ELEMENT of uncertainty surrounding the proposed Pakistan visit of the five-member APHC team continues with the Centre still non-committal on granting travel documents to three of the selected members.

There are indications that a decision on granting passports to veteran Jamait-e-Islami leader S A S Geelani, Shia representative Moulvi Abbas Ansari and Sheikh Abdul Aziz of the People's League, would be taken only after Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's return on Saturday.

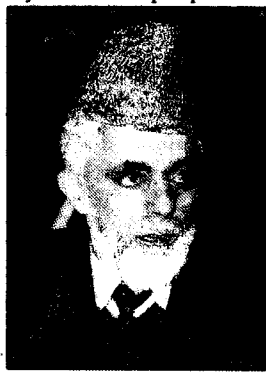
Home Ministry officials did not rule out the possibility of Mr Geelani and Mr Aziz, the Hurriyat's hardliners, being denied travel documents. Mr Geelani's case is particularly doubtful in view of his recent pro-Pakistan utterances.

Home Minister L K Advani maintained the government would not be guided by the Hurriyat stand on passports. In a related development, another Hurriyat leader, Yasin Malik, chief of the JKLF, who has been kept out of the

APHC team, has been provided a USA-UK specific passport by the Ministry of External Affairs for medical treatment.

The exclusion of Mr Malik and Mr Aziz's inclusion in the team has added to the confusion in the APHC camp. According to Hurriyat insiders, both the leaders were to be kept out of the team as per a prior understanding with the Centre. Both these leaders are involved in several criminal cases and it would be embarrassing for New Delhi to provide them travel papers to visit Pakistan. Quite obviously, the Hurriyat's internal power struggle has made the multi-party outfit go back on its promise.

There are indications the APHC chief may include Mr Javed Mir - Malik's second in command -- in the team to assuage the JKLF chief's feelings.



Syed Ali Shah Geelani

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 JAN 2001

US hopeful of Indo-Pak talks

S Rajagopalan
Washington, January 11

THE US believes that the latest Indian initiative to let Hurriyat leaders travel to Islamabad for consultations with the Musharraf regime will improve the atmosphere and pave the way for a direct dialogue between India and Pakistan.

Mr Karl Inderfurth, Assistant Secretary of State for South Asia, sees the recent steps beginning with Indian announcement of cease-fire and Pakistani pullback of some forces from the Line of Control as a fresh 'ripple of promise'.

The US has been advocating resumption of the stalled Indo-Pak dialogue through the creation of a congenial atmosphere for the purpose. In his view, the propitious conditions for resumption of dialogue may be unfolding.

The outgoing Clinton pointman on South Asia, at a farewell Press meet on Wednesday, was gung-ho about the turnaround in Indo-US relations. Under the Clinton Administration, US has 'successfully reintroduced' itself to India.

The bilateral developments over the past one year have been at such a frenetic speed that India and the US have catapulted themselves

from 'estranged democracies' till not long ago to 'engaged democracies' now, he commented.

Mr Inderfurth, however, conceded that some concrete actions have remained on hold. Lifting of the remaining post-Pokhran II sanctions, for instance, has been left to the incoming Bush Administration to handle. The Clinton regime has remained firm on India signing the CTBT before lifting the sanctions in their entirety.

Another issue being passed over to the Bush Administration is the question of declaring Lashkar-e-Toiba as a terrorist organisation. Despite periodic indications of an action of the kind over the past six months, the Clinton Administration failed to complete its 'review' on this matter. In Mr Inderfurth's perception, South Asia as a whole has come into its own in the US's world view over the past four years of Mr Clinton's second term. For far too long, South Asia was regarded as something on the backside of the globe. Now the region is receiving the attention it deserves in the US's scheme of things.

On Indo-US relations per se, Mr Inderfurth was confident that the Bush Administration would keep up the new tempo brought about by the back to back summit visits

within a space of six months. Indo-US ties, according to him, are now based on "a greater degree of mutual respect and candour".

Even while imparting a qualitative stimulus to the ties with India, Mr Inderfurth maintained that the US has remained engaged with Pakistan with which it has had a 'long-standing relationship'.

While on the current peace initiatives on Kashmir, he conceded that these were 'home-grown, coming from within the region' with the US having no hand other than lending its full support to the efforts.

He made a pointed reference to Prime Minister Vajpayee's assertion (in his 'Kumarakom Musings') that India, in its search for a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem, will not traverse solely on the beaten track but be "bold and innovative designers of a future architecture of peace and prosperity for the entire South Asian region".

Reflecting on his own tenure as Assistant Secretary, Mr Inderfurth said the otherwise exciting job has not been without its share of disappointments. He, for one, would have liked an early end to the Indo-Pak face-off. His other disappointments include the continuing Afghan crisis and the Sri Lankan ethnic strife.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 JAN 2001

Hurriyat names 5-member team for Pakistan

SRINAGAR: Ending all speculation about the composition of its team, the Hurriyat Conference on Thursday named a five-member delegation, including hardliner Jamaat-e-Islami leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani, to visit Pakistan on January 15 for talks there even as home minister L.K. Advani said the government would not be guided by the Hurriyat's stand on the issue.

Presenting a show of unity, the executive council of the Amalgam of 23 separatist groups met and approved the composition of the delegation decided by Hurriyat chairman Abdul Ghani Bhat.

Besides Mr Geelani, other members of the delegation consists Abdul Gani Lone, Maulana Abbas Ansari, Sheikh Abdul Aziz and Maulavi Umar Farooq.

Out of the five-member delegation, only Mirwaiz Umer Farooq and Abdul Gani Lone have valid passports. Geelani and Abdul Aziz do not have passports while Abbas Ansari's passport has been impounded by the government.

Pakistan government and militant groups based there have been suggesting that all seven Hurriyat executive council members travel to Islamabad for talks.

"We all go by this decision. Our

agenda is too clear to need any repetition. We hope the government of India would see to it that the peace process to resolve the Kashmir dispute is not put to jeopardy," a statement issued after the five-hour meeting said.

Senior Hurriyat leader and chairman of Awami action committee Mirwaiz Umer Farooq told reporters after the meeting "we understand that travel documents would be released in favour of those who have been selected."

Asked why Hurriyat chairman Bhat and JKLF leader Yaseen Malik were dropped from the delegation, Mirwaiz said the composition of the delegation demonstrated that "there are no differences within the Hurriyat conference".

Sheikh Abdul Aziz, chairman of Peoples League against whom several court cases are pending, said "it is upto them (the Centre) to decide about the passports to him."

Asked what if the Centre did not release his travel documents, he said Indian government "will attract international condemnation." He, however, said the proposed visit of the delegation would not be postponed in the event of his travel documents not being released. (PTI)

THE TIMES OF INDIA

12 JAN 2011

Track II team headed for Pak

HT Correspondent

New Delhi, January 11

TRACK TWO diplomacy between India and Pakistan will receive a fillip tomorrow when a team of Indian foreign and defence policy experts leave for Islamabad to discuss nuclear safety concerns.

The former foreign secretary and a member of the delegation, J.N. Dixit, said the three-day trip was not sponsored by the Indian government and that the team had "not sought a formal brief."

The team is to meet Pakistan Foreign Secretary Inamul Haq on Saturday.

The Delhi Policy Group team

also includes three retired military officers — Lt-Gen V.R. Raghavan, Air Chief Marshal S.K. Mehra, Rear Admiral Raja Menon — as well as former diplomat K.S. Bajpai and arms control expert, Professor Matin Zuberi.

Members of the team said the focus on nuclear safety followed from the memorandum of understanding that was part of the Lahore agreement. Lahore had been stymied by the Kargil war. But unofficial diplomacy allowed work to continue on the all-important issue of nuclear risk reduction.

