

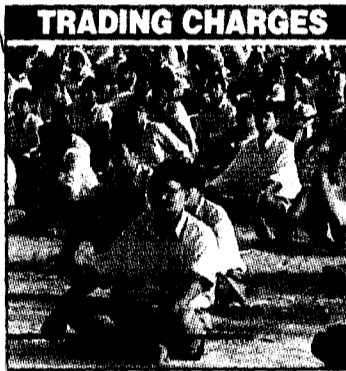
Stung by PM's remarks, RSS distances itself from NDA govt.

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: In the wake of the scathing attack by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on certain Sangh Parivar leaders for criticising his government, the RSS on Monday disassociated itself from the policies of the NDA government.

Addressing a press conference, RSS spokesman M.G. Vaidya said, "The RSS will make its views clear on all important issues as explicitly and unequivocally as possible." Asserting that the outfit would not be bound by the constraints and compulsions of coalition politics, he said, "The RSS will pursue its stand on issues like Ramjanmabhoomi, Jammu and Kashmir and swadeshi."

Although Mr Vaidya endorsed the economic policies of the Centre, he refused to commit himself on contentious issues like the hire-and-fire labour policy which the Centre has been pursuing vig-



orously. He said that the NDA government was competent enough to resolve such crucial issues. According to him, consulting labour unions on such matters would ensure that there was no labour unrest.

More importantly, he said, the RSS had, in a veiled manner, okayed the controversial privatisation process. Mr Vaidya said his party was not in favour of a social-

ist model of development and it did not believe in government control of all means of production.

Yet, he sought to disassociate the RSS from the NDA government's policies because Mr Vajpayee had made the Sangh-BJP relations explicit. In a recent interview, Mr Vajpayee had said, "I tell those in the Sangh Parivar who oppose the government (that) 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?"

Mr Vaidya clarified that although Mr Vajpayee was a *swayamsevak*, his was not an RSS government at the Centre. "The RSS will never have a government. It will not play the role of the opposition either. We have nothing to do with the policies of the NDA government. We don't exert any pressure," he maintained.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

11 SEP 2001

George joins SJM's anti-reforms chorus

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, September 5

THE PRIME Minister's most trusted trouble-shooter George Fernandes today joined hands with RSS-affiliate Swadeshi Jagran Manch to warn the Government of "serious consequences" unless the problem of unemployment was not tackled immediately.

Sounding more like his earlier avatar as a fiery trade union leader, rather than a key ruling front leader, the Samata Party leader severely condemned the Montek Singh Ahluwalia task

force report for making a "mockery" of the NDA's objective of generating employment.

He was speaking in a seminar on "Employment generation - burning issues", organised by the SJM. This was the first time that he spoke out against the changes sought in labour laws for reforms. He said the Montek panel's recommendations were too harsh and would lead to labour insecurity and loss of jobs. The World Bank "acolytes" did not wish to "see the tragedy at home", he said.

George's remark, coming soon after anti-reforms Sharad Ya-

adv's removal from the Civil Aviation Ministry to the Labour Ministry, should be worrying for the Vajpayee administration.

The other "unhappy" minister of the Janata stock is Ram Vilas Paswan, whose new ministry is Coal and Mines.

Yadav is yet to come out with the proposed changes in labour laws but is likely to oppose any hire-and-fire policy.

Only yesterday, dissatisfied with the pace of reforms, Prime Minister A B Vajpayee decided that a Bill would be introduced in Parliament's winter session for amending labour laws to

quicken the pace of reforms. He asked a group of ministers to go into the issue without delay.

Today, George disclosed that he had written to Planning Commission Deputy Chairman K C Pant on July 21 to "reprimand" Montek, who is a member of the Commission, for coming out with such a horrendous report when the NDA Agenda of Governance clearly spoke of "poor" policies to increase employment opportunities.

Besides, Montek took two years over a problem that needed to be addressed immediately, he said. "The Planning Commission

should not wait to address this issue till the 10th Plan when the mid-term appraisal of the 9th Plan admits money-spending schemes have gone down the drain because of anti-people policies."

Pant wrote back to George on August 23, saying that a steering panel had been set up to study the Montek report for a "final view".

George traced every single problem in the country, be it the terrorism in Kashmir and the North-East or the Naxalite problem in Andhra to unemployment.



GEORGE FERNANDES

The SJM convenor said the NDA Government should realise that World Bank's prescriptions had not worked anywhere in the world.

'Forged' letter whirlwind catches row-ridden govt

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 24: Battlelines between the NDA and the Opposition were redrawn after the Vajpayee government stumbled into another controversy, this time involving a "forged" letter written by Cabinet secretary T.R. Prasad to Brajesh Mishra, the Prime Minister's principal secretary. The letter questions the process of disinvestment adopted for Air-India.

Congress chief whip Priya Ranjan Das Munshi created a flutter last night when, during a Lok Sabha discussion on disinvestment, he produced a letter purportedly sent by Prasad to Mishra on July 7. According to the letter — copies of which were made available to the press by the BJP — disinvestment was not feasible because "Air-India is an asset which carries a lot of emotion being the national carrier of the country, hence, the argument that a minimum reserve price and single bidder will be appropriate does not hold good in ensuring a smooth disinvestment process through Parliament and government".

It went on to say: "We should look at the aviation policy as a whole rather than keep changing the policies to either suit the

process or the objective that we are trying to accomplish in a transparent manner."

Minister of state for disinvestment Arun Shourie tried to blunt the Opposition's protests by ordering a CBI inquiry. Shourie informed the House that he spoke to Prasad, who told him the document was "forged" as he had not written any such letter.

BJP sources said Shourie wrote to CBI officials requesting them to conduct an "expeditious" inquiry into the matter which had the "gravest" implications. According to PTI, the investigating agency today registered a case of forgery. CBI sources also did not rule out the possibility of Das Munshi being questioned.

The Congress, however, said the government should have first referred the matter to the Speaker as the letter was the property of the House.

"It involves a secret correspondence. What aspect will the CBI inquire into — whether the letter was forged or the signature was forged?" asked Congress sources. But the party was clear on one point: that the onus was on the government to prove that the letter was fabricated. The Congress was backed by the CPM, which argued that the letter should be sent to a privilege com-

mittee and not to the CBI.

The BJP reacted strongly to the Congress stand. Spokesman V.K. Malhotra said it was "deplorable" that the party should brandish a "forged" letter on the floor of the House. "The Congress should be sure of its facts and not base its allegations on forged documents," he said.

"They should have understood that the language in the letter cannot be one used by the Cabinet secretary. Instead of all this, Congress leaders could have placed their views on disinvestment in the debate."

Malhotra said the Congress treated issues related to forged documents like a "cottage industry". "First you had the St Kitts case. Then (Chhattisgarh chief minister) Ajit Jogi claimed he had documents to show that the Prime Minister's Office was involved in the Balco deal. We had challenged him but there has been no response so far," he said.

Government sources admitted that a CBI inquiry was unlikely to prove anything. "If it's proved that the letter is fake, at most Munshi will apologise. It's only a technical matter and, by the time the investigation is over, the whole thing would have passed out of public memory," said a Cabinet minister.

THE TELEGRAPH

25 AUG 1991

Protests against NDA 'code of conduct'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 3. The need for "norms" to help in the smooth functioning of the 24-party National Democratic Alliance suggested by the Bharatiya Janata Party president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi — and approved by the Prime Minister at the party's recent national executive committee meeting — are now to be adopted as a "code of conduct" by NDA members, but already protests are being heard that more than the "other" NDA members, it is the BJP which has been guilty of flouting the "canons of coalition politics".

Although all NDA members — barring the Shiv Sena which was absent — "unanimously" approved the August 1 resolution setting up a four-man committee to draft a "code of conduct" for the NDA, several constituents of the alliance are expressing their unhappiness.

"Coalitions can be run on trust and mutual understanding, not under rules and regulations (*kaanoon se nahin chala sakte*)," Mr. Mohan Prakash, spokesperson for the Janata Dal (United), said today. The coalition "dharma" (or code) should be followed by all constituents, he insisted, perhaps hinting that the leading party may itself be guilty. He pointed out that the JD(U) had not spoken out of turn, it had always adhered to the coalition 'dharma'.

During the Manipur crisis, the Samata Party was clearly at odds with the BJP publicly charging that the latter was instrumental in bringing down its Government in the State. "How can the BJP give us sermons on the dharma of coalition politics?" a Samata leader said.

Taking note of the rumblings against the proposed code coming from its partners, the BJP spokesperson, Mr. Vijay Kumar

Malhotra, said the four-man committee set up to draft the code — Mr. Sikander Bakht (BJP), Mr. George Fernandes (Samata Party), Mr. Arjun Charan Sethi (Biju Janata Dal) and Mr. Murasoli Maran (DMK) — had three leaders from the "allies" and only one from the BJP.

He added that the draft code of conduct would be placed before a meeting of NDA leaders, who would then accept the code after making any changes they may wish to.

Once the leaders of the NDA were to accept the code, naturally the NDA would expect all members, all Members of Parliament of the parties constituting the NDA to fall in line.

But this is an argument that certainly does not appeal to most MPs, no matter what their leaders may have in mind. How can the rights of MPs to raise issues on public importance be curtailed

simply because it may not suit a ruling party? Moreover, MPs of these parties will naturally be guided by their own leaders who may be (many of them are) outside Parliament.

Other MPs pointed out that even the party leading the coalition had consider the directions from the RSS, and that "this mother organisation" of the BJP could not be reined in by any code of conduct.

It is emphasised that the NDA has not yet been consulted on the PMK's "re-entry" into the alliance, though the Prime Minister himself stated this would be done, nor has the issue of a possible "re-entry" of the Trinamool Congress come up at any meeting. No NDA party was consulted on Mr. Ajit Singh's entry into the Cabinet. Is his party the Rashtriya Lok Dal now a member of the NDA? Nobody knows.

NDA code to rein in partners

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 1. — The NDA today backed Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's stand on discipline and decided to evolve a code of ethics for the partners. Mr Vajpayee withdrew his offer to quit but made it clear that if he was to stay, the allies must adhere to certain norms. The Prime Minister later told the Lok Sabha that he had changed his decision to quit after the NDA reposed faith in his leadership. "I am here to stay as Prime Minister."

He said he was sorry if he had caused anguish to the MPs by announcing his decision outside Parliament. "I had no intention to hurt the sentiments of the House."

He ended his brief statement in Hindi by saying: "It's monsoon now; clouds will gather and then disappear." In the Rajya Sabha, he said: "I treat this matter as closed."

At the NDA meeting, Mr Vajpayee reportedly said he couldn't tolerate his government's criticism from alliance partners.

He indicated that those who cannot stop criticising the government should leave.

A four-member committee, headed by Mr George Fernandes, will frame the code of ethics for the alliance partners in about two weeks. Other

members are Mr Shankar Bakht (BJP), Mr Murali Manohar (DMK) and Mr Arjun Charan Sethi (BJD).

The panel is likely to include in its recommendations a minimum waiting period for a party seeking re-entry into the NDA.

The BJP wanted to call the code of ethics "coalition dharm", but Mr Maran objected to the expression on the ground that "dharm" could mean "safefronisation". The party then settled on "canons of coalition politics".

Those present at the meeting slammed Shiv Sena MP, Mr Sanjay Nirupam, for hinting at PMO's involvement in the UTI scam. Their task became easier because the Sena boycotted the meeting.

Some leaders said that if Mr Nirupam didn't apologise for his statement in the Rajya Sabha, the NDA should take action against the Sena. The meeting adopted a resolution saying: "The NDA shares the Prime Minister's disappointment and distress over the irresponsible actions and behaviour of some individuals, which gives an impression of a lack of cohesiveness in our alliance... The NDA rededicates itself to work as a solid phalanx under the Atalji's leadership."

The meeting was called to take stock of the situation after Mr

Vajpayee announced at the BJP parliamentary party meeting yesterday that he would quit. He was miffed by Mr Nirupam's comments especially because the Sena has two ministers in the government.

Mr Fernandes quoted the Prime Minister as having said at the NDA meeting: "We shouldn't forget that the NDA is responsible for running the government of a country that has a billion people."

Mr Vajpayee expressed anger over the fact that NDA partners were not following the rules of coalition government. After the Cabinet takes a decision, some ministers criticise it publicly. Similarly, after the NDA takes a decision, those party to it often flout it.

Mr Fernandes said the Sena chief, Mr Bal Thackeray, had called Mr Vajpayee and expressed faith in his leadership. "I told Mr Thackeray that Mr Nirupam's baseless charges were uncalled for and that he should reprimand his MP. Mr Thackeray told me that he had already done so," the NDA convenor said.

The tone of the meeting was set by the J&K chief minister, Dr Farooq Abdullah, who praised Mr Vajpayee for his role as the NDA leader, his efforts to bring the economy back on the rails and for fighting terrorism in the "best possible way".



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani at the NDA meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday. — AP/PTI

PRIVILEGE NOTICE AGAINST MAHAJAN

NEW DELHI, Aug. 1. — The Congress member, Mr Suresh Pachouri, has moved a privilege notice against the parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Pramod Mahajan, for going to the Press with a statement on the Prime Minister's offer to resign. The statement, he said, violated the dignity of the House.

The Rajya Sabha Chairman, Mr Krishan Kant, said he was looking into the notice. Justifying his action, Mr Mahajan said he had not committed any impropriety since he had gone to the Press as the BJP chief whip and not as parliamentary affairs minister.

Mr Pachouri countered him, saying the statement made it clear that it was issued in his capacity as the parliamentary affairs minister and not as the chief whip.

— SNS

Mr LK Advani echoed Dr Abdullah.

PMK's status: The PMK has been taken back into the NDA, Mr George Fernandes said. The Trinamul is likely to be taken back soon. The RLD's status is not certain, though its leader, Mr Ajit Singh, had been made a Cabinet minister.

Mr Singh didn't attend the NDA meeting. He was apparently not invited. The PMK was represented by Mr E Ponnuswamy.

■ Editorial: Own man again!, page 6

Sena stays away from NDA meeting

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 1. — The Shiv Sena has kept the BJP and its allies guessing by boycotting today's NDA meeting and calling a press conference, to be addressed by Mr Bal Thackeray, in Mumbai tomorrow.

The Sena chief doesn't formally address the media very frequently. Hence, his decision has set alarm bell ringing in the NDA circles.

BJP leaders fear the Sena may announce withdrawal from the Cabinet, while continuing in the NDA.

There are indications that the Sena chief may not take any action against Mr Sanjay Nirupam (MP) who had hinted in the Rajya Sabha that some PMO officials had played a role in the UTI scam.

The Union power minister, Mr Suresh Prabhhu, was scheduled to attend the NDA meeting, but he was told by Mr Thackeray to abstain. Instead, the Sena parliamentary party held a meeting around the same as the NDA meeting. This may be a signal that the Sena is not happy with the alliance.

The Sena mouthpiece, *Saamna*, today carried an editorial expressing regret on Mr Nirupam's behalf. It said the MP himself would have apologised had the Rajya Sabha functioned normally.

There was, however, a significant twist in the party's stand. The paper said that when charges were levelled against Mr Vincent George, the CBI raided his premises. The implication, NDA leaders said, was that the Centre had ignored Mr Nirupam's allegations.

The Sena has reportedly taken exception to the NDA's decision to evolve a norm for the alliance MPs. It's also "unhappy" with Mr Yashwant Sinha and certain PMO officials and is unlikely to give up its reservations soon.

The Prime Minister may try to mollify Mr Thackeray by offering more ministerial berths to his MPs. The Sena supremo reportedly wants "meatier" ministries for his men than what they now have.

NDA leaders, however, said that since some "important" ministries, such as power and heavy industry, are with the Sena, it would be difficult to meet Mr Thackeray's wish without angering other partners.

THE STATESMAN

4 AUG 2001

PM tells allies to put up or shut up

Coalition members to frame code of conduct

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 1 AUGUST

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee on Wednesday put the NDA on notice, saying he will not tolerate indiscipline any more, and that those who don't agree should feel free to walk out. The message had, however, been somewhat diluted by evening when he gave in to the pressure from the minister of state Digvijay Singh allowing him to retain the additional charge of railways.

Besides, the NDA was still having to contend with a recalcitrant Shiv Sena. The saffron partner of the BJP remains unimpressed by the Prime Minister's display of firmness, and the NDA leadership, as of this evening, seemed to be in a mood to duck the challenge thrown at the just-asserted authority of Mr Vajpayee.

Striking an emphatic enough-is-enough note, Mr Vajpayee told the NDA leaders that he would quit for sure if the ruling coalition didn't change its ways. "There is little point in persisting with the NDA if indiscipline doesn't end. Those who are happy with the current state of affairs are welcome to elect a new leader. But as long as I am the leader, I will not put up with indiscipline any more, and those who disagree should better leave," was the brief message Mr Vajpayee put across with striking forthrightness.

His remarks expressed the same exasperation with the disarray in ruling coalition that the Prime Minister had displayed on Tuesday, but with a major difference. This time, it came with a firmness which left no doubts about that he meant business. Built in to the message was another signal — that the withdrawal of Tuesday's quit offer was not unconditional. It was amplified when Union home minister, L.K. Advani, struck the same lump-it-or-leave-it tone.