Gen Raghavan said this was a response to a visit last year by a Pakistani team from the Islamabad

Policy Research Institute. He said such track two diplomacy was presently "very low key" and did not represent a weakening of India's tough stance on talks with Pakistan.

However, he said, neither government was opposed to "having some kind of channel open so long as it did not carry an official imprimatur." Such track two diplomacy will be useful to ensure that if and when official talks began, "they do not begin from scratch."

Delegation members had also met the national security advisor, Brajesh Mishra, and ministry of external affairs officials in advance of the visit for what one team member called a routine briefing.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

12 JAN 2001

Pakistan awaits delegation

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JAN.10. Pakistan eagerly awaits clearance of travel documents to members of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference by the Indian Government for their visit to Islamabad and the Pak-Occupied Kashmir from January 15.

Indications are that Pakistan will go out of the way to make the visit a success as it considers the APHC the "representative body" of Kashmiris.

This is the first time since 1964 that a delegation of Kashmiri leaders will visit Pakistan to hold talks for finding a solution to the conflict.

Then the late Sheikh Abdullah led an official delegation, but now India does not concur with Pakistan's view that the APHC alone represents the Kashmiri opinion.

India has made known that the Hurriyat leaders will travel to Pakistan in their individual capacity.

The Pakistan Government has extended an invitation to the entire APHC Executive comprising seven members. However, unlike the militant organisations and religious parties such as the Jamaat-e-Islami, it is not insisting on all members holding a meaningful dialogue.

A few days ago, the militant outfits asked the

APHC to spell out its agenda as the Hurriyat leaders were speaking in different voices.

The moderates, led by Mr. Abdul Ghani Lone, are insisting that the visit is aimed at conveying the message that while support from every quarter is welcome, the Kashmiris should be allowed to determine their future.

During his three-week stay in Pakistan for the marriage of his son in November and December, Mr. Lone lost no opportunity to impress on his hosts, including the militant outfits, the point that they should listen to the Kashmiri leaders and not the other way round. His message did not go down well with them and the hardliners in the APHC took exception to his statements.

The mouthpiece of the Jamaat-e-Islami in Pakistan accused Mr. Lone of being an Indian agent and of attempting to drive a wedge between the Kashmiris, the militant groups and Pakistan.

The Pakistan Government appears to have done some damage-control and this was evident in the resolution adopted by the United Jehadi Council earlier this week welcoming the APHC visit.

The militant outfits such as the Lashkar-e-Taiba which were fretting over the peace initiatives, also seem to have toned down their rhetoric.

THE HINDU

11 JAN 2001

HD-13
9/1

Pakistan gears up to receive APHC leaders

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 8. The Pakistan Government is busy finalising its strategy to ensure that the coming visit of leaders of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) goes off smoothly.

The Pakistan High Commissioner in New Delhi, Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, was here to brief the Government on his discussions with APHC leaders in New Delhi last week.

Pakistan, which extended an invitation to the APHC executive to visit Islamabad for discussions with the Government and representatives of militant organisations, is eagerly waiting to find out the composition of the team.

Mr. Qazi is believed to have met the Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, the Foreign Minister, Mr. Abdul Sattar, and the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Inamul Haq, during his stay in Islamabad and appraised them of his assessment of the situation.

Pakistan has appealed to India to issue travel documents to all seven members of the APHC executive. It is concerned over the possibility of a split in the APHC ranks over the composition of the delegation if India does not issue passports to all members of the executive committee.

The Pakistan Government has every reason to be worried about the outcome of the visit given the divisions within the Hurriyat ranks and the views of some Pa-

kistan-based militant organisations. Pakistan would like to do everything possible to send out a signal that there was a meeting point in the perception of the Hurriyat and the Government on the Kashmir conflict.

Having taken the stand that it considered the APHC as the true representative of Kashmiris, Pakistan would like to ensure that there are no voices questioning the credentials of Hurriyat leaders to discuss on behalf of the Kashmir people.

However, it is not an easy task. Organisations such as the Harkatul-Ansar have questioned the locus standi of the APHC to speak on behalf of the Kashmiris. Some militant organisations are also demanding that they be made party to any future dialogue between India and Pakistan.

The Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front (JKLF), led by Mr. Amanullah Khan, today went on record to reiterate its viewpoint that APHC could not be accepted as the only representative body of Kashmiris. Mr. Khan demanded representation for people from all regions of the State, including Jammu, Ladakh, Pak-occupied Kashmir and Gilgit Baltisar.

Nambiar seeks meeting with Musharraf

A request by the Indian High Commissioner to Pakistan, Mr. Vijay Nambiar, for a meeting with the Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, has caught the imag-

ination of the media here.

Mr. Nambiar, in fact, had sought the appointment over five weeks ago. It was not intended to be anything more than a courtesy call as he had not met Gen. Musharraf after taking charge of the mission in the second week of August last.

He made known his desire when he was summoned to the Foreign Office and handed over Pakistan's official statement on Kashmir by the Foreign Secretary, Mr. Inamul Haq. In its statement, Pakistan announced the decision to observe "maximum restraint" on the Line of Control and invited APHC leaders to visit the country.

Immediately after the official statement was issued, Mr. Nambiar went to Delhi for "consultations". He stayed on for 11 days as his visit coincided with a marriage in the family.

Mansoor Ijaz arrives for talks

NEW DELHI, JAN. 8. Mr. Mansoor Ijaz, a U.S.-based Pakistani investment banker and self-styled peacemaker, arrived here today amidst expectations of a push being given to track-II diplomacy between the two countries.

Mr. Ijaz, who is believed to be close to the outgoing United States President, Mr. Bill Clinton, might hold talks with some officials and "emissaries", informed sources said. — PTI

THE HINDU

9 JAN 2001

'Hurriyat visit will pave way for tripartite talks'

Islamabad, January 7 *9-13*

CLAIMING THAT "substantial" progress had been made on the Kashmir issue, Pakistan President Rafiq Tarar has said the coming visit by a Hurriyat Conference delegation to Pakistan would pave the way for tripartite talks on the issue and asked India to adopt a "positive" attitude on the trip.

Asking India to allow the trip on January 15, Tarar told reporters in Lahore that Pakistan would welcome the team. *Sindhi fan*

"Substantial progress has been made on the (Kashmir) issue," he said, adding New Delhi should "adopt a positive attitude on the Hurriyat leaders' visit to Pakistan."

Alleging that India had "so far been delaying the resolution of the Kashmir dispute on one pretext or another," Tarar said "but now the entire world wants to settle the dispute as without it peace in the region is not possible."

He said Pakistan was ready to hold "a meaningful dialogue on the Kashmir issue only if India reciprocates the offer." *911*

He said both Pakistan and India had become N-powers and the world was pressing for the solution to avert a war between them.

Tarar said peace and prosperity in S. Asia was linked with the solution to the Kashmir and a solution was not possible without taking the aspirations of the Kashmiri people into consideration. *(PTI)*

THE TIMES OF INDIA

8 JAN 2001

Hurriyat told to ensure Indian pullout Or else stay home, says Lashkar Z security ring for Lone

Arun Joshi

Jammu, January 6

THE RADICAL Islamic militant outfit Lashkar-e-Tayyeba has asked All-Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leaders to visit Pakistan only with a clear assurance from Delhi that it would withdraw its troops from Kashmir.

This was the crux of an hour-long telephonic discussion the Lashkar chief Hafiz Mohammad Sayeed had with senior Hurriyat leader Syed Ali Shah Geelani on Saturday, according to the Hurriyat leader's aides. These aides confirmed to *The Hindustan Times* that the two leaders discussed the proposed Hurriyat visit to Pakistan and the agenda of the talks slated to begin on January 15.

"The only way the talks can be held is if

India assures the Hurriyat that it would withdraw its troops from Kashmir", Geelani's aides quoted the Lashkar chief as having told the Hurriyat leader.