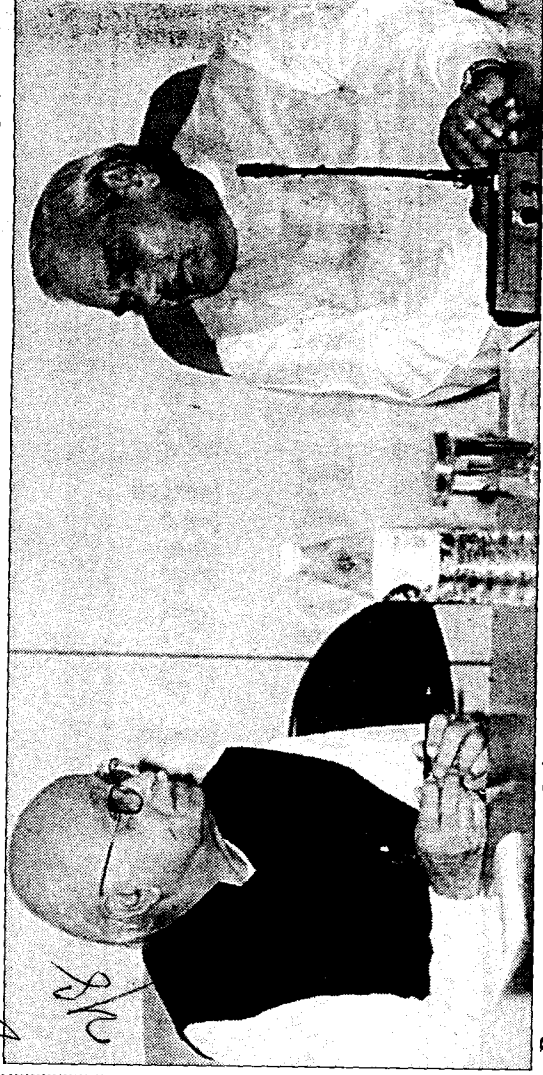
The unstituted support

expressed for the Prime Minister showed that his resignation offer had had the desired effect with the coalition partners agreeing to frame a code of conduct and promising to abide by it. But the solidarity show was spoiled by the Shiv Sena which stayed away, reneging on an understanding that its leader, Bal Thackeray, had given to the NDA convenor, George Fernandes. Mr Thackeray had on Tuesday called up Mr Vajpayee to express regret for the conduct of the Sena MP, Sanjay Nirupam, whose charge about the involvement of the PMO in the UTI fiasco is believed to have been the immediate provocation for the Prime Minister's emotional outburst on Tuesday. He followed that up by promising to censure the MP.

Mr Thackeray, however, sprang a surprise asking his representative, Suresh Prabhhu, to stay away from the meeting, and ruling out any action against Mr Nirupam at this stage. Besides, he has also asked the Sena MPs to keep quiet when the Lok Sabha discusses the US-64 fiasco.

The snub generated considerable resentment but the dominant mood was to avoid confrontation with Mr Thackeray and it found expression in the deletion of the criticism of Mr Nirupam's conduct from the draft of the solidarity resolution. In the evening, Mr Fernandes met Mr Thackeray in Mumbai. The NDA convenor is learnt to have apprised Mr Thackeray of Mr Vajpayee's determination to get rid of indiscipline.

Prime Minister, who looked tense on Tuesday, was a changed man after the NDA meeting. He disarmed the Opposition which wanted to have some mirth at his expense by acknowledging that he had indeed offered to resign. "Monsoon is on. Clouds will, of course, be there. But they do disappear," said Mr Vajpayee, implying that the crisis being talked about had already blown over.



PLOTTING STRATEGIES: Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and home minister L.K. Advani at the NDA meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday. — PTI

Sena delegate shuns meet

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 1 AUGUST

THE SHIV Sena, whose MP Sanjay Nirupam caused a flutter in the ruling alliance with his attack on the prime ministerial establishment, refused to participate in Wednesday's NDA meeting.

The Sena supremo, who had a telephonic talk with the Prime Minister and apologised over his MP's conduct, hardened his position on Wednesday morning and directed the party's nominee not to attend the meeting. The NDA members, who waited for Sena nominee Suresh Prabhhu for over 30 minutes, decided to go ahead with the deliberations without the representative of BJP's oldest ally.

Convenor George Fernandes will meet Mr Thackeray late on Wednesday. Government sources said Mr Fernandes' Mumbai mission was aimed at rammung home the point that constant pinpricks from the Sena were creating a considerable strain.

But those who have been dealing with the Sena chief are unhappy. It is felt Mr Nirupam could not alone have moved Mr Thackeray. Some are even seeing the hand of Mr Thackeray's son Uddhav in the episode. They are suggesting the involvement of the counsel of jailed former UTI chief Satish Manashinde in the anti-PMO campaign. They claimed that Mr Manashinde enjoyed great rapport with Uddhav Thackeray.

Vajpayee, Advani play the same tune

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 1 AUGUST

THE VAJPAYEE-Advani duet was in full flow on Wednesday as they played the firmness song at the NDA meeting. The two leaders spoke the same language and sent out a clear message to the party, Parivar and the allies that there will be no more compromises for the sake of running the coalition.

Mr Advani, who lavished praise on the Prime Minister's leadership, said Mr Vajpayee cannot be expected to put up with the tantrums of various constituents of the alliance. The home minister, whose words shape the Parivar's reflexes, also promised to rein in the trouble-makers within the Parivar. "I have been interacting with them on this issue," the home minister told the participants.

The home minister also made it plain that those who want to do business with the NDA will have to observe the norms of proper political conduct. "You cannot stay within the alliance and persist with the old ways," the home minister said.

The home minister's remarks indicated the level of exasperation in the leadership over the conduct of individual ministers and leaders of the alliance parties. While some ministers are playing solo, hurrying the interests of good governance,

the attack on the government from within is creating a crisis of credibility.

The Union home minister, who has so far refrained from commenting on the affairs of the NDA, said all components of the alliance, including his own BJP, should be mindful of the image of the government. "Those who want to stay within the alliance should abide by a code of conduct," he said.

The home minister also made it clear that there was no automatic route for grabbing ministerial berths for those who were rejoining the NDA. "There should be a cooling off period," he said, indicating that the PMK, which had rejoined the NDA, and the Trinamool Congress, which wants a re-entry into the alliance, will have to wait to gain ministerial berths.

This laid the groundwork for a hard-hitting resolution by the NDA and tough talk by the Prime Minister. The resolution adopted at the meeting shared the Prime Minister's disappointment and distress over the "irresponsible actions and behaviour of some individuals" which gave an impression of a lack of cohesiveness in the alliance.

At the meeting, Mr George Fernandes, Mr Farooq Abdullah and Mr Jaswant Singh agreed with the top two BJP leaders,

11/10

Resigned India

118

Hindi films have taught us that the best way to bring around a wayward son is for the mother to go on a fast-unto-death. Filled with remorse, the son will do as told, including give up the girl he loves. Emotional blackmail achieves wonders in politics too, as Atal Behari Vajpayee's resignation threat so usefully demonstrates. The prime minister threw up his hands after a Shiv Sena MP publicly charged the PMO with involvement in the on-going UTI scandal. Atalji had merely to utter the word 'resign' for BJP parliamentarians to go into apology mode. They beseeched him not even to think about the drastic step. Renunciation is part of the great Indian tradition. Unquestioned though his moral standing was, Mahatma Gandhi played on people's emotions each time he went on one of his innumerable fasts. Of course not everybody can get away with this gentle art of moral arm-twisting. No less than Jawaharlal Nehru learnt this to his dismay when he tried to protect Krishna Menon, then under attack for the Chinese debacle. When Nehru offered to resign rather than let go of Menon, some in his own party indicated that they were prepared for the eventuality. Finally Menon went and Nehru stayed. Mr Vajpayee has often been compared to Nehru and much like him Mr Vajpayee too towers over the party — and by extension the NDA — he leads. The Vajpayee-BJP popularity gap has repeatedly come through in opinion polls, which must explain why even the suggestion that the prime minister could go causes the party to react in panic.

This is not the first time that Mr Vajpayee has offered to step down. He did so in the immediate aftermath of the Babri Masjid demolition. Back then, the BJP was not in office, and indeed Mr Vajpayee was himself somewhat marginalised within the party. And yet, he has always been something of a patriarch to the party, a part of the BJP's history and a witness to its many ups and downs. So a BJP without Mr Vajpayee was unthinkable even at that time. Once the NDA was formed, of course, Mr Vajpayee became the pivot around which the constituents hung. Little wonder then that each time he had a run-in with the sangh parivar, Mr Vajpayee would unleash his brahmastra — the threat of resignation. And inevitably, Mr Vajpayee's critics would be silenced. It is too early to say whether Mr Vajpayee has once again effectively dealt with the growing unrest in the NDA. There have been far too many things going wrong with the government, starting with the state of the economy and the long list of financial scams of which US-64 is only the latest. It has also been obvious for sometime now that politicians enjoy immunity of the kind not available to ordinary citizens, and this includes high-profile businessmen. Governments that quite happily jail a Rajan Pillai or an L M Thapar, will themselves be found to be involved in scams without anyone having to take responsibility. And when the pressure grows, one minister or another merely needs to brandish the weapon of resignation to wash off his sins. It's perhaps time those in office thought of the verdict that might await them in the 'people's court' — the highest court of judgment by their own reckoning.

Tata's Ratan

THE TIMES OF INDIA

21 NOV 2011

Vajpayee offers to go, allies say no

- PM says he can't get NDA to function coherently
- Thackeray distances party from Nirupam remark

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 31

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee today stunned the BJP and NDA by offering to resign because he had not been able to make the ruling coalition function in a 'coherent and disciplined manner'.

But soon it was business as usual. Senior Cabinet colleagues 'persuaded' him to abandon the move after BJP MPs said he could not be allowed to leave. In the evening, Vajpayee chaired a routine Cabinet meeting.

NDA allies called on him to reaffirm their support. A meeting of the NDA Coordination Committee has been called for tomorrow. It is expected to formally reiterate its faith in the leadership of Vajpayee.

Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray spoke to Vajpayee over the telephone and distanced his party from Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Nirupam's criticism of the PMO in the context of the UTI controversy. It was Nirupam's attack in the Rajya Sabha yesterday that, apparently, prompted Vajpayee's resignation move. Sena MPs Anant Geete and Satish Pradhan said Sanjay Nirupam's opinions did not reflect their party's stand.

Apparently upset by attacks on his Government from a section of the BJP and NDA partners on the UTI issue, Vajpayee told a meeting of the BJP Par-

FEEDBACK

CHANDRABABU NAIDU: No need for PM to quit, but the UTI scandal must be thoroughly probed.

"Frequent scams like the UTI scandal should not be allowed to happen. The Central Government must take necessary corrective steps."

MAMATA BANERJEE: Please don't resign, we stand firmly behind you.

CONGRESS: Prime Minister's move a farcical drama aimed at diverting attention from the need to probe PMO's role in the UTI scandal.

CPI(M): Resignation offer a ploy to prevent NDA allies attacking Government on the UTI issue. If PM was serious about quitting he should not have said so at a BJP meeting, but faced the House

Parliamentary Party this morning that he wanted to quit. He then left abruptly for Parliament. LK Advani, Jaswant Singh, Murlu Manohar Joshi and Pramod Mahajan followed him to persuade him to change his mind.

Vajpayee spoke at the meeting after some BJP members complained about the behaviour of non-BJP ministers. Led by BJP Rajya Sabha MP Maheshwar Singh (Himachal Pradesh) and Lok Sabha MP RC Tomar (Ghaziabad), the BJP members said Communication Minister Ram Vilas Paswan had ignored them while constituting the telephone advisory com-

mittees (TACs) and had not behaved with them properly. While Maheshwar Singh was speaking, Mahajan said Vajpayee wished to speak.

Vajpayee then said, "Since I am the Prime Minister, I am answerable for all shortcomings. I have not been able to make the NDA function in a coherent and disciplined manner. I have decided that it is better that I leave now. It is for the party to decide its future course and find a successor."

Vajpayee also said his health had been the subject of much speculation. The BJP MPs appealed to him not to resign, but Vajpayee said he was not going to change his decision.

Initially, many BJP MPs did not think that Vajpayee was serious, but they soon realised the seriousness of the situation.

Later, Mahajan said "The Prime Minister did express his desire to quit office in view of his 'inability' to make the NDA function in a coherent and disciplined manner". He added, "Party members reacted sharply to the PM's remarks and said that Vajpayee could not be allowed to leave. Advani, Jaswant Singh, MM Joshi and I called on the PM and persuaded him to abandon his proposal." Mahajan said the UTI issue had not been discussed at the BJP Parliamentary Party meeting.

On Page 9: Why the Prime Minister wanted to quit



PMK returns to NDA

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 25. Five months after it quit the ruling combination at the Centre, the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) today returned to the National Democratic Alliance. The return of the PMK which has five MPs in the Lok Sabha was announced by the NDA convenor, Mr. George Fernandes, here this evening after the PMK chief, Dr. S. Ramadoss, and the MPs called on the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee. The meeting lasted 30 minutes.

A statement from the NDA convenor said that Dr. Ramadoss had expressed the desire of the PMK to rejoin the NDA. As chairman of the alliance, the Prime Minister welcomed them. Earlier, Dr. Ramadoss and his MPs called on Mr. Fernandes.

The PMK had quit the NDA on February 5 this year

with its two Central Ministers, Mr. N.T. Shanmugam and Mr. E. Ponnuswamy, resigning from the Council of Ministers. On the question of seeking berth in the Ministry, Mr. Ponnuswamy told *The Hindu* that the matter was left to the Prime Minister.

The PMK pulled out of the NDA ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections and later had an understanding with the AIADMK. As the PMK's aspirations of coming to power in Pondicherry were dashed after the polls, it once again started moving towards the NDA.

With the return of the PMK, the NDA has reclaimed part of its strength that got depleted between February and March this year when both the PMK and the Trinamool Congress snapped their links with the alliance. Meanwhile, the NDA acquired a new constituent in Mr. Ajit Singh's Rashtriya Lok Dal last Sunday.

ONLY AN EXPRESSION OF DISPLEASURE: FERNANDES

NDA to keep off tea party

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 11. The ruling National Democratic Alliance this evening decided to keep away from the Pakistani High Commissioner's "high tea" for Gen. Pervez Musharraf here on July 14. Interpreting the invitation for the All-Party Hurriyat Conference as an attempt to project the conglomerate as the sole representative voice of Jammu and Kashmir, the NDA decided it was "unacceptable" and as "an expression of displeasure" the ruling alliance constituents would not attend the reception.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, presided over the meeting. The rationale behind the decision was explained by the convener, Mr. George Fernandes. According to him, the Pakistani High Commissioner had opted not to invite anyone else from Jammu and Kashmir, not even any representative of the elected Government in the State; this was seen as a calculated move to accord to the Hurriyat a status, which was unacceptable to the political leadership (as different from the Government).

Mr. Fernandes cautioned that the NDA's decision should neither be seen as a "snub" nor as a "boycott", but just "an expression of displeasure, if at all". Mr. Fernandes pointed out that the Government of India was the host for the Pakistani President's visit, and there would be no dilution in respect and protocol for the visiting head of state. He also hoped the boycott of the "tea party" would

not overshadow the summit.

The NDA convener refused to ask the Opposition parties to stay away from the "tea party". Mr. Fernandes clarified his remarks yesterday (in Lucknow where he thought it was all right to attend the reception) as his personal view. The irony is that so far only Mr. Fernandes and Ms. Jaya Jaitly are understood to be the sole NDA functionaries to have received the invitation.

According to information available with the NDA leaders, except Mr. Jagmohan, all other six MPs from the capital are believed to be on the invitation list. Also on the list are believed to be Mr. L. K. Advani (in the

category of political leaders), and Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi, BJP president. From the Government side, those invited are the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, the Foreign Secretary, the Joint Secretary (Pakistan), the chief protocol officer, and two directors on the Pakistan desk in the Ministry of External affairs. However, Mr. Singh is most unlikely to put in an appearance at the High Commissioner's party as he would be leaving for Agra in the afternoon of July 14.

Mr. Vajpayee is understood to have briefed the NDA leaders on the nature of the proposed talks with the visiting President. Apart

from the Kashmir issue, other items of the agenda could be trade, cultural relations and terrorism. The Prime Minister also told the NDA partners about the confidence-building measures initiated by the Government in the last few days.

Mr. Fernandes revealed that the Prime Minister had decided to include the External Affairs Minister, the Home Minister, the Commerce Minister and the Finance Minister in the official delegation for the summit. Asked with whom these Ministers would interact, he said they would be in Agra to advise the Prime Minister.

Congress rethink on invitation

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 11. It seems that some BJP leaders started shouting too early and too loudly that they would not attend the "tea-party" being hosted by the Pakistan High Commissioner, Mr. Ashraf Jehangir Qazi, for till this evening none of the party leaders had been invited — although some names are supposedly on a 'list'.

At the all-party meeting called by the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, on July 9, the BJP representative, Mr. V.K. Malhotra, had said that his partymen would not attend the "tea" to protest against the invitations sent out to some Hurriyat leaders in spite of India letting Pakistan know this was not to its liking.

But Mr. Malhotra confirmed

today that so far he had not received any invitation. In fact, party president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi, said (when asked) that "no BJP leader had as yet received an invitation." Would he go to the party which was being thrown in honour of the Pakistan President, Gen. Pervez Musharraf? Mr. Krishnamurthi's response was that he had no invitation and if and when he got one, he would decide. But Mr. Malhotra was clear. No one from the party would go. And another party leader, national secretary, Mr. Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, also stated today that he would not go (he too has no invitation).

Leaders of other parties have confirmed that they have received invitations, and given this it seemed rather odd that the BJP leaders had been left

out. It has been suggested that since they said they would not go, they were not invited.