"The mujahideen should not be asked to its silence guns unless the Hurriyat is convinced that India would withdraw the troops from Jammu and Kashmir", Hafiz is reported to have told former Hurriyat Conference chairman.

The Lashkar chief reportedly had similar discussions with other Hurriyat leaders as well. Hafiz has reportedly conveyed to the Hurriyat leaders that they would be accorded a warm welcome in Pakistan by militant outfits.

Meanwhile, the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen has reacted strongly to the observations made by Dukhtrain-e-Millat chairman Asiya Andrabi regarding the Hizb and its leaders.

THE GOVERNMENT has decided to provide 'Z' category security — one of the highest in security status — for senior All-Party Hurriyat Conference leader Abdul Ghani Lone following a fresh assessment of threats to him.

The 'Z' category provides for a bullet-proof car, an escort and guards posted at residence.

Sources said threats to Lone had increased after he spoke against foreign militants, charging them with trying to achieve the objective of "unfurling flags at Red Fort and White House by using Kashmir as an excuse".

The threat held out by Dukhtrain-e-Millat chief Asiya Andrabi that Lone would have to pay for his actions has also been seen as a manifestation of increased security threat for him.

Lone, when contacted in Delhi, denied any knowledge about the increased security for him. He told *The Hindustan Times* that he had same security he had earlier. "There is no change in it," he said. "I feel that Asiya will, one day, make me a prisoner of security."

HTC, Jammu

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 JAN 2001

Pak. denies firing along LoC

By B. Muralidhar Reddy 110 12

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 5 Pakistan has categorically denied any firing by its troops along the Line of Control early this week and said there has been no eruption of fighting along the LoC.

Commenting on the charges made by India that Pakistani troops indulged in unprovoked firing along the LoC, the Director General of the Inter Services Public Relations (ISPR), Maj. Gen. Rashid Quereshi, told a news conference here today that "nothing of this sort has happened".

Maj. Gen. Quereshi claimed that Pakistan had taken a number of steps to deescalate the tension between India and Pakistan and resolve the Kashmir conflict peacefully. "Time and again we have said we are ready for talks".

He said initially India was adamant on its stance of no talk with Pakistan but in view of the mounting international pressure, it had taken certain cosmetic measures such as ceasefire in Kashmir.

Maj. Gen. Quereshi claimed that Pakistan had re-

sponded to Indian moves with 'substantive action' such as maximum restraint on the LoC and partial withdrawal of the forces from the LoC. "This has put tremendous pressure on India to reciprocate. The only excuse for India was to raise the bogey of increased tension and the talk of need for conducive atmosphere to stave off world pressure".

At the same time, he conceded that there seems to be a shift in the Indian attitude and this was evident in its willingness to permit the leaders of the All Parties Hurriyat Conference (APHC) to travel to Islamabad. "This is an encouraging sign."

He described the APHC as a representative body of the people of Kashmir and said the Pakistani Government looked forward to a meaningful interaction with the Hurriyat delegation when it comes here on January 15.

In another development, 'self-determination' day was observed today in Pakistan and Pak-occupied Kashmir to commemorate the adoption of the resolution by the U.N. Security Council on January 5, 1949.

6 JAN 2001

Vajpayee invites Musharraf

By C. Raja Mohan

AFTER SHUNNING Gen. Pervez Musharraf, Chief Executive of Pakistan, for more than a year, the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has finally offered to meet him under certain conditions. In his "Musings from Kumarakom", Mr. Vajpayee has extended an open-ended invitation for Gen. Musharraf to come to India. "Show us you can rein in the Jihadis, and you are welcome here" is the essence of Mr. Vajpayee's message to Gen. Musharraf. It will be a while before we know if the General is ready to come to Delhi. But there is no question that Mr. Vajpayee has taken one more risky step forward in his search for peace with Pakistan.

Ever since he ousted the Nawaz Sharif Government and took charge in October 1999, Gen. Musharraf expressed two strong desires — one to meet Mr. Vajpayee at "any time and any place" and the other a serious discussion with India on the Kashmir dispute, which he said was lacking in the earlier peace initiative of Mr. Vajpayee at Lahore. Mr. Vajpayee is now saying he will meet both the demands of Gen. Musharraf, if Pakistan is willing to put the gun down.

To put it in Mr. Vajpayee's own words: "India is willing and ready to seek a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem. Towards this end, we are prepared to recommence talks with Pakistan at any level, including the highest level, provided Islamabad gives sufficient proof of its preparedness to create a conducive atmosphere for a meaningful dialogue".

The reference to talks at the highest level is a signal that Mr. Vajpayee is ready to host Gen. Musharraf in New Delhi. After Mr. Vajpayee's visit to Lahore in February 1999, it is now Pakistan's turn to send its top gun to India. In offering to receive Gen. Musharraf, Mr. Vajpayee has reversed India's year-long refusal to engage the military brass in Pakistan. Not only did the Government reject Pakistan's offer for bilateral summit meeting but avoided contact with Gen. Musharraf even in a multilateral setting.

Deeply angered by what the Government saw as Gen. Musharraf's personal role in the Kargil betrayal of the Lahore

HD-12
5/11

The stakes are far too high for the whole world to let the incipient peace process in the subcontinent collapse because a powerful section of the Pakistani military establishment has become a prisoner of the jihadi groups.

peace initiative, India supported the immediate international moves to isolate his regime after the coup. New Delhi backed the effort to keep Pakistan out of the Commonwealth summit, and sought a postponement of the SAARC summit at the end of 1999. At the millennium summit of the United Nations in New York, Mr. Vajpayee did everything possible to prevent an accidental running into the Pakistani General. Now Mr. Vajpayee is saying he is ready to receive Gen. Musharraf in New Delhi, with just one proviso that he crack down on the jihadi groups fomenting terrorism in India.

In proclaiming his readiness to directly engage Gen. Musharraf, Mr. Vajpayee has transformed his Ramzan initiative for a ceasefire in Kashmir into a broader approach to renew

WORLD VIEW

the peace process with Pakistan. But in one fundamental sense, what Mr. Vajpayee is proposing is very different from the Lahore initiative. He had gone to Lahore with the assumption that India could begin a comprehensive peace process with Pakistan even while Islamabad extended support to cross-border violence in India. Mr. Vajpayee is determined not to make that mistake again. At the same time, by linking his initiative in Kashmir to a peace process with Pakistan, he has put the dispute over Jammu and Kashmir at the front and centre of the proposed dialogue with Islamabad.

In moving India towards uncharted diplomatic waters on Kashmir, Mr. Vajpayee has laid down a broad set of parameters for the new engagement with Pakistan. No Government can be expected to give away its negotiating position on the eve of such a sensitive diplomatic effort. But his "Musings at Kumarakom"

define the outlines of the new Indian diplomacy on Kashmir.

First, Mr. Vajpayee has made a fundamental break with the traditional Indian thinking on Kashmir that preferred to leave the question unresolved rather than address the dispute with Pakistan frontally. He is reflecting the new thinking in India that the time has come to find a final solution to the vexatious dispute. This new line was implicit in Mr. Vajpayee's Lahore initiative. Recall the statement of the former Pakistan Foreign Secretary, Mr. Niaz Naik, who acted as a back channel between Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Sharif in the brief period between Lahore and Kargil. After the Kargil crisis, Mr. Naik had stated that India and Pakistan were close to resolving the Kashmir dispute in a manner of months. In declaring his readiness to find a "lasting solution", Mr. Vajpayee is now making it an explicit Indian objective.

Second, Mr. Vajpayee has promised that "in our search for a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem, both in its external and internal dimensions, we shall not traverse solely on the beaten track of the past. Rather we shall be bold and innovative designers of a future architecture of peace and prosperity for the entire South Asian region". The only guiding consideration will be "peace, justice and vital interests of the nation". This readiness to move away from stated positions on Kashmir should address the long-standing grievance of Pakistan that India was unwilling to engage seriously on the subject.