The Congress tonight said that it would review its decision to send some of its representatives to the party. Reacting to the NDA's decision to stay away, Congress Working Committee member, Mr. Natwar Singh, said his party would take a fresh look into the matter in the wake of the development. He told *The Hindu* that Gen. Musharaff "was not taking into account the sensitivity of the host nation", by insisting on the inclusion of the Hurriyat and the exclusion of all other representatives from Jammu and Kashmir. "This does not augur well for his visit, and the Congress party will take a decision in keeping with the national sentiments on the matter".

Mamata seals deal for NDA return

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, July 5

MF-1

THE DEAL has been clinched. Mamata Banerjee is rejoining the NDA and she will be her party's sole Cabinet minister. This time too, she'll be in charge of Railways.

The decision, party insiders say, will be made public at a press conference a day or two ahead of July 23, when the Monsoon session of Parliament begins.

But, in sealing the alliance with the Trinamool, the NDA has made sure that renegade MP Ajit Panja too finds a place in the Union ministry. Mamata had insisted that Panja — who had revolted against her —

must not be given a ministerial berth, as long as he was in the Trinamool.

So, as per the arrangement, Panja would be formally expelled from the Trinamool. He'll subsequently form his own political organisation and rejoin the NDA ministry.

Some NDA leaders said Mamata, though she would join the Cabinet alone, would ultimately ensure a minister of state berth for one of her leaders. That would probably happen after the UP Assembly polls.

The BJP central leadership reportedly suggested the solution to the problem. For Mamata was stonewalling the patch-up citing the Panja factor. "Giving a ministe-

rial berth to him would amount to rewarding a rebel," a Mamata aide explained.

The NDA, eager to recognise Panja's unstinted support to the Vajpayee Government, came up with the formula, which Mamata readily accepted.

Most Trinamool MPs, apparently aren't averse to dumping Panja, for they are pro-NDA and realise that unless this is done, it would be virtually impossible to persuade Mamata.

The Trinamool National Committee, comprising the MPs and senior organisation leaders, will meet soon to finalise the return. This explains why Mamata accepted the party State Committee's recommendation to expel Panja. "It was coming.

He should have restrained himself," Trinamool all-India general secretary Dinesh Trivedi said.

But for Panja himself, an expulsion will come as a blessing. He has already floated a parallel outfit within the Trinamool, formed its core committee and is said to be working on strategy to contest the panchayat polls.

"For now, my boys will do missionary work. And, when the polls come, they will be part of a well-oiled election machinery," he said. Though Panja himself refused to say much, rumours are that he'll take independent charge of either the coal or the surface transport ministry.

NDA plans step-by-step Jaya clampdown

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, July 2

THE NDA Coordination Committee today failed to reach a consensus on clamping Central rule in Tamil Nadu, but recommended "stern action" against the Jayalalithaa Government to make it fall in line. But at the same time, it suggested that the Centre should adopt a "step-by-step approach".

The NDA will press for withdrawal of all cases against jailed DMK chief M Karunanidhi, Murasoli Maran and T R Baalu and not rest content with the release of the two Union Ministers alone.

Till today, the detention of the two ministers was the only reason for the NDA to clamour for Article 356 in Tamil Nadu. But, the consensus that emerged from today's deliberations was that short of withdrawal of cases, the

Centre should not calm down.

Today's meeting left little scope for an early end to the conflict with Jayalalithaa. Tomorrow, the Union Cabinet meets to mull ways of tightening the screw on the Tamil Nadu Government. The idea is to invoke the right constitutional provisions to force the AIADMK Government to revoke the cases against the arrested leaders, release DMK supporters and end media curbs.

Senior BJP leaders said they believed the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister could be pressured into dropping the cases. For, the nationwide outrage caused by the brutal treatment of Karunanidhi had left her isolated.

The NDA gameplan envisages the Cabinet invoking Article 256, which allows the Centre to pass an executive order binding on the State. The Tamil Nadu Government would then have to fol-

low a particular course of action desired by the Centre.

Option two deals with invoking Article 355. This too makes it mandatory for the State to abide by the Centre's directives. Failing which, President's rule can be clamped under Article 356.

The issue is not just the release of Karunanidhi and the two Union Ministers. It is also about withdrawal of all "false and fraudulent cases against them, NDA convener George Fernandes said. Fernandes headed a fact-finding mission to Chennai yesterday.

In what appeared to be a swift damage control effort, 14 AIADMK leaders, headed by the State Law Minister today reached the capital and presented their version of the recent events in Chennai. They called on President K R Narayanan and Law Minister Arun Jaitley. They brought along with them a video-

cassette released by the police, which claimed that the Union Ministers had provoked the trouble.

The Union Law Minister told the AIADMK team that there was no choice before Jayalalithaa but to drop the cases. The Centre wouldn't allow a state of constitutional anarchy in which Union Ministers or former Chief Ministers could be arrested by State Governments.

However, the AIADMK leaders stood their ground. Jayalalithaa was not seeking a "compromise" deal with New Delhi, they said.

Fernandes later disagreed that there were differences among NDA partners on dismissing the Jayalalithaa Government. "Everybody wants stern action. The NDA team to Chennai saw merit in the demand for invoking Article 356 to save democracy in Tamil Nadu."

NDA wants President's rule in Tamil Nadu

SNS & AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, July 2. — The NDA today favoured imposition of President's rule on Tamil Nadu, while the Union Cabinet meeting, scheduled for this evening, has been postponed for tomorrow to enable Mr LK Advani to attend it.

The meeting was postponed after Mr Advani spoke to the home secretary and Mr George Fernandes from Dubai. The Prime Minister reportedly thinks that Mr Advani's presence at the meeting would add strength to whatever decision the Cabinet takes to tackle the

Tamil Nadu situation.

Mr Advani had advocated strong action against Tamil Nadu when he spoke to Mr Jaswant Singh and Mr Fernandes.

The Prime Minister has asked the Attorney General, Mr Soli Sorabjee, to cut short his London trip and reach capital tomorrow to attend the Cabinet meeting.

The NDA team that probed Saturday's incidents in Chennai has recommended imposition of Central rule on the state. The team, led by Mr Fernandes, submitted its report to the Prime Minister today.

The new TN Governor, Dr C

Rangarajan, who will take office tomorrow, is expected to send another report to the Centre.

The NDA met under the chairmanship of Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The Union law minister, who attended the meeting, said the Centre could issue a directive

under Article 256 or 355. The state's failure to comply with a directive issued under Article 355 would tantamount to failure of the constitutional machinery, he said.

The Centre will decide its course of action after tomorrow's meeting.

Mr Fernandes, the NDA convener, said that the consensus opinion at the meeting was for "stern action against the Jayalalitha government even if that means using Article 356".

He, however, clarified he had no authority to tell the government what to do. "It's up to the Cabinet to decide what action could be taken... in Tamil Nadu."

He denied reports from Chennai saying Mr Murasoli Maran and Mr TR Baalu had been released. "There is no change in the situation," Mr Maran had faxed a two-page message to Mr

Fernandes giving a detailed account of what happened in Chennai on Saturday. The report was discussed at the meeting.

Mr Fernandes hinted that the Centre might direct the TN government to take action against the police officers who heckled and assaulted Mr M Karunanidhi and Mr Maran.

Mr Arun Jaitley said that according to medical reports, Mr Maran had received blows on his face and had several stitches. "If the situation is allowed to continue then a day may come when any state government can say it has a case against the Union home minister with them."

or even the Prime Minister and then arrest them. This would mean a collapse of the federal structure."

Mr Fernandes admitted there were diverse views on invoking Article 356, but there was consensus on taking a stern action against Tamil Nadu.

The DMK today submitted a memorandum, signed by four MPs who haven't been arrested, to the Prime Minister demanding President's Rule in the state. Mr P Shiva, an MP, said: "Police today did a favour to us by releasing the video footage. It shows that he was most cooperative with them."

THE STATESMAN

NDA in trouble over N-E ceasefire

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 18. — Rumblings within the NDA have intensified over the extension of Centre's ceasefire with the NSCN-IM beyond the Nagaland borders. The violence in Manipur has posed a serious challenge to the Centre, especially the home ministry, besides exposing it to all-round criticism.

Mr George Fernandes today iterated the Samata's opposition to the decision to bring Nagaland's neighbouring states within the ceasefire's ambit. "Why only Samata, all political groups, not only in Manipur but other states, were opposed to it ... Even the chief ministers of some states have voiced their concern over it."

He called for "serious efforts" to dispel apprehensions in the minds of the people over the decision and check violence in Manipur. "I'm of the opinion that peace should be given a chance but only after consulting all

parties concerned," Mr Fernandes said. He, however, felt an NDA meeting could not be called now because the Prime Minister is away from Delhi. He didn't repeat his party's earlier demand for an all-party meeting.

Another NDA partner, JD-U, favoured a review of the decision even as the BJP is desperate trying damage-control exercises. The party today urged the government to ensure that the ceasefire doesn't affect Manipur's territorial integrity or that of any other north-eastern states.

Calling for a review of the ceasefire's frame-work, the party spokesman Mr Mohan Prakash said the Centre should order security forces to retaliate if the NSCN activists attack tribals in Manipur or Naga-nominated areas of other states.

Mr Prakash, unlike his party colleagues, didn't blame the Centre for the situation or demand an all-party or NDA meeting to discuss the issue.

"We're in the government and the platform of the Cabinet meeting is available to our representatives to discuss the matter". Mr Prakash blamed "some parties which instigated the matter by going overboard". He said: "The Samata Party didn't maintain the kind of restraint expected from a ruling ally".

One of the reasons for the trouble, he said, was the absence of an elected government in the state.

Meanwhile, a troubled BJP today said the ceasefire's extension beyond Nagaland "won't compromise with Manipur's territorial integrity."

The party general secretary, Mr Sunil Shastri, denied there was a "hidden agenda" behind the decision. "The BJP would like to state that speculations in this regard are totally unfounded and there is no plan to divest any portion of Manipur or any other state and include them in Nagaland."

THE STATESMAN

19 11 22

Nitish hints at Mamata return to NDA

Rakeb Hossain
Duan (Kharagpur), June 14

NITISH KUMAR today hinted that Mamata Banerjee might well be on her way back to the NDA as Railway Minister. After inaugurating a halt station at Duan in the Howrah-Kharagpur section of South Eastern Railway, he said, "I would be happy if she comes back."

The statement assumes significance given the fact that it is generally held that the Samata Party would be a major hurdle to Mamata's return, more so because Kumar himself led the diatribe against the Trinamool leader till recently.

Today, the current Railway Minister not only uttered a single word against his predecessor, but also assured that the projects mooted by Mamata as part of her Bengal Package would not be halted. He also said, "I just hold the added responsibility of the Railways along with Agriculture since Mamata resigned from her post. But I would like to concentrate on agriculture, which needs more attention. I don't have any personal interest in latching on to the Railway Ministry and would be happy if I could concentrate on agriculture."

He also assured Trinamool MP Bikram Sarkar, "We want to stay close to each other. It's up to them



SUBHANKAR CHAKRABORTY/HINDUSTAN TIMES

Railway Minister Nitish Kumar at the inauguration of the Duan station on Thursday.

to decide." Sarkar, who was also present at the function, suggested that it was just a matter of time before the Trinamool organisation set-up to fight the Left Front needed a strong

Mixed response to NDA return

OUR BUREAU

June 2: Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee's bonhomie with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee has evoked a mixed response, with the Biju Janata Dal wanting her to rejoin the NDA and the Bengal BJP opposing her reinduction into the coalition.

The Bengal BJP has come out strongly against the reinduction of Mamata Banerjee into the NDA. Reacting to the one-on-one meeting between Mamata and Vajpayee yesterday, West Bengal BJP vice-president Muzaffar Khan said: "On the same day she has a one-to-one meeting with the Prime Minister and a similar one with the Congress President. What does she want to prove — that she is indecisive or playing a bigger game? She cannot take us for a ride."

Mamata is seeking a reinduction into the NDA for the "limited" purpose of securing a Cabinet berth, he said.

"She is dying to get back into power just to prove to her MPs and MLAs that she still matters somewhere. She ditched us before the elections and went along with the Congress thinking she will become the chief minister with their support. But when that gameplan failed she wants to come back to the NDA," the BJP leader said.

Khan stressed that the rank and file in Bengal was opposed to Mamata's return to the NDA for two reasons: "First, we recently fought against each other and traded abuses during the poll campaign. Second, the elections proved that the Congress gained much more from the alliance with Mamata while her party's performance was nothing to write

home about. So what is all this hype about Mamata being the only real opposition to the Left?"

The BJP leader felt that if Mamata came back to the NDA it would hamper the party's growth in Bengal. "We should build a base on our own rather than ride on Mamata's back all the time. We should not demoralise our cadre again," he said.

Khan said he had conveyed the state unit's "sentiments" to BJP vice-president in charge of Bengal Kailashpati Mishra.

However, Union minister for steel B.K. Tripathi and BJD MP from Puri, said in Midnapore today that his party — a constituent of the NDA — would support Mamata's re-entry into the coalition.

"Mamata Banerjee will get support from the BJD if she wants to come back to the NDA. We have nothing to say against her," Tripathi said.

The BJD leader described Mamata as a "good Parliamentarian and successful railway minister". "We were a bit hurt when Orissa was neglected in this year's railway budget in terms of new trains. However, some trains, introduced by her, are running through the state," he said.

Expressing happiness over Mamata's meeting with Vajpayee yesterday, the minister showered praises on her for her honesty and determination. "She is an honest and courageous lady who can call a spade a spade. She will be an asset to the NDA if she is taken back," he said.

Referring to the industrial climate in Bengal under the new government led by Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, Tripathi hoped there would be some "welcome changes".

THE TELEGRAPH
THE TELEGRAPH

THE main objective of the BJP after the debacle in the Assembly elections in the five states is to try and make the National Democratic Alliance government secure against a possible bid by the Congress for power at the Centre.

The NDA managers plan a ministry reshuffle in June to parade new allies and will try to prick the Opposition balloon.

However, any such attempt is unlikely to give stability to the ruling coalition unless it is able to keep the Telugu Desam (29 members in the Lok Sabha) in good humour and ensure that it does not walk out despite attractive propositions from the rival camp.

To succeed, the Opposition has to work out a formula whereby the TDP, the Samajwadi Party, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the AIADMK join forces to topple the NDA.

An alliance of the Congress and the Left will not help.

First, the Opposition will have to offer an attractive proposition to the TDP, which has established itself as a tough bargainer. Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's repeated attempt to

Flock management NDA's prime task

Political pundits feel the ruling combine at the Centre will fall if the Congress makes a serious bid for power and the Opposition unites in the name of secularism. To thwart any such attempt, NDA managers are likely to have a show of strength when members of the new allies are inducted in the government in June, writes SUDESH K VERMA

Singh Surjeet persuade the Congress to accept him as Prime Minister for the sake of political survival? This leads to the other question whether the Congress will be prepared to

support a leader outside the party as the Prime Minister. The BJP has no answer to this, should such an eventuality arise. Some BJP ministers in the government sincerely hope Mr Naidu will not resort to adventurism at the Centre and instead try to concentrate on Andhra Pradesh.

But one cannot be certain. He may ask one of his nominees to take over as chief minister and agree to go to the Centre. After all, a third term for the TDP in the state is almost ruled out.

One BJP minister meekly said that in that case, the BJP prefers to support him as a prime ministerial candidate rather than allow the Opposition to take over.

This proposition has few takers as it repudiates the BJP's much-touted theory that for the success of a coalition, the single-largest party must form the nucleus. Political pundits speculate that the NDA will fall if the Congress makes a serious bid for power and the Opposition unites in the name of secularism.

They argue that the Congress was not serious after the *Tehelka* exposé as it wanted to test the political waters in the Assembly elections and this postponed the NDA's downfall.

The Assembly election results are sure to boost the Opposition and pitchfork its confidence. Contrary to exit poll results, the AIADMK has secured a two-thirds majority in Tamil Nadu, as

also the Left Front in West Bengal. The Congress has secured the same in Kerala. The BJP had faintly hoped that the results in Assam and Tamil Nadu might turn in its favour.

Hence the BJP's attempt to deny that the elections were in anyway a commentary on the performance of the Central government.

At best, it could be interpreted as the anti-incumbency factor against the respective state governments, said Union Minister M Venkaiah Naidu.

Even the defeat at Tiruchirappalli, held by the late PR Kumaramangalam of the BJP, is being explained away as the general wave against the DMK government. The BJP is putting up a brave face. Some soul searching is called for.

Mr Vajpayee has challenged the Opposition to bring down the government if they have the numbers. His statement, however, has given credence to the speculation that political players in Delhi are actively trying to destabilise the NDA combine.

Mr Vajpayee's confidence emanates from the contradictions within the anti-NDA forces. While the NDA is counting on the antagonism between the Congress and the Samajwadi Party and between Congress president Sonia Gandhi and AIADMK supremo J Jayalalitha, it is also trying to shore up the NDA's numbers through defections in the Trinamul Congress and the Rashtriya Janata Dal.

The power of Mr Surjeet's persuasive skill will be put to test when he attempts to bring Mrs Gandhi and Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav together,

despite mutual dislike.

For this, the Congress may have to leave the political space in Uttar Pradesh to Mr Yadav, whose main aim at present is to re-establish his political authority when the state goes to polls early next year.

This may help him win more numbers in the Lok Sabha elections later and keep alive his ambition of becoming Prime Minister.

The Samajwadi Party's victory in the Lok Sabha by-election in Shahjahanpur, which fell vacant after the death of senior Congress leader Jitendra Prasad is certain to further boost Mr Yadav's confidence and may call for a Congress rethink.

The only bottleneck would be Mr Yadav's opposition to Mrs Gandhi because of her foreign descent. The Left has dropped this point in the name of fighting communalism.

Can the Left then persuade Mr Yadav to do likewise? Nationalist Congress Party leader Sharad Pawar did, after all, forgot differences on the issue to form an NCP-Congress government in Maharashtra.

However, an Opposition grouping that includes the Samajwadi party may bring the Bahujan Samaj Party (14 MPs) closer to the NDA as both are fighting each other for the crucial minority votes in Uttar Pradesh.

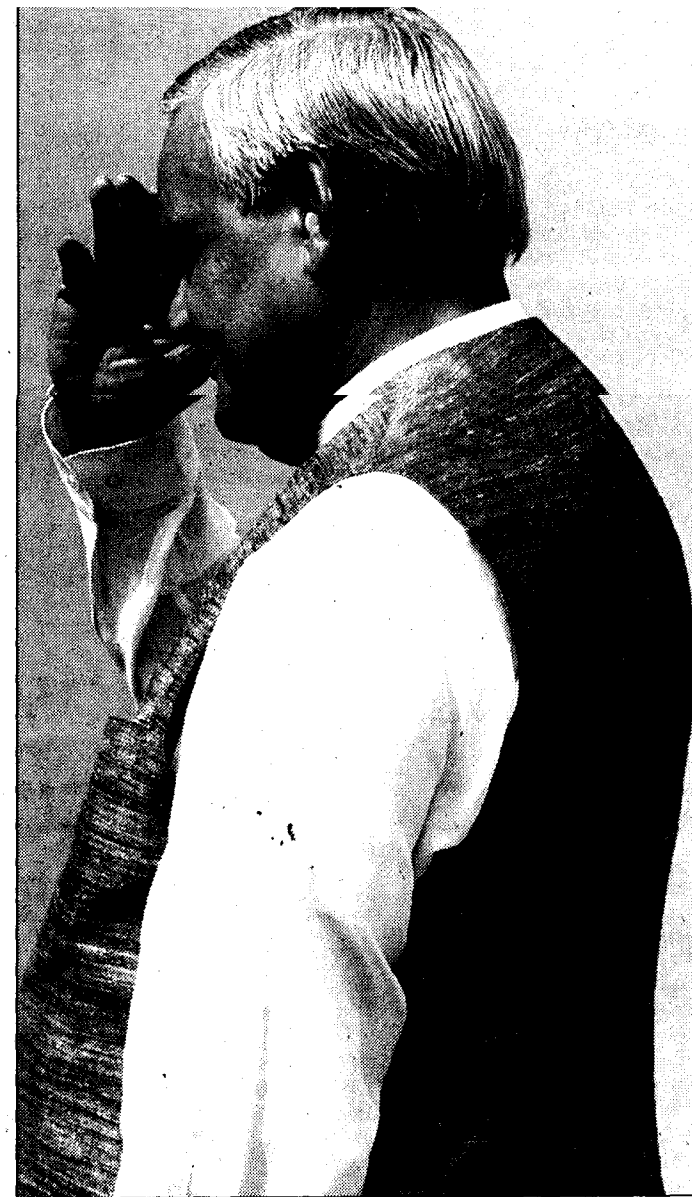
Even if the BSP does not join, it would prefer to abstain during voting. The possibility of the SP and the BSP joining hands in Uttar Pradesh seems unlikely in the near future.

BJP leaders calculate that it will be difficult for the AIADMK and the Congress to join hands because of the antagonism between the two chiefs.

Miss Jayalalitha has publicly ridiculed Mrs Gandhi's foreign origin, one senior party leader argued.

To counter the Opposition's attempt to dislodge the NDA, its managers are likely to have a show of strength when members of the new allies are inducted in the government in June.

The Rashtriya Lok Dal (two members) of Ajit Singh is slated to join the government as the BJP needs Mr Singh for the Uttar Pradesh elections as well. So is it a near



Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee has challenged the Opposition to bring down the government if they have the numbers.

certainly about four of the Trinamul Congress members and three of the Rashtriya Janata Dal members following the RLD.

The NDA is trying to persuade the NCP (8 members) to join it. However, no equation with the NCP is possible at the cost of the Shiv Sena which has 15 members in the Lok Sabha. And the NCP, which shares power with the Congress in Maharashtra, will any day find it easier to support the Congress at the national level as well.

The NDA had the support of 307 (see tally) members in the Lok Sabha before the announcement of the Assembly elections.

This included outside support of the TDP (29), the Indian National Lok Dal (5) and three Independents.

After desertions by the Trinamul Congress (9), the PMK (5) and the MDMK (4) the numbers came down by 18. The NDA is not counting out the PMK and the MDMK yet because their leaders enjoy personal rapport with the Prime Minister. A split in the Trinamul

Congress will ensure that the NDA number is down merely by five, if four of them join the coalition. Tughlaq editor Cho Ramaswamy, who

is close to the BJP leaders, the PMK and the MDMK, may persuade the AIADMK (11 after the victory at Tiruchirappalli) not to oppose the NDA.

NDA managers are apparently keen on ensuring that the cases against her are diluted if that is the price for stability. A BJP minister, however, ruled out the NDA seeking open support of the AIADMK.

This may lead to a new equation in Tamil Nadu. DMK chief M Karunanidhi may be angered by an informal arrangement between the BJP and the AIADMK but his exit from the NDA will reduce the number by two more as he has 12 MPs to the AIADMK's 11.

So, the total loss to the NDA on account of the Trinamul Congress and the DMK will be six (five + one). The actual loss will be just one as the Rashtriya Lok Dal (2) and the RJD split group (3) are expected to join the coalition.

And there will always be the BSP with 14, to reduce the magic figure by abstaining during voting.

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

NDA TALLY IN LOK SABHA

As on 8 March 2001

Total strength of the Lok Sabha 545. Vacancies five which included Tiruchirappalli, Bunkar, and Shahjahanpur.

Marandi and Shahjahanpur.

BJP	181
Shiv Sena	15
DMK	12
Janata Dal (Sameta)	12
Biju Janata Dal	10
Trinamul Congress	09
Janata Dal (United)	08
PMK	05
Lok Jan Shakti (Paswan)	04
MDMK	04
National Conference	04
Lok Tantrik Congress	02
Akali Dal	02
Himachal Vikas Congress	01
Manipur State Congress	01
MGR ADMK	01
Sikkim Democratic Front	01

(including Speaker)

Indian National Lok Dal

Independents

(including Maneka Gandhi)

Total

307

In the new equation, DMK may shift AIADMK with 11; may support from outside. The BSP with 14 likely to abstain in show of strength. Expected to join NDA

Rashtriya Lok Dal

Trinamul Congress split

RJD split

Total

307

Courtesy: Lok Sabha Secretariat

BJP will block Mamata return to NDA

Gautam Chaudhuri
Kolkata, May 18

THE STATE BJP is ready to confront the central leadership if fresh attempts are made to bring back Mamata Banerjee to the NDA.

The party State unit has taken strong exception to the statement of NDA convener George Fernandes that Mamata Banerjee is welcome back to the NDA fold. Union Minister and Mamata-baiter Tapan Sikdar made it clear that they were willing to re-accommodate the Trinamool Congress into the NDA but minus Mamata.

Sikdar now away in Delhi is in constant touch with rebel Trinamool MP Ajit Panja. The party pins great faith on the development and looks hopeful that

Panja would be able to coax a few other Trinamool MPs to his side causing a vertical split in the Trinamool.

Sikdar maintained that it would be politically naïve to woo Mamata back to the NDA after the way she left the NDA on a flimsy excuse and crossed over to the rival Congress camp. The Minister feels it was entirely because of her that the anti-Left forces had lost a great chance to unseat the Left Front Government simply because Congress in West Bengal had lost its political credibility and acceptance to the people.

State BJP leaders say the election results in West Bengal prove it clearly that the Congress-Trinamool tie-up was far less acceptable to the electorate than the Trinamool-BJP combine.

"We hit the nail on the head and our predictions were right. And Mamata was proved wrong. She hoped she would emerge a powerful force if the Congress votes were with her. She now presides over the ruins of the Trinamool, while the moribund Congress has been given a fresh lease of life," said party spokesman Muzaffar Khan.

Khan was confident that if the Congress would have been on its own, it could not have secured more than 10 seats in this Assembly poll. "It would have faced a certain rout if it would not have ridden piggyback on Trinamool. The Congress might have done well only in its traditional strongholds Murshidabad and Malda and that, too, because of personal influence base of Congress MPs Adhir Chowdhury and

A B A Ghani Khan Chowdhury," Khan explained.

But by tying up with the Trinamool, the Congress notched up 26 seats, but it spelt doom for the Trinamool. Khan felt if Mamata continued her alliance with the BJP, majority of the Congress votes would have certainly come over to the alliance and the Congress would have been marginalised in this State.

"She would have to pay the price for political chicanery. It would be no surprise if the Congress starts dictating terms with the Trinamool and tries to weaken the Trinamool further by wooing its MLAs into the party fold," said Khan. But the BJP is not ready to give too much importance to its pathetic show. Khan said it was inevitable when the electorate becomes polarised.

Trinamul still part of NDA, says Panja

5/21/01
UNITED NEWS OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, May 20. — Rebel Trinamul leader, Mr Ajit Panja today lashed out at party chief, Miss Mamata Banerjee, saying she was "erratic, whimsical and slow in making up her mind." He also said Trinamul was still very much part of the NDA.

Mr Panja criticised Miss Banerjee's statements after the party's poor showing in the West Bengal Assembly polls. "Her statement is the last nail in the Trinamul's coffin and unless withdrawn, it will be very bad for the party. There is a process (of registering protest), there is the High Court, the Election Commission and the Supreme Court," he said.

Mr Panja, however, ruled out any split in the party in the wake of his differences with Miss Banerjee. The Trinamul continued to be part of the NDA, he said. "We were very much part of the NDA and continue to be. There is no question of coming back."

The Trinamul leader also lashed out his expulsion from

the party saying "why should there be a split. I am one of the founders of the party. There is no question of my expulsion because nobody has



Mr Ajit Panja

the power to expel me."

Asked if he would resign from the party, he replied in the negative.

Mr Panja said the NDA convenor, Mr George Fernandes had also confirmed that there was no formal letter from Ms Banerjee about severing ties with the NDA. Ms Banerjee

had signed a letter on 15 March reposing full faith in Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's leadership. After that there had been no letter from her.

Mr Panja said Mr Fernandes had invited him to attend the NDA meeting tomorrow but he had expressed his inability because he had to leave for Kolkata to attend a Trinamul party meeting.

On the invitation to the Trinamul meeting, Mr Panja said, "I welcome it. It proves democracy is returning to the party." He, however, said he was still processing the invitation.

Asked if he would attend the next NDA meeting, Mr Panja said he would participate provided he was given at least 48 hours notice.

Mr Panja, who met Prime Minister Mr Vajpayee here yesterday, said he had discussed the issues of development in West Bengal and the food-for-oil programme with Iraq, which he had taken up with Iraqi President, Mr Saddam Hussain during his tenure as minister.

THE STATESMAN

21 MAY 2001

NDA meet to review poll setback today

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MAY 20. Leaders of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) will meet at the Prime Minister's residence tomorrow evening to review the political situation in the aftermath of the adverse electoral results in the recent Assembly polls.

Though the leadership has been maintaining that the results will have no bearing on the Centre's stability, the impression that the NDA is on the decline has gained ground, and this will have its own repercussions.

The meeting has been called taking advantage of the expected presence of Chief Ministers here tomorrow for the conference on agricultural issues related to the impact of the WTO.

Though the expansion of the NDA by taking on board some more partners has been talked about, it has not been discussed formally. The meeting will enable the Prime Minister to sound his coalition partners out on the prospects of a larger NDA.

When the BJP entered into an alliance with the Asom Gana Parishad in Assam, it was announced that the AGP would also join the NDA at the Centre. The BJP has also been trying to strike a deal with the Rashtriya Lok Dal of Mr. Ajit Singh in Uttar Pradesh, a move being strongly opposed by Mr. Om Prakash Chautala of the Indian National Lok Dal which is already in the NDA. It is also hoping for splits in the Trinamool Congress and the Rashtriya Jana-

ta Dal. Naturally, all these would-be entrants would expect their share of seats in the Cabinet. The timing of the much-talked-about Cabinet expansion is being linked to the concretisation of developments in the Trinamool, the RJD and the RLD.

Yet another subject of concern is the irritation that has crept into the relations between the BJP and the Samata Party in connection with developments in Manipur. Significantly, this matter could come to a head tomorrow when the Manipur Chief Minister is scheduled to seek a vote of confidence.

With Mr. George Fernandes, Samata Party leader, continuing to be the NDA convener, the Manipur developments if not handled with care could spell more trouble for the BJP.

The growing concern of regional parties and State leaders over the impact of the WTO, especially on agriculture, which has in turn led to dissatisfaction among farmers could also figure at the meeting. This factor is being cited as the reason for the poor electoral performance of some of the ruling parties in the States.

The bottomline is that after the disastrous poll results for the NDA, the Prime Minister can no longer afford to take his partners for granted, and this would call for more frequent consultations. The meeting will also be an opportunity for the Prime Minister to interact with his coalition partners before he goes in for surgery on his right knee in early June.

Samata, Chautala threaten to snap links with NDA

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 20 MAY

TROUBLE SEEMS to be brewing for the BJP from several fronts with the Samata Party making it clear that it will not be satisfied with anything less than an unconditional support for Manipur chief minister Radha Binod Kojiam in Monday's confidence vote and the Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala threatening to end his ties with the BJP if Mr Ajit Singh was accommodated in the NDA.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who has stepped in to defuse tensions in the NDA, met George Fernandes and promised necessary political intervention to save the Kojiam government. The BJP, which was refusing to back Kojiam in the face of a threat of desertions from the party, too admitted lack of options before it. "We have had discussion with Samata leader George Fernandes. We will not form the government. We will support them in the confidence motion," an agency report quoting BJP president Jana Krishnamurty said.

The Manipur government had plunged into a crisis after some dissident BJP, NCP and Federal Party of Manipur MLAs wanted a change of leadership. The BJP is the biggest formation in the 60-member Assembly with 25 MLAs. The Samata Party has 12 MLAs, MSCP 12, Manipur People's Party one, Janata Dal (secular) one and one independent.

Although the BJP leadership, sensing the mood in its legislature group, had refused to issue a whip to support Mr Kojiam, there is a realisation that such a decision can adversely affect the relationship with the Samata Party. Mr

Fernandes, who met Mr Vajpayee and home minister L.K. Advani, is believed to have told the leaders that his party will not accept anything short of an unconditional backing to the Kojiam government.

But agreeing to the Samata Party's demand could have its ramifications on the unity of the BJP group in Manipur. Like all other political outfits in small legislatures, the BJP's group is also not seen as a cohesive group and their impulses are dictated by sharing of loaves and fishes of office.

The belligerence on the part of the Samata Party is seen as an expression of its unhappiness with the Vajpayee government. Although the Prime Minister and the home minister share a good rapport with Mr Fernandes, the party suspects that the government is in no hurry to speed up the Tehelka probe and re-induct Mr Fernandes into the Cabinet. Party leaders cited speculations in the media that Mr Fernandes could be accommodated elsewhere and said that it would be unacceptable to the Samata Party.

There was trouble for the BJP from another front on Sunday: from the Indian National Lok Dal.

The party's chief and Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala on Sunday told a rally in Uttar Pradesh Kosi Kala that he would have to reconsider support to the Vajpayee government if his bete noire in Jat politics and Rashtriya Lok Dal leader Ajit Singh was inducted in the Union Cabinet. "It is for Mr Vajpayee to decide who should join the government. But if Mr Ajit Singh is inducted in the Cabinet, we will be forced to rethink about our support to the government," an agency report quoting Mr Chautala said.



Chautala

Samata may do a Mamata, throws NDA into crisis

BJP volte face ousts Koijam govt.

The Times of India News Service and Agencies

NEW DELHI: The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) is in crisis yet again with the Samata Party, which has 12 members in parliament, threatening to pull out of the alliance and terming the BJP's role in Manipur developments as the "final act of deceit".

The Samata Party-led Manipur government was defeated in a confidence vote on Monday with 24 of the 26 BJP MLAs voting against it, despite a whip reportedly issued by the BJP to its members to support the Radha Binod Koijam ministry. While only one BJP member voted for the government, another abstained. The BJP has now staked its claim to form the government.

On Monday evening, the Samata Party's national executive went into a huddle to decide its future course of action. At the time of writing, Samata sources indicated that while its ministers in the central government—Nitish Kumar, Digvijay Singh and Srinivasa Prasad—would resign, the party itself was in two minds about withdrawing support to the government immediately.

A senior party leader said, "We don't want to sound unreasonable, so we may just do it one step at a time. Although the way things are going, we may eventually be forced to withdraw support to the government as well. Although that may not be today." Simultaneously, Samata Party leader George Fernandes made it clear that he would not attend the NDA meeting that was scheduled for late Monday evening, even though he was its convenor.

The meeting, called by the Prime Minister in his capacity as its chairperson, was ostensibly to discuss the outcome of the recent assembly polls as well as to consider the possibility of new entries into the

NDA. But it was evident that the Samata Party crisis as well as the need immediately to sort out the threat by Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala to pull out of the NDA in case the Rashtriya Lok Dal chief was made agriculture minister would top the agenda.

Following this, the Prime Minister sent party MP Vijay Goel and his aide Sudheendra Kulkarni to the venue of the Samata Party national executive meeting, which is discussing the issue of continuing support to the Vajpayee ministry, to meet Samata leaders, especially Mr Fernandes. They are expected to make attempts to persuade Mr Fernandes to ensure that the party does not take any drastic action.