Finally, in preparing the nation to find a lasting solution to the Kashmir dispute, Mr. Vajpayee has made it quite clear that it cannot be based on the principle of the two-nation theory, which partitioned the

country. In short, the ultimate solution cannot be based on another partition of Jammu and Kashmir on communal lines. This principle, on which there is absolute unanimity within the nation, Mr. Vajpayee is making it clear, is not up for negotiation with Pakistan.

Will Gen. Musharraf respond positively to the unprecedented shift in the Indian position on Kashmir? Or, can he? Mr. Vajpayee's offer to receive him if he reins in the jihadis is indeed a big political test for the General. The Pakistani response will show whether Gen. Musharraf is part of the solution or the problem. If he pleads that he cannot control the militant groups, he will be either dissimulating or confirming that he is a "useless dictator". What is the point of engaging a leader on fundamental issues, if he cannot deliver?

If Gen. Musharraf, on the other hand, can grab the opportunity that Mr. Vajpayee is offering him, he could go down as a leader who has got India to negotiate seriously on Kashmir and has laid the basis for lasting peace in the subcontinent, a goal that has eluded so many leaders of Pakistan. Gen. Musharraf's response will also reveal the broader direction in which Pakistan is headed. Is he willing to and capable of leading Pakistan away from the jihadis, and regaining its earlier standing as a moderate Islamic state and putting peace, modernisation and development back on the national agenda?

A lot will depend too on the kind of pressure the international community can bring to bear on Pakistan's generals at the moment. For more than a decade, the world has clamoured for a serious engagement between India and Pakistan that will address the Kashmir dispute and the nuclear tensions built into the bilateral relationship. Mr. Vajpayee is saying India is ready to move forward to a new architecture of peace in the region, if Pakistan is willing to end support to violence by the jihadi groups. The stakes are far too high for the whole world to let the incipient peace process in the subcontinent collapse because a powerful section of the Pakistani military establishment has become a prisoner of the jihadi groups.

THE HINDU

5 JAN 2001

Engaging Pakistan

Carrot for Carrot, Stick for Stick

By AMITABH MATTOO

MORE than a year after the gains of the Lahore summit were sent spiralling down from the heights of Kargil, there are renewed international expectations of a new entente between India and Pakistan. New Delhi's new Kashmir policy has evoked a positive response from Islamabad, albeit trivial in comparison to India's bold initiatives. The debate in India has, however, run along predictable lines. Moderates in India are calling for the immediate resumption of a dialogue with Islamabad, while hardliners are as usual against any truck with the military regime in the foreseeable future.

The problem with most such prescriptions is that they reflect individual emotions and personal passions rather than being grounded in a well-thought-out Pakistan policy. Such a policy would need to be informed by a deep analysis of the nature of contemporary Pakistan's state and society and rooted in a firmer conceptual understanding of the problems that India will have to encounter in dealing with a troublesome neighbour.

Consider first the conceptual challenge. How does one induce cooperation between two countries that have an almost pathological distrust of each other and where there is no overarching central authority that can force collaboration? Any student of game theory would instantly recognise the similarities that the situation bears to Prisoners Dilemma (PD), a game often used to simulate real life situations. In essence, PD constructs a hypothetical scenario in which two detainees are held and interrogated separately for a crime that they have supposedly committed together.

The prisoners make independent choices that lead to sub-optimal outcomes. If the prisoners had cooperated they would have been let off with a lighter punishment, but in the absence of policy coordination and trust between them, they both end up with a long sentence even while they try to cheat on each other. Is there a way out?

Scholars of cooperation, who studied the problem, suggested that if the two prisoners are playing the game only once there is little chance of promoting cooperation, but in an iterated PD the chances of building trust and coordination are greater.

How does one go about creating incentives for cooperation and introducing stiff costs for cheating? The most important way is to lengthen the shadow of the future,

so that the prisoners know that they will be dealing with each other in the future as well and, thereby, minimising the incentives for cheating. Equally important is for each prisoner to construct a strategy of reciprocating the other's behaviour or, simply put, a commonsensical policy device of tit for tat. If a prisoner knows that cheating will invite cheating, there will be greater incentives to cooperate. In other words, there should be a readiness to make the first unilateral gesture towards cooperation, but a resolve not to bear disproportionate costs, as that will only encourage free riding. Consequently, it is critical that all cooperation is incremental and linked.

How does PD match up to the current stalemate in India-Pakistan relations? First, New Delhi has despite its experience in Kargil after Lahore initiated a ceasefire in Kashmir. The only way for Pakistan

for the future. Unfortunately, scholarship on Pakistan is dismal in this country. Apart from even lacking experts in the main languages spoken in the provinces, there are few scholars with a nuanced understanding of Pakistan's army and especially the Inter-Services Intelligence. In the absence of such a knowledge, it is difficult to formulate a long-term, Pakistan policy. This must be remedied.

Nevertheless, even the most casual observer of South Asian relations will realise that there is, at present, virtually no possibility of a win-win resolution of the Kashmir problem even through the most innovative and creative diplomacy. Nor would the resolution of Kashmir, even if it were possible, necessarily lead to peace between the two countries, given the manner in which Pakistan's identity is today defined mostly in anti-Indian terms. And yet, it needs to be recognised, there is an urgent requirement to stabilise the bilateral relationship, particularly but not only because of the presence of nuclear weapons on both sides.

What would it take Pakistan's military regime to cooperate with India to stabilise the nuclear deterrent and create conditions for economic and social cooperation? Three conditions seem obvious if this has to happen. First, Pakistan's army has to realise that its influence and power as an institution is going to decline if it continues with the conflict with India. Second, it has to become obvious to the army and the ISI that the costs of maintaining their present policy in Kashmir will be far greater than any benefits that may be accrued in the present and the future.

Third, the dominant forces in the country must believe that Pakistan's state could collapse and decline into anarchy if the military regime does not end the process of militarisation and begins a process of normalisation with India.

On present evidence, there seems to be little to show that Pakistan's armed forces, the ISI or the leadership has come to such a realisation. In other words, Pakistan is unlikely to move back from its anti-India foundations in the near future. What is most essential, therefore, is for India to proceed with utmost caution, taking one step at a time, hoping that there are deeper structural challenges in the offing in Pakistan that will create the climate for cooperation, but preparing meanwhile for the continuation of the status quo.

IN BRIEF

- We need a more realistic, well-thought-out policy to deal with Pakistan
- Make the first, unilateral gesture, but meet hostility with hostility
- Think in terms, not of dramatic solutions, but a gradual process in which both countries have a stake.

to induce further cooperation from India is not by tactical half-baked actions on the Line of Control, but by making militant groups, under its control, reciprocate the ceasefire in the Kashmir valley. And unless Islamabad responds along these lines, New Delhi must not make any further gesture towards Pakistan. If Pakistan responds to a cooperative Indian move through a hostile action, New Delhi should respond by returning the hostile move. Further cooperation would then be dependent on Pakistan's behaviour. Second, both India and Pakistan, if they are seriously interested in cooperation, must think in terms, not of dramatic solutions, but of a gradual process in which both countries have a stake and which cannot be easily derailed.

A conceptual understanding of the hurdles in the way of cooperation would, however, need to be linked to a thorough analysis of Pakistan's military regime, its support base, trends within the country's civil society and portents

Pak. urges India to issue travel papers to APHC team

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

ISLAMABAD, JAN. 4. Pakistan tonight urged India to issue travel documents to all the seven members of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) to enable them visit Pakistan and hold discussions with all concerned to pave the way for a tripartite talks on the Kashmir issue.

In a statement here the Pakistan Foreign Office spokesman hailed the APHC decision to depute a delegation to Pakistan in response to the invitation extended by military Government discussions to prepare the ground for a tripartite dialogue "in accordance with the aspirations of the people of the State".

The spokesman regretted that India has not yet responded to the APHC request and urged the Indian Government to enable all APHC executive council members to visit Pakistan.

During the visit of the Hurriyat delegation, the Pakistan Government would hold consultations with them on all issues relevant to the "achievement of the right of self-determination" of the Kashmiri people.

The statement said that the delegation would also be visiting the Pak. Occupied Kashmir for talks with the Government there.

However, there is no mention about the intention of the Hurriyat to talk to the Pakistan-based militant organisations.

In a related development the National Security Council (NSC) reviewed the general security situation in the region with special focus on Kashmir.

The Chief Executive and the military ruler, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, chaired the meeting.

It discussed the forthcoming visit of the Hurriyat delegation and expressed the hope that its visit would lend impetus to a tripartite dialogue process.

Besides the service chiefs, the Foreign Minister, the Interior Minister, Finance Minister and Commerce Minister attended the meeting.

In another development the Pakistan Foreign Affairs Minister,

Mr. Abdus Sattar, has expressed the hope that dialogue between India and Pakistan would resume soon.

Referring to Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's musings, Mr. Sattar said that his views on Kashmir gave room to hope for an early resolution of the dispute.

In a separate development a spokesman of the Pakistan Government took serious exception to the reported remarks made by the Union Sports Minister, Ms. Uma Bharati, that Pakistan would be wiped out of the political map.

The spokesman termed the remarks as 'irresponsible' and urged the world community to take note of the remarks.

THE HINDU

5 JAN 2001

Pak. 'surprised' at India's charge

By B. Muralidhar Reddy

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ISLAMABAD, JAN. 4 The Kashmir peace moves could be in jeopardy if the signals emanating from various quarters in Pakistan are any indication. For the first time in four weeks, there are reports of heavy firing along the Line of Control (LoC) in the Jammu region — a clear violation of the earlier stand taken by both Pakistan and India.

India has accused Pakistan of unprovoked firing — a charge it has denied. A spokesman of the military has expressed surprise at India's charge.

It is difficult to verify the veracity of the incident but levelling of the charge has coincided with a discernable unease in the Pakistani Government over India's moves.

The spokesman read the proposal by the

Jammu and Kashmir Government to hold panchayat elections as an indication of lack of sincerity in holding a dialogue for resolution of the Kashmir conflict.

The Pakistani official news agency, *Associated Press of Pakistan*, has quoted the spokesman as saying "the decision to hold the elections is particularly regrettable at this time when efforts are under way to launch a peace process".

If India was genuinely interested in a peaceful solution of the Kashmir issue, it should enter into a meaningful dialogue with Pakistan, with the participation of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference. The APHC decision to boycott the panchayat elections was consistent with the long-standing opposition of the Kashmiris to any elections in Kashmir, he said.

At the same time, the United Jehadi

Council (UJC) — an umbrella organisation of Pakistan-based militant organisations — has been meeting in Muzaffarabad for the last three days to take stock of the situation in the light of the recent Indian moves.

The council is expected to adopt a resolution tomorrow to the effect that the APHC team should visit Islamabad only if there is a consensus among all groups in Kashmir.

The council is concerned about the viewpoint of some of the APHC leaders on the role of the militant organisations.

The Harkat-ul-Ansari has already questioned the locus standi of the APHC to negotiate on behalf of the Kashmiris and said the militant organisations should be part of the talks between India and Pakistan.

THE HINDU

JAN 10 1990

Fury on 'musings' distribution

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 2. — The decision to selectively hand out the Prime Minister's musings has sharply brought into focus the rift between the Press Information Bureau, which officially exists to disseminate the government's views, and the Prime Minister's Office.

Senior officials of the information and broadcasting ministry were highly critical of the way the PMO handled the matter, having been at the receiving end of media anger through most of the day. "It betrays a certain lack of vision," said a senior official about the decision. "After all, he is the Prime Minister of the entire country." Even the Doordarshan and the All India Radio were not given copies of the article.

The BJP too was surprised at the PMO's decision. The senior party vice-president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, said he would try to ascertain the reasons from the officials concerned.

According to the PM's media advisor, Mr HK

Dua, his job was to ensure that the Prime Minister got maximum coverage. But unfortunately, the main coverage the articles received today was negative, not because of the content, but because of the way they were handed out, with the stipulation that they be carried by the chosen papers in their entirety.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, just back from a week-long vacation in Kerala, penned his thoughts on the state of the nation in a two-part series called *Musings from Kumarakon*. The first of the articles dealt with his views on the Kashmir problem and Ayodhya.

He has probably never faced the kind of outrage personally that his remarks equating Ram temple to an expression of national sentiment, evoked. Unable to suitably convince his dissenting constituencies in the parliamentary debate, Mr Vajpayee decided to use his southern sojourn to collect his thoughts and present his case.

■ See MEDIA: page 8

THE STATESMAN

3 JAN 2001

MEDIA:

(Continued from page 1)

In doing this, he has tried to project himself in the mould of a statesman, above the daily business of politics, but some of the musings read like an afterthought.

In the second part of his 'musings,' where he speaks of the immense opportunities India presents for an ordinary teacher's son like him to aspire for the top post, he says: "The era of dynastic politics is finally over."

He mentions economic reforms and the need for radical development reforms that entail accountability, a systemic change and the removal of corruption.

The tenor is similar to that of the US Presidency. Almost as an endorsement of this was his media advisor's explanation for why the articles were selectively given only to some dailies.

"You must remember this is not a policy statement of the government, it is an article written by the Prime Minister. We're interested in ensuring that it has the maximum impact. After all, Mr Clinton can write an article for the *Washington Post* and *The New York Times* need not carry it," Mr Dua said.

"An English daily in each of the four parts of the country was chosen," he said. In eastern India, it was a Guwahati-based paper, while three Delhi papers ran the articles. The logic was that one has a major presence in the West and one in the South, and never mind if they all have Delhi editions. Also, each region was represented through a language paper, dependent not on circulation, but on an arbitrary choice of PMO's media managers.

THE STATESMAN

3 JAN 2001

PM LEAVES KERALA WITH FOND MEMORIES

'Climate not conducive for talks with Pak., militants'

By Our Staff Reporter

KOTTAYAM, JAN. 1. The Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, today said conditions were not conducive for holding talks on the Kashmir issue with "either the militants or Pakistan". Asked why the ceasefire in Kashmir was not followed up by dialogue, the Prime Minister told reporters at the helipad here, prior to his departure for New Delhi via Kochi, that "the atmosphere should be conducive for talks with either militants or Pakistan".

For any initiative towards parleys, the other side should respond favourably, he said, adding the country could have a dialogue with Pakistan provided it responded favourably.

To another question, the Prime Minister said he was trying to resolve the Ayodhya issue on which much blood had been shed in the name of Mandir and Masjid. (Ac-

ording to PTI, asked about the reported suggestion to declare Ayodhya a heritage city, he asked: "Who said so?")

About his vacation, the Prime Minister said it had been "very good" and he was spellbound by the natural beauty of Kumarakom. A poet, the Prime Minister, however, did not attempt anything during the stay; but "poetry will follow politics."

Early in the day, Mr. Vajpayee received a flower basket at his suite, along with wishes for the New Year from a native of Kottayam, the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan.

The Prime Minister and his entourage were expected to leave Kottayam by 11-30 a.m., but were delayed by adverse weather conditions by nearly one and a half hours. He was escorted to Kochi by Mr. T.K. Ramakrishnan, State Minister for Cultural Affairs. Local leaders of the Bharatiya Janata

Party and people's representatives saw him off at the helipad.