The Prime Minister's concern was understandable as earlier in

the day, Samata spokesperson S. Srivastava had termed the BJP's role an "act of betrayal" and said the fact that the topmost BJP leadership kept assuring the Samata Party in private and in public that it would vote in favour of the trust motion "only adds to the

gravity of the betrayal".

"This was the last thing the Samata Party expected of the BJP leadership," he said, adding that the development was "bound to shake the confidence of the allies". He described the BJP's reported issuance of a whip to its members as the "final act of deceit" and said it was "truly amazing" that it was issued through the media.

He said the MLAs who should have received the three-line whip had not received it. "We checked from the lobby of the assembly building. We have been told that no whip was issued," he said.

After the Pattali Makkal Katchi and the Trinamul Congress quit the NDA, the government was left with a majority of 20. If the Samata Party follows suit, it will be left with a majority of just eight.

MANIPUR MAELSTROM

- Samata terms BJP role 'final act of deceit'
- No whip was issued although BJP claimed so, says Samata spokesperson
- Fernandes stays away from NDA meeting
- Ministers likely to quit, but party may not withdraw support immediately
- BJP stakes its claim to form govt.

No ticket for Mamata passage to NDA yet

Panja lashes out at Trinamool leadership

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, May 22

IT'S AGAIN a classic case of who blinks first. Mamata Banerjee is waiting for the Prime Minister to call her back into the NDA fold, but the NDA leaders are just as adamant that it's Banerjee really who must make the first move. A deadlock? That's only the surface reality. There is movement underneath.

Most Trinamool MPs are prodding their leader to return to the NDA and are pressing her to talk to BJP and NDA leaders about a possible return.

Aware that Mamata might not make the first move, some senior MPs have already started sending quiet feelers to Central leaders about rejoining the NDA.

"Let one thing be clear. She won't approach anybody personally," Mamata confidant and all-India Trinamool general secretary Dinesh Trivedi said.

So, her MPs have got active. "I, along with Krishna Bose, have made it clear that the alliance with the Congress has not worked out for us. The Congress won't leave the CPI(M) and only made fools of us during the Assembly polls. It would be political suicide, therefore, unless we reposition ourselves and rejoin the NDA," Trinamool MP Bikram Sarkar said.

"We should return to the NDA for the sake of Bengal. I have told Mamata that her decision to leave the NDA was hasty. The alliance with the Congress has proved detrimental to our interests. So, if it must come to aligning with a national party, we should go with the NDA," Trinamool working committee member and former MP Sardar



MAMATA BANERJEE

Amjad Ali said.

But Ajit Panja feels Mamata's return to the NDA wouldn't be so easy. The NDA leaders, he thinks, won't forgive her whimsical twists and turns.

"Pranab Mukherjee and Jaipal Reddy's statements show that the Congress was hand-in-gloves with the Left Front and Mamata's whimsical decision to leave the NDA did Bengal a great disservice at the hustings. Now she wants to return, because she has realised that without a ministry she won't be able to serve the people of Bengal," he said.

But is the BJP prepared to take Banerjee back? It doesn't look like that. Not at least from the statements by senior State and national BJP leaders.

According to Trinamool sources, the Prime Minister had

tried to call up Banerjee from Malaysia the day after the poll results were out in Bengal. But they didn't get to talk, because Mamata Banerjee was unavailable.

In an indication of the leadership's stand, BJP national president Jana Krishnamurthy made it clear Banerjee should be forthright and not play hide and seek with the NDA. "So far, we have no positive indication that Mamata has changed her mind about the NDA.

She must approach the Alliance leaders directly, if she wants to rejoin. Sending feelers won't do. As for Jaswant Singh's statement yesterday, let me tell you that it was based on the prevailing Trinamool-NDA equation. The Trinamool is saying it is not part of the NDA. Even we are saying that. Let Mamata approach us, we will consider then," Krishnamurthy told the *Hindustan Times* over phone from Delhi.

"We will review the latest development at our State secretariat meeting. Mamata should behave in a manner, which promotes the interest of her party as well as that of her partner. The haste in which she withdrew from the NDA has hurt many BJP and NDA leaders. Now, the decision of whether she can return lies with them. But I do believe that time is a great, great healer," State BJP president Asim Ghosh said.

The Trinamool chief, however, is playing it cool. Time, she believes, is on her side. "Let me see how things move, let me also assess the national political scenario before we take any decision," Banerjee told the *Hindustan Times*.

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 22

TRINAMOOOL MP Ajit Panja, who was removed from the party chairman's post yesterday by Mamata Banerjee, today hit out against the Trinamool Congress leadership and said the decision was arbitrary, unethical, unconstitutional and autocratic.

"I am one of the founder members of the party and I know who is and who isn't a member. This entire exercise of removing me from the party post is an act of vendetta. In fact, neither Mamata Banerjee nor Sudip Bandopadhyay is a party member, so how can they take any action against me?" Panja said.

Hitting out at Mamata, he said: "Today she is criticising George Fernandes, the very man who helped her in all possible manner during her honeymoon with the NDA. This shows her whimsical attitude just as her decision to part with the NDA and go with the Congress to corner the Muslim votes proved suicidal for the Trinamool in the Assembly elections. Pranab Mukherjee and Jaipal Reddy's statements should be an eye-opener for her."

Panja said Mamata was humiliating him but had forgotten that it was "he who had gone to AB Vajpayee to secure the Railway Ministry for her after the 1999 Lok Sabha polls". "Today she is again eager to go back so that she can become a Minister. Sudip Bandopadhyay has ordered a Nehru jacket hoping that a ministerial berth would come his way. Party workers have not accepted Mamata's decision," Panja said. "I am with the NDA and will remain in the NDA. The Prime Minister is my leader and whenever I go to Delhi, I will meet him."

NDA crisis blows over for now

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/ IMPHAL, May 22. - The crisis in the NDA government at the Centre temporarily blew over today after Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee made it clear to the senior Samata Party leader, Mr George Fernandes, that the Bharatiya Janata Party would sacrifice its chances of forming its own government in Manipur. The possibility of imposition of President's rule in Manipur in a bid to find a solution also appears remote.

(Earlier in the day, the anti-Radhabinod Kojiam group formed a new alliance - the Progressive Democratic Alliance - in a bid to stake claim to form the next government in the state. The alliance, however, has not been made formal and is yet to stake its claim following strict Central instructions.)

Senior leaders of both the Samata Party and the BJP from Manipur have been asked to come to Delhi on 28 May where they would sit face to face with senior central leaders of the respective parties in a bid to find a solution to the present problem. The delay in their visit to Delhi is because of the fact that local bodies' elections in the state are scheduled for 26 May and the leaders are preoccupied there.

The main item on the agenda would be to find a consensus on the name of the future chief minister as the BJP has made it clear that it would not form a government there despite having a majority. The Kojiam government in Manipur fell yesterday after it failed to muster majority support in the trust vote in the Assembly.

The BJP MP, Mr Vijay Goel, who acted as Mr Vajpayee's emissary to Mr Fernandes yesterday, said: "All options are open, including the possibility of reinstallation of a Samata Party-led government. Things

would be clear on 28 May when senior party leaders from the state arrive here to settle the name of the future chief minister."

Mr Fernandes sounded satisfied at the outcome of the meeting with Mr Vajpayee this afternoon. In a complete climb-down from the party's stated position which its leaders openly voiced till yesterday evening, he said, "Let's not forget that we all have stakes in this government. Why should there be a threat to the government at the Centre for something done by the local faction leaders in Manipur? We'll try to find a solution to the present problem."

Why an emergency meeting of the party was held with the single agenda to "reconsider its support to the NDA government at the Centre?" Mr Fernandes said, "the meeting was convened earlier in view of certain developments that had been taking place in Manipur. The Radhabinod Kojiam government fell at 1 p.m. and by 5 p.m. when we met, we had assumed that the BJP would stake claim to form government. We came to know later that the leadership had decided that the BJP would not allow the local unit to form an alternate government."

Mr Fernandes ruled out the resignation of three Samata Party ministers in the Union cabinet. He quoted the external affairs and defence minister, Mr Jaswant Singh, as saying that the BJP had issued a whip but it could not be honoured because of local factional problems. When reminded that some leaders in his party were openly advocating severing ties with the NDA, he said "we have to take into consideration the broader perspective of national issues rather than going by what people say we ought to do."

■ See CRISIS: page 6

CRISIS:

(Continued from page 1)

Mr Fernandes, however, admitted that because of internal wrangling the image of the NDA as a coalition had gone down. "I'm more worried on that count."

The Bharatiya Janata Party president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, and the party in-charge for the North-east, Mr PB Acharya, were present at the meeting held by Mr Vajpayee at his residence.

According to a reliable source in Imphal the BJP Legislature Party leader, Mr RK Dorendro, had been elected leader of the new alliance. He was, however, not available for comment.

According to reports, the Bharatiya Janata Party chief, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, had in a fax message directed Mr Dorendro Singh that the BJP would not stake its claim to form the government or take part or support any other government not headed by the Samata Party.

The BJP chief reportedly came down heavily on Mr Dorendro and BJP legislators for disobeying the party chief's directive that they vote for Mr Kojiam.

The closed-door meeting reportedly discussed the issue of an alternate government not headed by the Bharatiya Janata Party.

It has thrown open the leadership issue in the next major party - the MSCP - which has 10 MLAs.

The names of at least three MSCP leaders, including that of the Union minister of state for food processing, Mr Th Chaoba, have been floated. The other two aspirants are the Speaker, Dr Dhananjay, and the former deputy chief minister, Dr Chandramani Singh. But there is no confirmation from any of the members.

The Samata Party is reported to have suggested the name of Col (retd) H Bubbhon as the next chief minister.

23 MAY 2001

NDA allies don't want Mamata back

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, May 23

MAMATA BANERJEE may want to go back to the NDA, but the smaller partners in the NDA are firmly opposed to it.

BJP sources in Kolkata said that while the party's central leadership remains somewhat divided over the issue, the main opposition comes from constituent partners like Lok Janashakti, Samata Party and Janata Dal (S).

These parties have reportedly made it clear to the BJP leadership that if Mamata is reinducted into the NDA after the way she walked out of the alliance in a huff, it would send a wrong message to other NDA partners and put the NDA in a bad light.

For them, the worry lies on other counts. Once Trinamool Congress rejoins the NDA, Mamata is certain to lay fresh claims to the Railway Ministry,



MAMATA BANERJEE

which is not acceptable particularly to the Samata Party, which had never taken kindly to the Ministry going to Mamata in the first place.

Railway Minister Nitish Kumar is also known to be Mamata's bete noire and the Samata leaders are still extremely cut up over the way Mamata quit over an issue that led to the

resignation of Jaya Jaitley.

The BJP leadership is yet to make up its mind.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee for once is not too keen till now to take back the Trinamool and LK Advani prefers to maintain a studied silence on the issue, but some party leaders are not averse to the idea.

It is mainly on grounds of national political compulsions that some party leaders, including BJP president Jana Krishnamurthi, do not wish to take a rigid stand on Mamata's return to the NDA.

They seek to judge the issue afresh especially after the inspiring electoral performance by the Congress and the poor show by the BJP in the just-concluded Assembly polls.

In their logic, it is all the more necessary to arrange for Mamata's "homecoming" as it would come as a blow to the Congress after she was received back into the Congress at the personal ini-

tiative of Sonia Gandhi.

Mamata's return to the NDA would thus weaken the Congress and would keep hopes alive for a new round of alliance with the BJP in left-ruled West Bengal.

They are not willing to take seriously the stiff opposition to the move by the Bengal BJP unit, especially after the shoddy performance of the BJP in the West Bengal Assembly election, in which the party failed to win a single seat and witnessed a sharp decline in vote percentage.

The results are identified as sure pointers to the fact that the BJP would have no political future in the polarized political arena in Bengal, unless it has with it a strong ally like the Trinamool Congress.

Admits a senior State BJP leader: "If the Central leadership wishes to have Mamata back, we will never like it but we can do nothing about it".

Opp camps to corner NDA

CL MANUJ
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 25. — Close on the heels of the BJP's convention in Mussoorie, the Capital will witness three conclaves — stretching from tomorrow to next Friday — of the victorious Opposition camps.

The leaders will discuss the post-poll situation and ways to rein in the shaken BJP-led front.

The Congress working committee will meet on Monday to discuss strategies to cash in on the victories in Assam, Kerala, Pondichery and also Tamil Nadu (where it rode piggy-back on Miss Jayalalitha).

The CPI-M politburo will meet on Tuesday and the central committee will have a three-day session starting on Wednesday. The three-day meet of the CPI

with the BJP rule". As for the Dalit votes, it's considering a tie-up with the unpredictable BSP.

But the Congress's major challenge is to intrude into the



Mrs Sonia Gandhi and Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee: the battle heats up

sizeable Yadav-OBC vote-bank, now in the safe custody of Mrs Gandhi's main tormentor, Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav.

"Making inroads into the Muslim-OBC constituencies is crucial to our revival plan in

UP. In the long-run, we've to either trounce Mulayam in his own turf, or reach a working-arrangement with him to replace the NDA at the national level," a Congress leader said.

The CPI and the CPI-M conclave, besides raising a toast for the West Bengal victory, will see some unpleasant soul-searching over the Kerala defeat. The Left Democratic Front's explanation that "a secret Congress-RSS pact" was responsible for its defeat is valid to some extent. But the closed-door sessions will have to take up the "failures of the LDF government" and the adverse fall-out of the open infighting in the state CPI-M and the politics of violence and sectarianism which alienated a large section of the traditional Left voters in Kerala.

The Communists also will take up their pet-theme of "re-

viving and strengthening the third front (now People's Front)". With the AIADMK as their leading ally in Tamil Nadu and therefore corruption no more a "touchy-issue", the Left could now root for the inclusion of Miss Jayalalitha and Mr Lalo Prasad Yadav in the People's Front. The possibility of roping in some "sceptical" allies of the BJP (TDP being one of them) will also figure in the strategy sessions.

But the biggest challenge for the Left will be to find ways to build a bridge between the People's Front and the Congress for a combined assault on the NDA. With the Left-Congress poll bitterness still fresh and the mutual hatred of Mr Mulayam Singh and Mrs Gandhi growing by the day, the path to form a common anti-NDA platform is not going to be a smooth one.

Manipur crisis won't affect NDA: Prasad

By Our Staff Correspondent

BIJAPUR, MAY 27. The Union Minister of State for Consumer Affairs and Civil Supplies, Mr. V.Srinivas Prasad, said here on Sunday that political developments in Manipur would not have any effect on the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) Government at the Centre.

Mr. Prasad, who belongs to the Samata Party, told presspersons that Manipur was a small State and the political situation there would not alter equations in New Delhi. A peculiar situation prevailed in Manipur and it was difficult to fathom what a particular MLA or a group of MLAs would do. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, had clarified that the BJP had no control over its MLAs in Manipur.

Asked if the Samata Party would accept a BJP candidate to the post of Chief Minister, Mr. Prasad said top leaders of the two parties were meeting in Delhi to discuss the issue. The imposition of President's rule could not be ruled out if the political groups failed to break the impasse.

To a question about his department, he said the storage facility was inadequate for procurement of foodgrains and efforts were on to construct more godowns.

MSCP (Chaoba) to stake claim

PTI reports from Imphal:

The political impasse in Manipur arising out of the fall of the Samata Party-led Government today took a new turn with the Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) (Chaoba) deciding to stake claim to form the next Ministry.

The central executive committee of the party in an emer-

gency meeting this afternoon directed the MSCP (C) legislature party to stake claim to form an MSCP (C)-led Progressive Democratic Alliance Government.

Motion of confidence against Sri Lanka CJ shelved

COLOMBO, MAY 27. Judges in Sri Lanka today shelved a motion of confidence in Chief Justice Mr. Sarath Silva, delivering a blow to his bid to avoid impeachment in Parliament, officials said.

District judges and magistrates discarded the confidence resolution at a meeting in Colombo, a judge who attended the meeting said. "One magistrate wanted us to pass a resolution supporting the Chief Justice, but since adequate time of the motion was not given, it was decided to put it off for at least two weeks." — AFP

Ranil coming

By Nirupama Subramanian

COLOMBO, MAY 27. The leader of Sri Lanka's main opposition United National Party, Mr. Ranil Wickremesinghe, is to leave for New Delhi on June 1 where he will meet the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee. Mr. Wickremesinghe's visit to India will take place amid hectic moves by the UNP to table a no-confidence motion against the Kumaratunga Government.

Party sources said Mr. Wickremesinghe would return via Chennai, where he will seek a meeting with the new Chief Minister, Ms Jayalalitha, as well as the DMK leader, Mr. M. Karunanidhi.

THE HINDU

8 MAY 2001

Mamata inches closer to NDA

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, May 27

MAMATA BANERJEE may well be on her way to rejoining the NDA. Hectic behind-the-scenes parleys are on and the leader herself seems finally convinced that her rightful place is in the coalition she dumped a few weeks ago.

The vibes from the Prime Minister's Office, the BJP and the NDA are positive. Key Prime Ministerial aide and BJP MP Vijay Goel said as much: "Mamata has always been a good friend. It's just a matter of time before things fall in place."

The Trinamool leader herself isn't saying much, though. "You've to wait eight to 10 days. I'm going to Delhi to meet the President. As of now, I'll only

congratulate Prime Minister Vajpayee for his initiative to resume bilateral talks with Pakistan."

Mamata emissaries and pro-NDA leaders such as Ajit Panja, Bikram Sarkar, Nitish Sengupta, Krishna Bose and senior party functionary Sardar Amjad Ali are in touch with BJP leaders. Sarkar has held talks with influential BJP MP Rajiv Ranjan, who it is believed, is close to Vajpayee. Panja has talked to the Prime Minister, L K Advani and George Fernandes. Nitish Kumar and Yashwant Sinha too have been sounded out. All these discussions have been positive.