Treatment to continue

Our Kochi Staff Reporter writes:

Talking to reporters before boarding Rajadoot, a special aircraft of the Indian Air Force, from the Cochin International Airport at Nedumbassery, Mr. Vajpayee expressed his desire to visit the State again. "I enjoyed the stay and will come back."

"I wish the people of Kerala a happy New Year and let the New Year be a peaceful and prosperous one," Mr. Vajpayee greeted the Keralites. Regarding the Ayurvedic treatment he took for his knees, Mr. Vajpayee said he would continue the treatment that was just started.

"Let us talk about Kerala now and not Kashmir," quipped Mr. Vajpayee on a question on talks with Pakistan regarding the Kashmir issue. Mr. Vajpayee was ac-



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, bids farewell at the Kottayam helipad on Monday before leaving for Delhi after the end of his week-long sojourn in Kumarakom. —

Photo: H. Vibhu

panied by the Union Minister of State for Railways and Parliamentary Affairs, Mr. O. Rajagopal.

'Not a boycott'

PTI reports:

The BJP's Kerala unit president, Mr. Padmanabhan, said it was not right to say that Roman Catholic bishops had refused to meet the Prime Minister on Sunday when the latter met a delegation of church leaders. In his presidential address at the BJP delegates session yesterday, attended by Mr. Vajpayee, Mr. Padmanabhan alleged certain vested interests were trying to create the impression that the Roman Catholic bishops boycotted the Prime Minister's meeting.

The bishops could not make it as the time allotted to them coincided with the Sunday mass at the churches. They therefore politely informed the PMO about their inability to meet the Prime Minister.

THE HINDU

2 JAN 2001

PMO is new power centre: Somnath

NEW DELHI, MARCH 8. The CPI(M) leader, Mr. Somnath Chatterjee, today made a scathing attack on the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) for being an "extra-constitutional authority" which has "subverted" the Cabinet system of governance, with Ministers becoming mere executive agents for implementing "dubious decisions."

Participating in the resumed discussion in the Lok Sabha on the motion of thanks to the President's address, Mr. Chatterjee said the power centre was shifting from Ministries to the PMO, which had "no constitutional responsibility and working as an extra-constitutional authority."

At a time, when there was a need for transparency in administration and probity, the PMO had become the "biggest agency" of power seekers and power brokers. A former senior civil servant had, in an interview, made several charges and had spoken of how the PMO was being pressurised by big business houses, but there had been no denial from the Government so far.

Stating that he assumed that the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, was not unaware of what was happening, Mr. Chat-

terjee said a "proper reply" should come from the Prime Minister. He described the NDA as a "sinister conglomeration devoid of principles or ideology" which had come together only for the sake of power.

The BJP member, Mr. M.A.K. Swain, objected to certain allegations against the PMO, but was overruled by Mr. Srinivas Patil, who was in the Chair.

Mr. Chatterjee also questioned the Government's silence over a court order setting aside the trial of three Union Ministers including, the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, in the Babri Masjid demolition case, on technical grounds.

"The Government has deliberately kept quiet so as to spare Advani and two other Ministers from being prosecuted in this case", he alleged. On the Constitution Review Commission, he said the Government was keeping Parliament in the dark.

The Centre's "anti-people and anti-worker" policies like hire and fire policy would affect 99 per cent workers in the country. The Opposition parties had supported Mr. Vajpayee's decision on ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir but nothing had been done to take

forward the peace process, he said.

In the Rajya Sabha, the former Union Minister, Mr. Ram Jethmalani, accused the Government of putting the Information Bill dealing with the Official Secrets Act on the "back burner" and sought a categorical assurance from the Prime Minister for expediting the bill.

Successive Governments had misused the Act and it appeared that the new Bill was sought to be sabotaged by powerful people having something to hide. Till the Bill came up for consideration of the two Houses, Mr. Vajpayee should give an assurance in the House that provisions of the Bill would be respected.

The National conference member, Mr. Mirza Abdul Rashid, said the latest ceasefire extension had provided an opportunity to militants to cross over to Pakistan for arms training and return after sometime with sophisticated arms and ammunition. This had also provided an opportunity to them to reorganise and consolidate and store their weapons. All this could well be judged by the increasing attacks on and killings of security personnel. — PTI, UNI

THE HINDU

MARCH 2001

Should the PMO be all powerful?

It gently acts as a trouble-shooter in areas obfuscating policy



S. Narendra

THE PMO, or the PM's secretariat until 1977, is an administrative innovation of the post-Nehruvian period. It was mainly a response to the needs of a non-charismatic leadership. It is another matter that two charismatic personalities continued this arrangement bestowing upon it greater influence than ever before.

The PMO is at best an instrument of the first among equals in the Cabinet. It radiates the Prime Minister's vision and influence on the system of governance. Since the buck stops with him, the aides in this office become his eyes and ears, and when the need is felt, a nudging hand is given as well. This is resented by ministries and often misrepresented.

I wonder whether the New Telecom Policy 1994 would ever have seen the light of the day but for the then PMO. Later, the policy got into a mess perhaps because the PMO did not interfere with its implementation. NTP 1998 and the unscrambling of the knots around it would again not have been possible without the prodding of the PMO. 'Buddha smiled' in May 1974 and, repeated it in 1998. The two explosions compelled international attention on India. Who was behind them?

There are other areas as well where the PMO stepped in. Deflecting international criticism of human rights violations in India's terrorist-ridden states and setting up of the Human Rights Commission and initiating a debate on reforms in the administration of criminal justice were masterminded by the PMO. This was part of the long haul to holding assembly elections in Jammu & Kashmir in 1996. Adequate attention has not been given to the deft ways in which the PMO paved the road for India's permanent membership in the UN Security Council. This was a decade-long effort on many fronts, internal and external.

While most of the credit for economic liberalisation has been laid at the doorstep of the North Block, the onus of packaging it for building political consensus and calibrating the pace and implementation has always been on the South Block. Some of the best budgets have ended up merely as dreams in the absence of this invisible hand. This is not to suggest that all work gets done in the PMO. It is the concerned departments which primarily engage in policy-thinking and implementation of relevant decisions. But the PMO brings collective responsibility in the implementation of policies by gently poking its nose into potential official trouble-spots and dark bureaucratic holes obfuscating policy or decision. Composite thinking as against

compartmentalisation or departmentalisation is the PMO's mandate.

For example, allocations in rural and social development sectors were increased because of prime ministers' concern for them. Village empowerment, or Panchayat Raj reforms, was another example of composite thinking which no individual ministry or department could have undertaken. The IT policy package crossing several borders also emanated from the PMO.

Its role assumes criticality when Prime Ministers have to run minority or coalition governments or when the political set-up lacks cohesion. Ministries want it to be a fire-brigade. When it becomes a prime mover, it attracts a whispering campaign. If you can't dare the

No, quality of governance then suffers



Narendar Pani

THE emergence of an all-powerful PMO inevitably suggests that the Prime Minister lacks confidence in the policy-making abilities of his cabinet colleagues.

The fact that the PM has his own bureaucracy to initiate and develop policy options reflects a belief that his ministers are incapable of using their ministries effectively.

The constitutional response to this situation would have been for the Prime Minister to reshuffle his cabinet. But realpolitik has made this difficult. The composition of the cabinet is increasingly deter-

ally nominates its own representatives. The Prime Minister may then not even have had an opportunity to judge the personal competence of some of his cabinet colleagues.

In trying to bridge this gap between a cabinet determined by political expediency and the need for cohesive policy, an all-powerful prime minister's office appears an attractive option.

It allows the Prime Minister to bypass inconvenient allies. It also gives the government a more cohesive image than a disparate cabinet would. But what this all-powerful office gains in expediency, it loses in the quality of governance.

The greatest risk in allowing the few professionals in the prime minister's office to decide policy is that it can develop an ivory-tower approach to policy.

Typically, policy-makers in the PMO advocate theoretically attractive solutions. When these are implemented within the diverse set of ground realities that exist in India, there are bound to be unexpected and adverse consequences. And the PMO does not have the mechanism to spot these results before they assume crisis proportions.

The resultant insensitivity to local conditions is a factor that has contributed to the rise of regional, and even sub-regional, parties. The emergence of these parties could have been seen as an opportunity to put local issues on the national agenda.

But by its very ideology, the PMO treats the rise of these parties as an aberration. The discordant views of the regional parties are treated as mere political irritants. And the PMO gets even more self-righteous in bypassing the ministries led by these parties.

As the PMO takes more onto its plate, the few experts in this office are forced to handle issues that lie beyond their expertise. In this relatively new territory, they get wary of change.

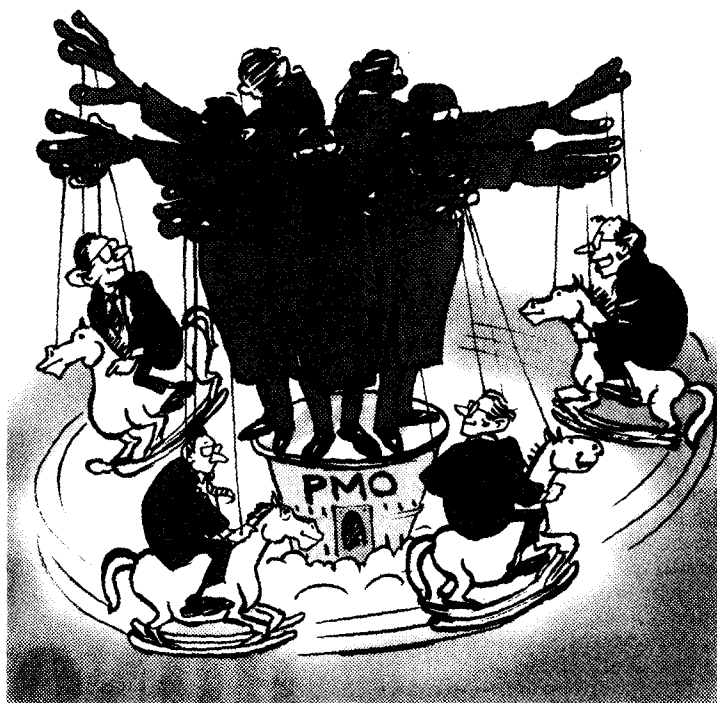
For instance, in the run-up to the WTO ministerial meet in Seattle, much was made of the commerce ministry's broad-based consultations and its willingness to adopt innovative positions.

But at Seattle itself, for reasons unknown, the PMO took charge. And India went back to its traditional positions; positions that ensured it had little influence on the course of negotiations.

The very nature of an all-powerful PMO thus ensures that, over time, its insensitivity is garnished with incompetence. When this becomes obvious, the PMO will lose much of its *raison d'être*. But surely, this is a lesson we don't have to learn the hard way.

(Narendar Pani is senior editor, The Economic Times)

IN BLACK AND WHITE



TOI Illustration: Prakash Babu

enemy, aim at the shadow. This office is no stranger to attacks.

One is aware of the argument that the PMO's role can be performed by the cabinet secretariat. But this body is expected to serve the cabinet, not the PM alone despite being under him. Why have 11 Prime Ministers during the past three-and-a-half decades not found this or any other alternative suitable? Some of them were critics of the PMO when they were not in South Block. But something new has happened. Senior aides of the Prime Minister have generally avoided the limelight. Whenever this aberration crops up, their boss gets into trouble.

(S. Narendra was former information adviser in the PMO)

mined less by policy-making ability and more by political compulsions. And these have, over the years, become more systemic.

Mrs Indira Gandhi's compulsions may have been no more than a distrust of cabinet ministers with an independent political stature. But with the appearance of coalition politics, the very survival of a government has become dependent on the Prime Minister giving up some control over the composition of his cabinet. With coalitions based on minimum agendas, the Prime Minister cannot even be sure that his cabinet colleagues will not violently disagree with his ideology.

To make matters worse, each constituent of the coalition gener-

PM's 'musings' take steam out of Opp attack

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 2. — The Congress and the CPI-M, the two major Opposition parties, see the Prime Minister's views on Ayodhya as a dampener.

The Congress said, "The Prime Minister is in the habit of making statements, and then retracting." The CPI-M Politburo described Mr Vajpayee's "musings" as "verbal jugglery".

The Congress spokesman, Mr Anil Shastri, was surprised not so much by the Prime Minister taking the steam out of the Opposition's renewed campaign on Ayodhya but by the timing of the policy statement.

The hype over the Ayodhya dispute helped the Opposition unite on a single subject. The Congress and, to a lesser extent, the Marxists began approaching the government's allies



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee

hoping to divide the ruling coalition on the BJP's temple agenda.

Congress leaders said the Prime Minister's latest statement was a dampener as any decision by the Dharam Sansad, scheduled to be

57-8 371
held at the Mahakumbh in Allahabad beginning next week, will not have the BJP's backing and that of Mr Vajpayee's government.

"It'll rob Opposition parties of the opportunity to corner the Prime Minister on his earlier declaration that construction of Ram Temple in Ayodhya was the expression of a national sentiment," a Congress leader said.

Taking a dig at Mr Vajpayee, Mr Anil Shastri said, "Our Prime Minister now speaks in the past tense, not in present or future tense." He criticised the Prime Minister for alleging that the Congress government was a mute spectator when the mosque was demolished in 1992.

"Why is the Prime Minister not advising his three chargesheeted ministers in the Babari case to resign when he says the law will take its own course?" the Congress spokesman asked.

SC DEFERS KALYAN HEARING

NEW DELHI, Jan. 2. — The Supreme Court today deferred hearing on a transfer petition filed by former chief minister of Uttar Pradesh, Mr Kalyan Singh, seeking transfer of a writ petition filed by him challenging the constitutional validity of orders passed by Liberhan Commission asking him to disclose some information about the Babari Masjid demolition by filing an affidavit.

Seeking transfer of the writ pending before Allahabad High Court under Article 139-A, his Counsel, Mr Ajay Aggarwal, told a division Bench comprising Mr Justice BN Kirpal and Ms Justice Ruma Pal that some writ petitions had been filed before Delhi High Court raising identical questions.

Mr Aggarwal said that in spite of the interim orders of Allahabad High Court and Delhi High Court, the commission has issued bailable warrants against his client. — SNS

THE STATESMAN

3 JAN 1997

Time to resolve problems of the past and move on towards a better future

Continued from Page 1 section of the media and the political class from a "moderate" to a "hard-liner". "Vaipayee unmasked," they said, conveniently masking the fact that my long stint in public life is an open book. Worse still, a campaign was launched to create misgivings about me in the minds of our minority brethren.

I had hoped - and I am sure that most of our countrymen too had hoped - that my comprehensive replies to the debate, first in the Lok Sabha and then in the Rajya Sabha, would put an end to the controversy. Alas, that has not been the case. I must confess that I am pained by some of the comments, observations and speculations in the aftermath of the recent developments in Parliament. My political adversaries are entitled to disagree with me, but they will not be able to see any inconsistency in my views on the Ayodhya issue, all of which are well recorded.

I have always held that there are only two ways to resolve this contentious issue: the judicial route or the route of negotiations leading to a mutually acceptable solution. I have stated that the Government will accept, and is constitutionally bound to implement, the judiciary's verdict, whatever it might be.

But this does not foreclose the need for negotiations in a non-governmental and non-political framework. The judicial route and the option of talks do not exclude, but are rather complementary to one another.