"Surely things will work out. NDA leaders feel that Mamata's return would lend greater stability to the alliance," said an aide of the Trinamool supremo.

"All this talk of a mid-term poll is rubbish. The TDP, I'm told, will soon hold a conference. A key issue on the agenda will be joining the NDA ministry. If the TDP decides to do so, the NDA will emerge strong as never before. The TDP has 29 MPs," Sarkar said.

These developments have come as music to Mamata's ear, for she now doubts the Congress. "She has realised what role the Congress played in these polls. I'm sure she will return to the NDA and be a minister," Panja said.

There are MPs within the Trinamool who oppose rejoining the NDA. Among them are Sudip Bandopadhyay, Jayanta Bhattacharya and Akbar Ali Khondekar. The TDP, they claim, might pull the plug on Vajpayee.

And, the Congress might cobble together a Government. They say the UP Assembly polls would prove crucial and the NDA Government might fall after that.

Mamata isn't taking these fears seriously. She knows that panchayat polls are due in Andhra and since the Congress is an archrival, Naidu would never go with the party. As for the UP polls, she believes that the elections would either return a hung Assembly or give a wafer-thin majority to the Samajwadi Party. Mayawati will come second, the BJP third and the Congress fourth. "Under these circumstances, BJP might support Mayawati and help her form Government. Therefore, there is no way the Vajpayee Government will be destabilised."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 MAY 2001

Cong backs code of ethics for MPs

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 27. - The effort of the Lok Sabha to evolve a code of ethics for its members has received support from the Leader of the Opposition, Mrs Sonia Gandhi. The Congress president has expressed her party's agreement to the Ethics Committee's recommendation to make it mandatory for members to disclose their income, assets and liabilities.

A copy of her letter to the former Prime Minister, Mr Chandra Shekhar, who heads the Ethics Committee, was released today. Mr Chandra Shekhar had sought her opinion on the first report of the committee that suggested disclosure of income by the MPs.

However, Mrs Sonia Gandhi has neither asked nor suggested that such declaration be made public for greater transparency and not confined to records at the Speaker's office. This could mean that parliamentarians are not ready to face public scrutiny as it is not clear whether such records with the Speaker would be open to people.

The Congress president has supported the concept that the Ethics Committee should examine all matters of unethical conduct referred to it. It can take up such issues suo motto. She has also agreed that the code of conduct be prepared by parliamentarians for themselves. Rules should be framed laying down acts of omission and commission that would constitute unethical conduct, she said.

The other suggestions which the Congress has accepted are keeping a register of the area of interest of each member in the parliament secretariat and that the procedure for examination shall be the same as that laid down for breach of privilege.

STATESMAN

Mamata still not clear on NDA: Panja

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 28. The dissident Trinamool Congress leader, Mr. Ajit Panja, today sharpened his attack against the party leadership, accusing it of "fooling" the people by not taking steps to complete the process of pulling out from the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

Mr. Panja, who disagreed with the Trinamool decision to come out of the NDA, today held separate meetings with the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, here. While refusing to divulge the details of his discussions with Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani, the former Union Minister said the general political scene in the country and in West Bengal were discussed. He discounted reports that he was floating another outfit or joining the BJP.

It is understood Mr. Panja had agreed to campaign with BJP leaders, and also share a platform with the Prime Minister at a rally in the State on April 7.

Speaking to presspersons here, Mr. Panja said even though Trinamool had pulled out from the NDA, its chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, had so far not written to the Lok Sabha Speaker or the President on snapping its links with the NDA. The withdrawal from the NDA was undertaken with an eye on the minority votes in the West Bengal elections, and by not communicating to the Lok Sabha Speaker, she had kept her options on the NDA open.

Mr. Panja was sceptical that the Congress-Trinamool alliance would make it to Writers Building, saying that after allying with the Congress, Trinamool had lost a "golden opportunity" of coming to power in the State; it had handed over the State on a platter to the Left Front.

Even though he disputed the adoption of a resolution by the Trinamool Parliamentary Party on March 15 to withdraw from the NDA, Mr. Panja said all that Ms. Banerjee had done was to send a letter to the Prime Minister communicating her decision.

Panja writes to Speaker^{27/4} for NDA^{HT-1} seat

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, April 26

AJIT PANJA today wrote to Lok Sabha Speaker G M C Balayogi seeking a seat for himself "within the NDA" and deepening confusion in the Trinamool camp over interpretations of the resolution adopted by the Trinamool Parliamentary Committee before Mamata Banerjee and Panja quit the NDA Cabinet.

The party's Chief Whip in Parliament Sudip Bandyopadhyay maintains that the resolution doesn't speak of supporting the NDA Government from outside. But he is sending the Speaker no fresh communication to this effect.

But Panja can't wait. The disaffected Trinamool leader lashed out at Bandyopadhyay for buying time. "Why does he dither to convey the party's stand to the Speaker? He should come clean immediately. How can the electorate rely on leaders who change stance everyday?"

All Trinamool MPs, including Panja, had adopted the resolution in question at MP Akbar Ali Khondkar's residence in New Delhi on March 15, days after the Tehelka expose. The resolution states: "We have full faith in the honourable Prime Minister. We should not allow the image of the Prime Minister to get tarnished...With these objectives and also to strengthen the hands of the Prime Minister we leave the NDA and reiterate our party's stand regarding our action as stated in the leader's letter to the Prime Minister on April 13 and 14."

Bandyopadhyaya today handed out copies of the resolution to put an end to rumblings within the Congress over the Trinamool's relations with the NDA.

But Panja argues that the document supports his contention. "How can you strengthen the Prime Minister's hands of without supporting his Government

PANJA FOR BJP RALLY?

THE BJP has decided to invite Ajit Panja to the Prime Minister's May 5 meeting in Kolkata in deference to the dissident Trinamool MP's wish. A formal invitation would be sent soon to Panja, BJP State President Asim Ghosh said on Thursday. "He expressed his wish publicly during talks with the electronic media and we have decided to honour his sentiments," Ghosh said. Asked if they would invite other Trinamool leaders as well, he said it would be done if they, too, wanted to be with the PM.

Detailed report on Page 4

from outside? The Prime Minister is also the leader of the NDA. So, if you repose faith in the Prime Minister, you can't take your seat in the Opposition. True, we left the NDA, but we also decided to support the NDA from outside."

He also challenged the Trinamool Chief Whip's claims that the Trinamool Policy Making Body adopted a resolution in Kolkata on March 17 where many MPs had put their signature. "It is a blatant lie. We met at Sudip Bandyopadhyaya's residence. There was no agenda for the meeting. Our attendance was recorded in an exercise book. Mamata arrived a little late. Subrata was present there.

"He was unhappy about the Trinamool leaving the NDA Government. He also had an altercation with Mamata. She was angry. But she chose to insult me instead. I left the gathering. Later, I verified with my colleagues. There had been no resolution in the meeting."

Panja fears the Trinamool Chief Whip might "fudge documents" to score points. "He can't produce the document because there isn't any. If Sudip Bandyopadhyaya has it, let him produce the papers by tomorrow," he said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 APR 2004

27 APR 2004

Why NDA is refusing a JPC probe

SUDESH K VERMA
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

59-10

274

NEW DELHI, April 21. - Why has the NDA, which agreed to a JPC immediately after the Tehelka revelations, refused it when the Congress demanded it and made it a condition for normal functioning of Parliament?

Is it because some people in the NDA desperately want the former defence minister and NDA convener, Mr George Fernandes, in the Cabinet because a sulking Fernandes would be dangerous for the coalition's stability. This seems to be the opinion of many BJP leaders.

The official explanation centres around the argument that two parallel inquiries cannot be ordered simultaneously and that it would send a wrong signal to the judiciary if the commission appointed to look into the Tehelka allegations is prematurely withdrawn. A BJP spokesperson claimed the judiciary would not like

it and might take it as an affront.

In private, BJP leaders describe this as hogwash intended to confuse the Opposition. The real reason, some BJP leaders say, is the NDA's predicament on account of Mr Fernandes, who has the potential to become a threat to the NDA.

The time-bound inquiry might come out with a decision in a short time whereas a JPC might linger on for years keeping the NDA convener out of the government. It appears from the urgency with which the commission has started functioning that the inquiry might come out with its findings in time.

Most BJP leaders believe that Mr Fernandes is not guilty though they have some doubts about the innocence of their former party president, Mr Bangaru Laxman. They say that the commission might not find enough reasons to indict Mr Fernandes which could lead to his induction in the government.

It may be recalled that the NDA had of-

fered a JPC inquiry when Mr Fernandes had not resigned.

The understanding was based on the assumption that he would continue to be in the government. His resignation came only after the judicial commission was ordered.

Mr Fernandes resigned after he was forced to in the hope that it would end the stalemate over Tehelka. The government had reportedly promised him that he would return as defence minister after four months.

The NDA managers were so worried on account of Mr Fernandes that they got an assurance from the Prime Minister that he would not succumb to the Opposition's pressure for the JPC. Their hawkish stand of no JPC came only after this assurance.

Some of them had calculated that AB Vajpayee, who has often risen party interests, might accept the demand as well.

THE STATESMAN

22 APR 2001

AGP allies with BJP, joins NDA

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, APRIL 9. The Bharatiya Janata Party and the Asom Gana Parishad today formally announced their alliance for the coming Assembly elections in Assam for which they will campaign jointly.

At the same time, the AGP's entry into the National Democratic Alliance at the Centre was also announced with a question mark on whether it would also participate in the Vajpayee Government.

The importance of the occasion for the two parties was made obvious by the presence of the Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, the BJP president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi, and the Assam Chief Minister and AGP leader, Mr. Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, at the press conference at the BJP headquarters here.

Against the total Assembly strength of 126, the BJP will contest 44 seats and the AGP and some of its other allies the rest. However, the BJP and AGP leaders later informally admitted that the seat-sharing may not be perfect. While an AGP leader said "there could be

friendly contests between the two parties in about 10 seats," Mr. Sunil Shastri, BJP general secretary in-charge of Assam who was leading the negotiations with the AGP, said, "we may go in for some tactical understanding in some seats." It seems that out of its share of 82 seats, it will be also giving away about 18 seats to its minor allies.

Mr. Advani, who welcomed the AGP into the NDA, just smiled to a question whether the party would participate in the Vajpayee government — the party has two MPs in the Rajya Sabha.

He also complimented Mr. Mahanta's government for "cooperating" with the Centre in the matter of insurgency. "Although these last three years the AGP was not a member of the NDA, yet there has been perfect cooperation between the State government and the Centre which helped us to deal with militancy effectively."

Yet, only late last month the BJP had denounced the AGP and the Congress in one breath, saying that while one was helping the ULFA the other had links with the SULFA. The

party had rejected the idea of an alliance with the AGP, declaring during its national executive committee meeting in late March that it would contest the Assam elections on its own. Privately, the BJP leader, Ms. Bijoy Chakravarty, explained this about turn in stance as "part of politics". And the party has been admitting that the main factor driving the alliance is the common desire to prevent the Congress from coming back to power.

Mr. Advani also made it clear that the AGP leadership had agreed to do away with the Illegal Migrants Determination by Tribunal Act, the special law on immigration enacted specially to deal with the huge influx of Bangladeshis into the State. The BJP has been opposing this and said it would like to repeal it. Now, it seems, the AGP has agreed.

Mr. Mahanta blamed the "weakened economic, social and political" fabric of Assam on the long years of Congress rule. It was against this background that the AGP had "decided to contest the elections along with a national party like the BJP," he said.

THE HINDU
30 APR 2001

NDA threatens Cong with counter-agitations

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 9 APRIL

THE NDA, on Monday, threatened reciprocal action against Sonia Gandhi if Congress activists continued to target the Prime Minister at his rallies with black flags and other "obscene demonstration" as was done in Mumbai on Sunday.

The co-ordination committee of the alliance, which met on Monday, said Congress should be "publicly told to stop forthwith these demonstrations and the kind of slogans thrown at the Prime Minister". Otherwise, it said: "Wherever the Congress president

goes, similar demonstrations will be held against her," but, clarified convenor George Fernandes, "without the obscenity". "It is up to the Congress to decide whether it would like to have such demonstrations," he said.

At the meeting, Maneka Gandhi focused on the relationship between Amar

Singh, Samajwadi Party leader, and Bhavna Pandey, companion of B.P. Verma, suspended CBEC chairman, who is in CBI custody at present. It was agreed that the links between them and other Samajwadi Party leaders should also be probed. It must be remem-

bered that the Samajwadi leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, had suddenly accused PMO joint secretary Ashok Saikia of corruption. Mr. Saikia looks after the activities of the CBI in the PMO.

That the NDA's prime target

MUD-SLINGING FESTIVAL

will be the Congress was clear after it was decided that after the election campaigns for the state elections, the alliance would concentrate on the corruption charges against the Congress party leaders and officials like Vincent George, KPCC chief V.S. Koujalagi and

Chattisgarh chief minister Ajit Jogi. The NDA convenor said, "It needs to be explained how a person who was drawing Rs 400 a month has come to possess assets of crore of rupees," referring to V. George's "extraordinary assets".

Mr Fernandes added that the Prime Minister will convene an all-party meeting in

Parliament to "ensure that Parliament functions normally and many issues of concern to the people are discussed. All parties should sit together and discuss the dates on which specific subjects can be debated.

The date, which is yet to be

fixed, will be announced by Parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan.

Dismissing reports of dissonance within the alliance, he said they will continue with rallies in Bhopal, Raipur and Ranchi before rounding it off with a meeting in Lucknow — to be addressed by Mr Vajpayee.

The meeting was attended, by home minister L.K. Advani, BJP president Jana Krishnamurthy, Murasoli Maran (DMK), Vaiko (MDMK), Suresh Prabhu (Shiy Sena), Omar Abdullah (NC), O.P. Chautala (INLD) and S.S. Dhindsa (Akali Dal).

The Economic Times

10 APR 2001

Cong fishes in troubled waters PM remark puts NDA in a spot

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 6. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's reported statement that the upcoming Assembly polls would be a referendum on the Tehelka expose has put the NDA in a difficult situation.

The Congress, which has a decisive edge in the polls, was quick to sense an opportunity in the statement. The party spokesman, Mr S Jaipal Reddy, said the Prime Minister must stick to what he had said. "If the NDA is battered in the polls, the government should resign."

The Congress declared there would be no let up in its tirade against the NDA government till it quits.

The BJP tried to wriggle out of the situation by saying the polls couldn't be a referendum as the party's stakes in them were not high. Some leaders even privately questioned Mr Vajpayee's assessment. A senior minister admitted that the statement, which he claimed was misquoted, has complicated NDA's problems.

The BJP instead wants to treat tomorrow's by-elections in Uttar Pradesh a referendum on the expose as it expects to win both the seats — Haidergarh, from where the chief minister, Mr Rajnath Singh, is seeking election, and Sadabad.

Although the party is expect-

ted to win the seats because of upper caste votes, calling the by-polls a referendum would help it counter the Opposition.

The BJP spokesman, Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, said the Prime Minister was speaking about the Lok Sabha polls, scheduled to take place after three years, and not the Assembly polls.

NDA leaders are surprised at the statement as they fear the polls would go against the alliance and strengthen the Opposition's hands. They have started preparing themselves to face such an eventuality. The NDA is unlikely to get a majority in any of the four states and Pondicherry that are going to polls.

In West Bengal, after Miss Mamata Banerjee broke away from NDA, the alliance's challenge to the Left Front has fizzled out. In Kerala, the NDA doesn't matter.

In Assam, though the BJP is working out an electoral understanding with the ruling Assam Gana Parishad, some NDA leaders think this could go against the BJP because of anti-incumbency factor. In support, they cited the Karnataka example: the BJP gave away the battle to the Congress after it aligned with Janata Dal, then the ruling party.

In Tamil Nadu, NDA's pitch has been queered after the PMK and the MDMK left the alliance.

THE STATESMAN

27 APR 2001

Left alone to defend itself, BJP cancels all NDA rallies

By Smita Gupta

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: 'Armstronggate' will continue to haunt the BJP for a while. After its first couple of public meetings, the party has been compelled to cancel all the rallies it had planned under the banner of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in its bid to deflect public attention from the spycam scandal.

The immediate cause for the cancellation of the BJP's plans was the Shiv Sena's refusal to participate in the rally slated for April 8 in Mumbai, which was to be addressed, among others, by Prime

Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, home minister L.K. Advani and former defence minister George Fernandes. The Shiv Sena has been in the forefront of the demand for the exit of some PMO officials.

Party sources, however, claimed that the BJP had been forced to change tack on the rallies for a variety of reasons. According to them, it was not just the Shiv Sena which was uncomfortable with sharing a platform with the BJP and defending it on the Tehelka issue. They said that even allies like the Telugu Desam Party (TDP) and the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam

(DMK) had been shying away from the BJP. Both the south-based parties stayed away from the first rally held in Delhi. Of course, at a subsequent rally in Trichy in Tamil Nadu, state law minister Alladi Aruna did take part.

Among its other allies, the JD (U) and the BJD have also not been very happy with the idea of defending corruption, notwithstanding the packaging—"an opposition conspiracy to destabilise the NDA government". In fact, JD (U) leader Ramakrishna Hegde stayed away from the NDA rally in Bangalore on Thursday.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

6 APR 2001

TDP stays away from NDA rally

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, APRIL 4. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) dissociated itself from the BJP rally in Hyderabad today, in which the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K.Advani, and the former Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, countered the Congress campaign for the resignation of the Vajpayee Government following the Tehelka exposures.

The TDP leader and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, gave a dinner to Mr. Advani and Mr. Fernandes at his residence.

TDP sources say the party has not participated in any NDA rally so far, because it is extending only outside support to the Vajpayee Government, and is not a member of the NDA and has not joined the Union Cabinet.

Mr. Naidu had sought an inquiry into the corruption scandal and action against anyone found guilty of unethical conduct.

Party sources say the TDP is against the Prime Minister seeking a vote of confidence in

the Lok Sabha, because the TDP is not willing to defend the actions of the NDA leaders caught on video camera. The party feels that its stand has been vindicated.

Since this stand of the TDP is well known, the local BJP leaders made their own preparations for the rally without informing the local TDP leadership.

TDP leaders feel that the BJP could have chosen a venue like Vijayawada or Visakhapatnam, instead of Hyderabad.

But the BJP's decision was to conduct such rallies in all State capitals, as far as possible, and so Hyderabad was included.

Mr. Advani and Mr. Fernandes, who arrived here at about 8 a.m., faced a hostile Congress demonstration at the airport, in which a group headed by the former Minister, Mr. P. Janardhana Reddy, and the Youth Congress leader, Mr. P. Sudhakar Reddy, raised slogans.

Police arrested about 30 persons. Both the leaders went by helicopter to the Ramoji Film City, about 30 km away, and returned for the public meeting.

THE HINDU

SHELTERING FROM THE HEAT



Banned cricket hero Ajay Jadeja, with his mentor Kapil Dev in tow, spends one of his last days of bachelorhood on the golf links of the Willingdon Sports Club during the Mayfair tournament in Mumbai on Sunday. Jadeja is to wed the daughter of Samata Party leader Jaya Jaitly on March 30 in Delhi.

NDA rally in Delhi vows to meet Congress challenge

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) on Sunday accepted the gauntlet thrown by the Congress in the wake of the Tehelka expose pertaining to defence deals, declaring to carry the fight to the length and breadth of the country.

"It's a challenge we have accepted. They have called it a war," said Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, referring to Congress president Sonia Gandhi's declaration of war against the NDA government at the AICC plenary session in Bangalore. Addressing a mammoth gathering of NDA supporters who had come from all parts of the country at the historic Ramlila Grounds here, Mr Vainavee said "They (Congress)



Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, home minister L.K. Advani and NDA convener George Fernandes wave to the crowd at the NDA rally in New Delhi on Sunday.

have sounded the bugle, now there is no going back."

Leaders of the NDA allies, including Jammu and Kashmir chief minister and National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, Punjab chief minister and Shiromani Akali Dal leader

Prakash Singh Badal, communication minister and Lok Shakti Party leader Ram Vilas Paswan, Haryana chief minister and Indian National Lok Dal leader Om Prakash Chautala, MDMK leader Vaiko, backed the Prime Minister. All the alliance leaders, who were present on the dais, declared their confidence in Mr Vajpayee's leadership and faith in former defence minister George Fernandes.

Mr Vajpayee attacked the Congress and the opposition parties for stalling proceedings in parliament. "What kind of thinking is this? Not letting parliament discharge its normal duty. Is the Congress trying to push the country to anarchy?" the Prime Minister asked.

► See Edit: Question Time, Page 10

Cong. wants war, we are ready: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 25. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said his multi-party National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was prepared to counter the Congress' charges of calumny emanating from the Tehelka tapes on the streets. "They have declared war and there is no going back. We have accepted the invitation. We will continue to run the Government and, at the same time, contest the charges by going to the people," he declared at a well-attended NDA rally here to mark the beginning of the ruling alliance's nationwide campaign to counter the charges against the Government.

The Prime Minister and the dozen-odd speakers who preceded him maintained a common theme. They acknowledged that the tapes had indicted some well-placed officials and politicians. But they were quick to point out that the Government had immediately ordered a probe and some of those featuring in the tapes, directly or by implication, had resigned from their posts.

Despite these steps, the Congress was unwilling to debate the issue in Parliament and failed to respond to constructive suggestions to break the stalemate. This behaviour, they said, suggested a conspiracy whose broader contours were to discredit the Government, demoralise the armed forces and capture power without seeking a fresh mandate.

All the speakers targeted only



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, with the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, the former Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, and his Haryana counterpart, Mr. O.P. Chautala, at the NDA 'Virat rally' in New Delhi on Sunday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

the Congress and assailed its obstructionist tactics in Parliament and provocative attitude outside. Rare was a speaker who referred to the 'Third Front', with most of the leading lights invited to speak focussing their belligerence on the Congress and its chief, Ms. Sonia Gandhi.

"We had never blocked Parliament to force a Government to resign. Ms. Gandhi is now resorting to the kind of language I have never used in my decades of public life. The Congress is negating the spirit of conciliation. I don't know why this is being done — perhaps it is due to jealousy or frustration. Sometimes I wonder whether the Congress has lost faith in democratic means," mused the Prime Minister.

As opposed to this kind of be-

haviour, the ruling alliance was the epitome of restraint and moderation, said Mr. Vajpayee. This was reflected in its unconditional acceptance of the one-vote loss in the Lok Sabha that precipitated the previous elections. "We too could have created a controversy, demanded a recount, but we did not do so. But the Congress believes only in chaos and disorder. We cannot bend before this kind of behaviour. That is why I have said the bugle has been sounded and we will not back away."

The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, referred to the unusual circumstances that had brought the NDA allies before the people and felt the combine would not be found wanting in responding to this challenge. "If the Congress says it will take the issue

to the people, we are also prepared to counter it on the streets."

The NDA convener, Mr. George Fernandes, recalled his 50 years of "unblemished political life", his concern for the soldier which was "epitomised by countless trips to Siachen and willingness to be examined by any forum".

The MDMK leader, Mr. Vaiko, wondered why Ms. Gandhi continued to retain the charge-sheeted Mr. Vincent George in her personal staff while harping on corruption in the NDA.

The Punjab Chief Minister, Mr. Parkash Singh Badal, his Haryana counterpart, Mr. O.P. Chautala, the Union Communications Minister, Mr. Ram Vilas Paswan too reposed faith in Mr. Vajpayee's leadership.

THE HINDU

25 MAR 2001

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 21, 2001

THE CONTINUING TRAVAILS OF THE NDA

THE DECISION TO institute a judicial inquiry and the exit of Mr. George Fernandes from the Union Council of Ministers — secured under tremendous pressure from within the ruling coalition — may have helped the Atal Behari Vajpayee Government in controlling the political damage inflicted by Tehelka's shocking revelations, to the extent that they removed considerable sting from the Opposition's campaign and, more importantly, in reaffirming the support of an outwardly ambivalent Mr. Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party, which held the trump card. In fact, once the TDP was persuaded not to pull the rug, the Government had won in the numbers game and hence its 'challenge' to the Opposition to face Parliament and bring in a no-confidence motion. And it was precisely for this reason that the Opposition too was more keen on taking the issue to the people, by focussing on the larger security related concerns the expose has raised and arguing that the Vajpayee regime has lost its "moral authority" to rule. A regrettable upshot of the realpolitik driven strategies of the two sides has been a virtual paralysis of Parliament for days together, with crucial financial and legislative business remaining stalled.

With the numbers on its side, the Vajpayee Government may well expect to ride out the Tehelka-induced political storm, with no immediate threat to its survival, having bought time until the judicial inquiry comes up with its findings. But such expectation has necessarily to be tempered with the negative potential of the several faultlines the episode has either induced or aggravated within the ruling establishment as well as in the BJP-RSS relationship. For instance, the rumblings in the Samata Party — in the wake of Mr. Fernandes' resignation —

and the defiance its three other Ministers had shown by insisting on quitting office as an expression of solidarity with their leader. True, Mr. Fernandes has succeeded in getting them round, but the now subdued sense of hurt may not take long to surface. Then, there was the discordant note struck by Mr. Ramakrishna Hegde of the Janata Dal (United) about Mr. Fernandes being retained as convenor of the NDA.

What could be really worrisome post-the Tehelka expose in the intra-NDA and intra-Sangh Parivar context, however, is the issue involving the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, whose name figures rather indirectly in the murky story featured on the videotape. The Shiv Sena supremo, Mr. Bal Thackeray, and the RSS chief, Mr. K. S. Sudarshan, have been forthright in their criticism of Mr. Mishra (besides a few other key functionaries in the PMO notably Mr. N. K. Singh); Mr. Sudarshan even called into question the competence and constitutional propriety of those officials. To the extent that Mr. Mishra has become involved in the controversy, the case for bringing his role also into hard scrutiny under the microscope of the judicial inquiry is unassailable. An important factor to reckon with, of course, is that those in the governmental and political establishments of the ruling coalition who were 'aggrieved' with the PMO top brass (on account of what they perceived to be its overweening authority) have found in the Tehelka tapes a potent instrument to press for change. Given that the forces at work include his detractors within his own party, the BJP, and its ideological fountainhead, the RSS, the travails of Mr. Vajpayee and the coalition he heads are indeed far from over.

THE HINDU

21 MARCH 2001

Atal envoy on mission to mollify Mamata

● Nitish gets Rly ● NDA ultimatum angers Trinamool

HT Correspondents
New Delhi/Kolkata, March 20

THE PRIME Minister gave Nitish Kumar the portfolio Mamata Banerjee held before pulling out of the NDA, on a day that the BJP decided to dispatch a senior leader to Kolkata to placate the Trinamool leader, furious over a letter asking her to make up her mind in 24 hours on her relation with the NDA.

Mamata Banerjee's office received the letter in the afternoon yesterday. The letter, which Sudip Bandopadhyay claimed was signed by Sudheendra Kulkarni, said the Trinamool should reaffirm its faith in the Prime Minister and back the Government. It said the party should come out with an announcement in 24 hours so that "the country is not pushed into the vortex of instability by the machinations of the Congress and the CPI(M)".

But Kailashpati Mishra, who

meets Mamata here tomorrow as the BJP's emissary, said in Delhi that the PMO had nothing to do with the letter: he had signed it, and not Kulkarni. He said in a statement that the BJP is ready for an alliance with the Trinamool if it supports the Vajpayee Government from outside.

On a day of conflicting signals, there were reports that the BJP has decided to contest all 294 seats in West Bengal. The Trinamool evidently did not expect this. The party's Chief Whip in the Lok Sabha, Sudip Bandopadhyay said in Kolkata that his party still stood by the seat-sharing commitment, but would not swap any of the 39 seats it had given the BJP.

Prospects for a poll tie-up between the Congress and Trinamool seemed to improve today. Sudip Bandopadhyay said formal talks with the Congress had not started, but his party doesn't mind including it in the fight against the Left Front. "We are

happy to note that in the Bangalore AICC session, the Congress took a stand against the Left Front." In Delhi, Ambika Soni said an alliance now depends on what Mamata decides.

As for the BJP, the Trinamool wanted to stand by its seat-sharing commitment with the party, though it refused to fall in line over support to the NDA. Bandopadhyay said his party saw the letter as an ultimatum from the NDA, if not as a threat.

"Our parliamentary party took a unanimous decision on withdrawing support from the NDA on March 15. We will not change our stand and there is no question of going back to the NDA," he said. "We think this is improper, uncivilised and unacceptable. If the BJP wants to snap ties, it is welcome. But we have made a seat-adjustment with them and we stick to that. We will not change a single seat that the BJP wants us to change."

Related reports on Pages 3 & 9

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 MAR 2001

NDA PLANS CAMPAIGN AGAINST TEHELKA FALLOUT

PM ready for trial of strength

RAWATBHATA (Rajasthan), MARCH 18. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today went on a counter-offensive against the Congress which had demanded his resignation after the "expose" of corruption in defence deals, challenging it to a trial of strength in Parliament.

Addressing a rally of BJP workers here, Mr. Vajpayee said the Congress lacked the required number in the House and was, therefore, levelling allegations and demanding his Government's resignation outside Parliament.

"The Congress has a habit of toppling governments and in forging alliance with other parties to come to power, something which the party has done in Bihar," he said.

The Prime Minister said the Congress was "upset with the achievements of my Government — stable Government, sound economy and social harmony. That is why it wants to topple the Government."

Challenging the Opposition to bring a no-confidence motion and obstruct budgetary debate in Parliament, he said the Government was ready to face the trial of strength on the floor of the House. — PTI

Our New Delhi Special Correspondent reports:

The NDA plans to begin a campaign to counter the fallout of Tehelka tapes expose during the recesses period of Parliament.

The NDA convenor, Mr. George Fernandes, who met the Prime Minister here this evening, said the campaign would be launched on March 23, coinciding with the birth anniversary of Ram Manohar Lohia. Covering all State Capitals and major population centres the campaign would continue till April 16, he said.

Sonia has no right to question us: BJP

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 18. The Bharatiya Janata Party today lashed out at the Congress president,

Ms. Sonia Gandhi, for demanding the resignation of the Vajpayee Government on "moral grounds". Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi, BJP president, reminded Ms. Gandhi that she had not articulated the need for Rajiv Gandhi to resign after the Bofors scandal erupted, nor had her mother-in-law, Indira Gandhi, offered to step down after the Nagarwala scam. Even when numerous scandals rocked the Narasimha Government, Ms. Gandhi had never expressed the view that he should step down.

The party was critical of the Opposition for blocking a debate in Parliament, for not wanting to wait for the judicial inquiry to complete its work, and for going against all norms of parliamentary functioning.

As always, the BJP president, covered the obvious holes in the security set-up that the Tehelka tapes have revealed by pointing out that no one can question the personal integrity of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee. What seems to have stung the party more than anything else is the Congress charge that the BJP-led Government has committed an act of treason. "Yeh desh ke saath dhokha aur gaddari hai" the party stated in Bangalore where the AICC plenary session has just ended.

"Only the Congress can say that a foreigner has become a patriot and a nationalist a traitor," Mr. Krishnamurthi said.

Atomic units inaugurated: Page 11

'Competent men should man PMO'

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MARCH 18. The RSS sarsanghchalak, Mr. K.S. Sudershan, today more than hinted that the organisation was unhappy with the set-up in the Prime Minister's Office, and that it would like to see the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, pack his bags, but said it was for the Prime Minister to act.

While categorically stating that there was "no need" for the Government to go following the disclosures in the Tehelka videotapes that have scandalised the whole nation, Mr. Sudershan was not so charitable when responding to questions from the media related to Mr. Mishra and to the Prime Minister's foster son-in-law, Mr. Ranjan Bhattacharya.

He was addressing a press conference at the venue of the Akhil Bharatiya Pratinidhi Sabha, national council session of the RSS here today. To a question on the role of Mr. Mishra, the RSS chief said that "if there were competent people (in the PMO) then it (the Tehelka scandal) would not have taken

place." The RSS "had been telling the Prime Minister to appoint only competent people; they (Mr. Mishra and some others) do not have the competence they are expected to have... we have advised him, it is up to him to act."

PTI reports:

Mr. Sudershan tonight clarified that he made no remarks against the functioning of the PMO.

"A reporter had said that in Indira Gandhi's regime, (her son) Sanjay Gandhi had emerged an extra-constitutional authority and sought my comments on the role of Mr. Ranjan Bhattacharya. I replied in a general way that there should not be any extra-constitutional centre. This should by no means be interpreted that I implied that there is extra-constitutional centre in the present PMO," he said in a statement. Referring to the competence of the PMO, Mr. Sudershan said, "I had said that the PMO should be managed by competent officers in a general way."

'BJP is Congressised': Page 13

19/3
9 209 9 194

19 MAR 2001

NDA reposes faith in Fernandes

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 16. — The NDA today reposed full faith in Mr George Fernandes's leadership and rejected the idea of persuading the Miss Mamata Banerjee to return to the coalition.

After an NDA meeting, Mr Fernandes said the Trinamul had let the coalition down by pulling out of it during its hour of crisis.

So, is Miss Banerjee an opportunist? Mr Fernandes said she too had fought the polls on the NDA manifesto and the Prime Minister campaigned for her MPs as well. The Trinamul action was a "great let down".

Confirming his loyalty to the NDA, he said he would try to persuade the three Samata ministers not to press for their resignations. The NDA has rejected their resignation letters.

Mr Fernandes sounded confident apparently because the inquiry proposed by Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee is time-bound. The parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Pramod Mahajan, quoted Mr LK Advani as hav-

ing said at the meeting that Mr Fernandes would return as defence minister after four or five months.

Mr Fernandes denied that the Samata Party was pressing for the resignation of PMO officials whose names had been mentioned in the Tehelka tapes.

But his MPs had demanded their ouster? Mr Fernandes said the party hadn't made any

remove Mr Mishra if he's keen on presenting a clean image of his government," Mr Prabhunath Singh told journalists.

Mr Singh and Mr Raghunath Jha criticised Mr Mishra and Mr Vajpayee's foster son-in-law, Mr Ranjan Bhattacharya. They alleged that Mr Fernandes had been made the sacrificial goat. Mr Singh said: "We, Samata Party MPs, are sending a letter to Mr Vajpayee today in this regard."

Nitish and Co. adamant: The three Samata ministers, led by the agriculture minister, Mr Nitish Kumar, today insisted that their resignations be accepted, adds UNI.

They sent their resignation letters to Mr Vajpayee again today after he had rejected them last night.

"We have stated in the letters that we will continue to be part of NDA and our leader will... be its convener," a Samata leader said. But Mr Vajpayee has to accept the three Samata ministers resignation because they don't want to continue in their post after Mr Fernandes was forced to quit.

On page 6

- BJP talks of international conspiracy
- Cong prepares to put govt on the mat
- Tainted Army officers are R-Day awardees

such demand. He, however, said the inquiry would take care of all aspects mentioned in the tapes, including the alleged role of the officials.