Irrespective of what the judicial verdict might be, its smooth implementation would require a con-



KUMARAKOM MUSINGS-I
by **Atal Bihari Vajpayee**

ducive social atmosphere. Resumption of talks between representatives of the two communities, conducted in an atmosphere of trust, goodwill and flexibility, has the potential to create such an atmosphere. The ongoing controversy over implementing the Supreme Court's verdict in the case of relocation of polluting industries out of Delhi has strikingly highlighted the need for a supportive social environment involving all the parties to a dispute.

Few can deny that Ram occupies an exalted place in India's culture. He is one of the most respected symbols of our national ethos. Respect for him transcends sectarian barriers. Many Indians revere him as an avatar of God and some regard him as Maryada Purushottam. Non-Hindus, too, see in him an ideal king and an embodiment of great human qualities. Had it not been so, Poet Allama Iqbal would not have penned the following eulogy to Ram.

*The cup of India has always overflowed
With the heady wine of truth.
Even the philosophers from the West
Are her ardent devotees.
There is something so sublime in her mysticism
That her star soars high above constellations.
There have been thousands of rulers in this land
But none can compare with Rama:
The discerning ones proclaim him
The spiritual leader of India.
His lamp gave the light of wisdom
Which outshone the radiance*

*Of the whole of humankind,
Rama was valiant, Rama was bold,
Rama yielded deftly his word,
He cared for the poorest of poor,
He was unmatched in love and compassion.*

No wonder, then, that the movement for construction of a Ram Temple at Ayodhya struck a positive chord in more than one political party. Had it not been so, the Government of late Rajiv Gandhi would not have taken the kind of specific steps it did to facilitate the construction of a Ram Temple at Ayodhya. Rajivji even inaugurated the Congress party's 1989 election campaign from the vicinity of Ayodhya with a promise to usher in Ram Rajya, which was also Mahatma Gandhi's dream.

There was nothing communal about either Gandhi's vision or Rajiv Gandhi's initiatives at Ayodhya. This shows that there was no dispute over a Ram Temple at Ayodhya being an expression of the national sentiment, in the same way that reconstruction of a temple at Somnath too was recognised by the then Government as an expression of the national senti-

ment. (The Government of Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru had set up a committee for the reconstruction of Somnath Temple under the chairmanship of K.M. Munshi. Babu Rajendra Prasad, the then President himself participated in the temple's inaugural function, calling Somnath a "symbol" of India's national culture.)

'I have stated the Govt will accept the judiciary's verdict, whatever it might be. But this does not foreclose the need for negotiations.'

The only dispute at Ayodhya was over where and how. On this contentious matter, too, my views have been clear and consistent. I never stated that the temple should be built at the disputed site without either a judicial verdict or an amicable agreement between the two communities. This is how it should be in a law-governed country. I wish to make it absolutely clear that the law will take its course, should any organisation attempt to

disturb the status quo. The Government will not remain a silent spectator and adopt delaying tactics, as unfortunately happened eight years ago.

In my reply to the debate in the Lok Sabha, I had stated that, in addition to Ram, many other personalities and places symbolise our national culture.

Be it the Dargah of Ajmer Sharif or the shrine of Nizamuddin Auliya in Delhi, the Golden Temple at Amritsar or the Church of St. Francis at Goa - these are all proud symbols of our syncretic national culture.

My statement that the movement for construction of a Ram Temple in Ayodhya was an expression of the national sentiment has been misrepresented in many ways.

What is overlooked is the past tense that I had consciously used in my statement. In my reply to the debate in the Rajya Sabha, I had clearly stated that although the movement for the construction of a Ram Temple at Ayodhya was an expression of our national sentiment, this sentiment became narrow, and its inclusive character became restrictive, because of the unfortunate demolition of the disputed mosque structure on

December 6, 1992. A flagrant violation of the law, it certainly was. But it was also totally at variance with the Hindu ethos. The wrongs of a medieval past cannot be righted by a similar wrong in modern times.

The status quo at Kashi, Mathura and other disputed places of worship must remain undisturbed. Far from indicating the Hindu society's weakness, this will show the strength of our national ethos of tolerance and religious harmony.

Deeply saddening though that December Sunday was, we cannot forever remain shackled to the debate on demolitions, either of the distant or the recent past. India must move on.

The best of India resides not in the past. Rather, it belongs to the future that we all must collectively build. Glorious though our past was, a more glorious destiny beckons India. However, its realisation calls for a radical shift from contention to conciliation, from confrontation to consensus and cooperative action.

How do we make this transition? I would like to share some more of my thoughts with my countrymen in another article tomorrow.

Time to resolve problems of the past and move on

AS WE bid goodbye to 2000 and usher in 2001, I send my hearty New Year greetings to all my fellow countrymen, as also to the large diaspora of Indians abroad.

The beginning of a New Year is always a time to look back and to look ahead. A year is but a speck in the life of an ancient nation like India, which is ever youthful in spite of her great antiquity. However, unlike our nation, all of us have a limited life. Each new generation, therefore, has to give a worthy account of itself in its own lifetime, aware that its contribution to India's progress will be judged essentially on two counts: One, how many 'legacy problems' inherited from the past has it resolved? Two, how strong a foundation has it laid for the future development of the nation?

My mind probes these questions as my eyes feast on the verdant environs of Kumarakom resort on the banks of the sea-sized Vembanad Lake in Kerala. I have come here for my year-end holidays, far away from the national capital. Nature's silent beauty provides a perfect setting here for contemplation. And I wish to share some of my

'The wrongs of a medieval past cannot be righted by a similar wrong in modern times.'

thoughts with my countrymen with this article. Our country is facing many problems that are a legacy of our history. I wish to share my views on two of them. One is the long-standing problem with Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir and the other is the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute at Ayodhya.

A self-confident and resilient nation does not postpone the inconvenient issues of yesterday to a distant tomorrow. Rather, it strives to decisively overcome the problems of the past so that it can pursue its developmental agenda for the future with single-minded determination. I have heard many of my countrymen tell me that, now that we

KUMARAKOM MUSINGS-I

by **Atal Bihari Vajpayee**



have entered a new century and a new millennium, it is time we found lasting solutions to these two problems, one of which is a legacy of the last century and the other a legacy of the last millennium. I agree with them.

The Kashmir problem is an unfortunate inheritance from the tragic partition of India in 1947. India never accepted the pernicious Two-Nation theory that brought about the partition. However, the mindset that created Pakistan continues to operate in that country. This is why it is continuing with its untenable policy on Kashmir, disregarding the considerations of both good-neighbourly relations with India and the well being of the people of

'In our search for a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem, we shall not traverse solely on the beaten track.'

Jammu and Kashmir. India is willing and ready to seek a lasting solution to the Kashmir problem. Towards this end, we are prepared to re-commence talks with Pakistan at any level, including the highest level, provided Islamabad gives sufficient proof of its preparedness to create a conducive atmosphere for a meaningful dialogue. I am sad to note, however, that the Government of Pakistan is not doing enough to rein-in terrorist organisations based on its soil that are continuing their killing spree, targeting both innocent civilians and our security personnel in Kashmir and other parts of India.

The Government is taking well-conceived steps

to normalise the situation in Jammu and Kashmir. The unilateral cessation of combat operations against militants in the State, which was observed during the holy month of Ramzan, has been extended till January 26. My heart shares the agony of the grieving mothers, sisters and widows who have lost their near and dear ones in the violence that has bloodied the beautiful Kashmir Valley. I also feel the pain and anguish of those Kashmiris who have become refugees in their own motherland. The New Year is the time to heal their wounds. The Government will soon initiate talks with various representative groups in the State. We are prepared to take further steps to respond to Jammu and Kashmir's deep longing for

Continued on Page 11

TALKBACK

Do you agree with the Prime Minister's views? Fax us at 3704600 and 3704589 or e-mail us at talkback@hindustantimes.com. We will publish excerpts from selected letters.

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