Samata MPs' demand: But Samata MPs today demanded a "clean up" of the PMO and the removal of the Prime Minister's principal secretary, Mr Brajesh Mishra, reports PTL. "Mr Vajpayee should immediately

THE STATESMAN

17 MAR 2001

Fernandes back as NDA convenor

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 16

GEORGE FERNANDES today retained his position as the NDA convenor.

The NDA today recommended to the Government a probe by a sitting Supreme Court judge into the tehelka expose.

The NDA coordination committee today described Fernandes' exit from the Cabinet as "unfortunate". The alliance, however, ruled out resignations of any PMO official.

Pramod Mahajan said the NDA considered Fernandes had served as an exemplary Defence

Minister, "who would return to his job" once the probe was completed in five or six months.

The three Samata ministers continued to stick to their resolve on not remaining in the government till Fernandes was cleared of the charges levelled against him and reinstated in the Cabinet.

Last night, they had submitted their resignations. Fernandes stepped down. Vajpayee had rejected the three ministers' resignations.

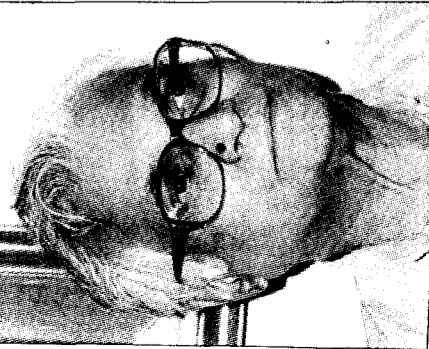
Fernandes said today he was against their resigning from the government as the Samata Party, a founder of the NDA, had "a

very big responsibility to shoulder". But he was unable to convince them on the decision which had been taken at a meeting of all party MPs on Wednesday night, he said.

Referring to Mamata Banerji's move to withdraw from the NDA on the issue of his resignation, Fernandes said he felt "very hurt" at her behaviour.

"Whenever she has been in trouble, the only man she could turn to was George Fernandes.

And when the time came for a crucial decision, she did not even have the courtesy of talking to me," he said at a gathering of Samata and BJP workers.



No more tapes, says tehelka



TEHELKA.COM TODAY said it was not coming out with any further tapes.

"We have nothing more," Tehelka CEO Tarun Tejpal said when asked if the website had information on any other deals or names. They had screened what they had at the March 14 press conference, he said. Tejpal said it was the stink of the defence deals corruption that set journalists Aniruddha Bahal and Samuel Mathew on a long-winding trail. And it was a "combination of greed and promise for more" which made it easier for the two to make their way to the most inaccessible people and incriminating evidence. Journalism at its core is about asking uncomfortable questions.

"These are guys with colossal greed," says Tejpal. Defends Bahal, "This kind of journalism is happening in the West for so many years."
HTC, New Delhi

George bows to pressure; Mamata resigns, quits NDA

By Smita Gupta
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: Under mounting pressure from NDA partners, a powerful section of the BJP and the opposition as well, defence minister George Fernandes finally bowed out of the government at 8 p.m. on Thursday. His announcement of resignation came barely two hours after President K.R. Narayanan called Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee to Rashtrapati Bhavan for a meeting at 6 p.m.

In his nationally televised address, which came four hours after president of Samata Party Jaya Jaitly stepped down in the wake of the 'armsgate', Mr Fernandes proclaimed his innocence, and said during his tenure he had tried to introduce transparency in the defence administration.

But the damage had already been done. For, at 5 p.m., the Tinamul Congress withdrew both from the government and the NDA, vowing not to return even if Mr Fernandes were to quit. With this, the strength of the NDA government slipped from 301 (its strength after the five-member PMK left it last month) to 292, leaving it with a bare majority of 20.

Earlier in the day, taking its cue from the Tinamul Congress, which had initially demanded the sacking of Mr Fernandes as its price for staying on in the government, the Janata Dal-United wrote to the PM endorsing that demand and announced it would decide its political future on March 19 at its parliamentary party meet. There were similar murmurings, though offstage, from

the Shiv Sena and the Akali Dal, that it might be difficult for Mr Vajpayee to continue as Prime Minister unless Mr Fernandes was dropped.

President Narayanan reportedly summoned the Prime Minister on Thursday evening to advise him that Mr Fernandes should go. As an official put it, "The Supreme Commander of the Armed Forces wants to know about issues that concern the national security of the country." But officially Rashtrapati Bhavan only said, "... the President apprised the Prime Minister about his recently concluded visit to Mauritius, while the Prime Minister briefed the President about the general situation in the country."

Within the BJP too, there was pressure all day from the Advani camp on the PM to drop not just Fernandes, but also to "cleanse" the PMO of officials named in the tapes, including national security adviser Brajesh Mishra. Indeed, BJP sources said that the feeling in the RSS and the Advani camp—which is gradually regaining control of the party—was that it would be better to lose the government and recoup to fight another day than allow this "tarnished" government to continue.

The Samata Party, which in a bid to stem the tide against Fernandes had got Jaya Jaitly to step down, went into a huddle following the defence minister's exit. The party, which was earlier united in the view that Mr Fernandes should stay on was apparently trying to decide whether it should quit the NDA, too, in solidarity with their leader. If the 12-member Samata decides to opt out of the NDA, the Vajpayee government will be left

THE PARTY'S OVER



George Fernandes



Mamata Banerjee

Resignations accepted

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The Prime Minister has accepted the resignations of defence minister George Fernandes, railway minister Mamata Banerjee and minister of state for external affairs Ajit Panja, and forwarded them to the President, PMO sources confirmed late on Thursday night.

with a majority of just eight.

Yerran Naidu of the 29-member Telugu Desam Party, which is currently supporting the NDA government from the outside, said, with Mr Fernandes' exit "that chapter is over. We will maintain the status quo".

Meanwhile, in a day of swiftly moving developments, the erstwhile United Front was reborn as

the People's Front with former West Bengal chief minister Jyoti Basu as chairperson and Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav as convener. The Left parties, the SP and the JDS formed the core, and there were indications that the RJD, too, would lend its support to the PF.

The Congress, which was demanding the ouster of the Vajpayee government, softened its stand on the Samajwadi Party, with which it has had an antagonistic relationship for the past two years. When asked whether the disaster of 1998 would be repeated in case the possibility of an alternative government came up again, a Congress leader said, "We are contemplating every step in a calibrated way."

Union agriculture minister Nitish Kumar and two ministers of state belonging to the Samata Party followed their leader George Fernandes in resigning from the government, but the resignations were rejected by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. Besides Nitish Kumar, minister of state for railways Digvijay Singh and minister of state for consumer affairs V. Sreenivasa Prasad had submitted their resignations in solidarity with Mr Fernandes.

Earlier on Thursday, Jaya Jaitly resigned as Samata Party president and said her party was "seriously contemplating" filing a defamation suit against thehka.com for dragging her name in a fictitious defence deal.

"I am taking the step to resign to spare the

party unnecessary attack and denigration," said Ms Jaitly. Thehka's secretly-filmed tapes showed money being given in Ms Jaitly's presence at George Fernandes' residence by those seeking to strike a fictitious defence deal.

As for the status of R.K. Jain, the former national treasurer of the Samata Party who figured prominently in the video footage, Ms Jaitly said he had resigned from the party's primary membership on Thursday.

"I will not stop my fight against the conspirators and allow dubious blackmailers to harm the interests of the country," said Ms Jaitly, adding that party vice-president V.V. Krishna Rao had been appointed as the acting president.

On Wednesday, Ms Jaitly had said she would not resign since she had done nothing wrong. "I have not taken any money personally. I had asked those who had visited me to hand over the donation to the party officials concerned for our party's national convention," she said, claiming her party had never interfered with the working of any department or with the government at any level including the defence ministry.

INSIDE

- ▶ State legislature adjourned, Page 3
- ▶ Third alternative launched, Page 7
- ▶ R.K. Gupta provided shelter to RSS men, Page 7
- ▶ Expose shocks army officers, Page 8
- ▶ See Edit: Chor Bazaar, Page 10

THURSDAY, MARCH 15, 2001

NDA'S HOUR OF SHAME

AD-12

VENALITY, WIDESPREAD AND massive, its reach extending from the low to the higher reaches of the NDA Government, stands exposed by Tehelka's sting operation that was made public on Tuesday. The story itself, the result of a painstaking investigation spread over several months, has all the elements of high drama, with some of the players boastful and even comical in their corrupt ways. The ethics of a sting operation using money to get a story is no doubt problematical, and waving bundles of currency notes before a person may not be the fairest way of testing his integrity. Also, what was involved here is a sham, rather than a real deal, and much of the information and innuendo about key political players comes by way of hearsay, from operators who can be expected to make boastful, exaggerated claims to connections in high office. Yet what stands exposed is a pervasive tendency towards corruption that is even more worrisome from the standpoint of good governance and the democratic polity than any specific instance of a corrupt deal. The fact that two intrepid reporters could gain access to key purchase decision makers with some money but mostly with the promise of huge kickbacks and the blatant manner in which money was demanded and taken show how permissive the administration has become under the NDA Government.

157

Defence purchases are shrouded in secrecy and governments typically invoke false security considerations and unstated foreign relations gains to evade public scrutiny; and they offer the widest scope for corruption. It is ironic that this scandal should surface when the Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, in a grand show of cleansing his Ministry had asked the Chief Vigilance Commissioner to probe major deals of the past. It has now been demonstrated beyond doubt that a most unholy nexus exists between political party operatives, officials in the Defence Ministry, high ranking army officers connected with equipment and arms purchases and an assortment of businessmen and deal makers. The public's faith in the decision making process in-

9 P.M. NDA

involved in the purchase of arms and equipment vital to the country's defence stands rudely shaken. Some of the officers involved in the scandal have been placed under suspension. However, that the Defence Ministry is so steeped in corruption, with so many officials in the Ministry and so many key decision makers in the army being found to be on the take, and that the president of the Samata Party was caught taking money in the Defence Minister's house cannot be explained away. Even if the charges of corruption do not stick personally, the moral and political responsibility for this state of affairs alone would make Mr. Fernandes' continuance in office untenable.

The political implications of the Tehelka expose are already being felt in Parliament and ought not to be underestimated. The heads of the two parties, the BJP and the Samata, now stand exposed. The NDA itself had carefully cultivated its image as a clean dispensation different from, say, the Congress(I) regimes of the past that were associated with corruption scandals. That sheen would seem to have vanished suddenly. The massive expose of corruption has also opened up a new front for the Opposition even as the NDA remains vulnerable on the communal issue as well. One lesson the NDA seems to have learnt from the past is that it is not sound political strategy to ignore charges of corruption or to stonewall and dismiss them with grand imperiousness, as Rajiv Gandhi learnt to his cost. An enquiry has been announced and efforts would be on to put a distance between those who have been exposed and key players in political office. Yet, political compulsions would dictate how thorough the cleansing process can be and how high it could reach, and in the face of such damning evidence caught on camera, damage control measures can help only to a limited extent. In the immediate aftermath, the BJP's NDA partners, particularly the Trinamool Congress and the DMK, who are facing elections to the State Assemblies are going to face embarrassing moments. It is going to be difficult for the NDA to live down this hour of shame.

15 MAR 2001

15 MAR 2001

15 MAR 2001

NDA partners join Opp in slamming Rly budget

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 26

POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS stood blurred as some NDA allies joined the Congress, the Left parties and other Opposition groupings in slamming the Railway Budget 2001-02.


Amidst stray and individual voices demanding Railway Minister Mamata Bannerjee's resignation, the Opposition dubbed the Railway Budget as "populist", a "tale of woes accompanied by a bagful of excuses" and "a make-believe exercise" that ignored basic issues like developmental requirements and safety norms and was geared towards the forthcoming assembly elections, especially in West Bengal.

Unlike the multi-pronged and broad-based attack of the Opposition, NDA allies like the Biju Janata Dal, the Shiv Sena and the Samata concentrated their criticism on the Railway Budget's "regional imbalances", "gross injustice" and "step motherly treatment" of their respective regions. The BJD, in fact, had staged a walkout from the House to lodge its protest. Although the TDP was guarded in its criticism, it made it clear that it would pursue with its demands for new trains and extending services to different regions in the state which had not been met.

Spearheading the Opposition attack, Mr Madhavrao Scindia, Congress Deputy Leader in Lok Sabha and a former Railway Minister himself, said that the Railway Budget displayed a

NEW TRAINS

- New Delhi-Raipur-Bilaspur weekly Rajdhani Express
- New Delhi-Ranchi-Hatia weekly Rajdhani Express
- Bi-weekly express between Gorakhpur and New Delhi
- Bangalore-Vasco bi-weekly express
- Pune-Ernakulam weekly express via Londa & Madgaon
- Asansol-New Jalpaiguri bi-weekly express
- Secunderabad-Dharmavaram express
- Sealdha-New Jalpaiguri bi-weekly express
- Dhanbad-Hatia intercity express
- Howrah-Yashwantpur (Bangalore) bi-weekly express



"sense of helpless despondency and dependence." As he listed out the woes that dog the Railway Ministry and the string of unfulfilled promises from the last Railway Budget, including methods of raising revenues, Mr Scindia came down heavily on the government's inability to power a strategy to tone up the railway system. He charged that the Railway Budget was merely meant "to reap dividends in an election."

Outlining the financial mess in the railway system, the Congress leader also warned that rehabilitation and renewal work would suffer for want of resources and the rise in freight tariff could spell major diversion to road transport.

His colleague and Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Man-

mohan Singh stressed that the Railway Budget failed to initiate a new direction for the railways for a new plan period or come up with a strategy to avert the certain collapse the railway system was heading for.

The CPI-M Polit Bureau warned that the Railway Minister's populist gimmicks foretold of imminent additional burdens and said that the increased freight charges would contribute to general inflation in the country—a point raised by the CPI-ML too. "It is absolutely certain that post-assembly elections, additional burdens on the people are in the offing to compensate the manipulated budgetary balancing done on the basis of exaggerated projections and with draws from the capital fund" the CPI-M said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 FEB 2001

Southern shock to Atal alliance

FROM KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, Feb. 5: In a jolt to the Vajpayee government, the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) today quit the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) ahead of its plans to join the Jayalalitha-led ADMK front in Tamil Nadu.

PMK chief S. Ramadoss and the party's two ministers of state — N.T. Shanmugham (coal) and E. Ponnuswamy (petroleum and natural gas) — met Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee this morning and submitted their resignations. Their resignations are yet to be accepted.

Ramadoss told reporters at Chennai airport tonight that he will meet Jayalalitha at 11.30 am tomorrow.

Though the five-MP party's decision to pull out will not have any impact on the government's stability, it has dealt a psychological blow to the NDA and increased Vajpayee's dependence on demanding allies such as the Telugu Desam and the Trinamul Congress.

The PMK is the first party to pull out of the coalition since it formed the government in October 1999.

Sources said the Prime Minister is not unduly worried as Ramadoss, in his letter, has mentioned that he will offer support to the NDA government in the event of any crisis.

"We formed the NDA with a high commitment to the cause of the people of India and the PMK is still committed to that philosophy. But circumstances in Tamil Nadu have made us part company with the NDA,"

Ramadoss said in his letter.

The sources said Ramadoss had suggested a *mahajot* — an anti-DMK alliance which will include the ADMK — modelled on a proposal in Bengal, where the BJP is not averse to a pact with the Congress in an anti-Left formation. But Vajpayee rejected the proposal outright as he is wary of Jayalalitha.

The Prime Minister held a meeting with ministerial colleagues L.K. Advani, George Fernandes, Jaswant Singh and BJP president Bangaru Laxman following the resignations of the two PMK members.

"In terms of pure arithmetic, it (the PMK pullout) will not affect the stability of the Central government. In psychological terms, yes, there is an impact on both sides," agreed Laxman.

Efforts are on to humour the PMK and Fernandes is likely to keep the dialogue on with Ramadoss until he decides which way to go during the state polls due in April-May.

The relationship between Ramadoss and Tamil Nadu chief minister M. Karunanidhi had soured over the past six months. The PMK chief, sources said, feels the DMK government has become unpopular and is unlikely to be voted back to power in the Assembly elections.

The PMK move comes ahead of a meeting scheduled between Ramadoss and Karunanidhi later this month to discuss the Assembly elections, including seat adjustments.

The PMK fell out with the DMK after Karunanidhi rejected the smaller ally's demand that it

be allowed to form the government in Pondicherry should the NDA win the Assembly elections there.

The PMK, a party of Vanniars, claims it has a large following among the backward community in Pondicherry.

The PMK is crucial for any winning combination in Tamil Nadu as the Vanniars make up a large part of the electorate in the north and can influence the outcome in 60 Assembly constituencies. In 1998, when the PMK was with Jayalalitha, the combine won impressively and in 1999, when Ramadoss crossed over to the DMK front, the ADMK suffered.

Sources said that Vajpayee, though not overly worried about the PMK's decision to leave the NDA, told Ramadoss that he was free to sew up state-level alliances but should keep supporting the coalition at the Centre, a PMK source said.

Vajpayee's aversion to Jayalalitha notwithstanding, a section of BJP leaders agrees with Ramadoss that Karunanidhi is a liability and the ADMK chief will head the next government in Chennai after the Assembly elections.

Sources said that Ramadoss had, over the past one year, complained against Karunanidhi to Vajpayee at least six times, but the Prime Minister had not taken any action.

Ramadoss had wanted his bete noire Vazhapadi Ramamurthy to be dropped from the NDA, but both Vajpayee and Karunanidhi had rejected his demand.

■ More reports on Page 6

6 FEB 2001