

Trinamul, PMK make it back into NDA fold

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

AJIT NOT INVITED

NEW DELHI, Aug. 27. — The NDA today re-admitted the Trinamul Congress despite reservations of most of the partners who wanted Miss Mamata Banerjee to first issue a public apology for leaving the alliance.

But for the intervention of the Prime Minister, the NDA consensus was that she wait for another week before a formal re-entry.

The PMK, which had attended the last NDA meeting too, has been formally re-admitted.

The NDA's strength has risen to 304 in the Lok Sabha that has an effective strength of 541. The Trinamul has nine Lok Sabha members and the PMK five. Six Independent MPs are offering issue-based support to the alliance.

The NDA convener, Mr George Fernandes, later said the partners were unanimous on the re-entry of the two parties. Sources, however, said Mrs Maneka Gandhi had raised the issue of an apology from Miss Banerjee. She was supported by all, including the BJP representatives.

The BJP president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, who had spoken about a norm for a party's re-entry into the alliance, reportedly didn't object. He, however, asked the NDA to frame the code of conduct quickly.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee too said the code should be prepared before Parliament's monsoon session ends, to which Mr Fernandes said it would be ready before that.

The fact that the Trinamul has been invited to tomorrow's dinner meeting of NDA MPs at Mr Vajpayee's residence seems to have forced the Prime Minister's hand. There was a consensus among the government's political managers that Miss Banerjee should attend the dinner to set at rest speculations about her status.

NEW DELHI, Aug. 27. — The Union agriculture minister, Mr Ajit Singh, was not invited to today's NDA meeting. This was the second alliance meeting since he joined the government that he was not invited to.

Sources said Mr Singh hasn't been formally admitted to the NDA. The BJP spokesman, Mr VK Malhotra, said the invitations were probably issued on the basis of the old list.

The NDA is reportedly trying to appease the Haryana chief minister, Mr OP Chautala, who had opposed Mr Singh's entry into the NDA. — SNS

Mr Fernandes tried his best to build Miss Banerjee's case at the meeting. When a leader asked whether the Trinamul had applied for NDA membership, he argued that Miss Banerjee had said on a number of occasions that she wanted to join the NDA. She had also said she was not interested in a ministerial berth. This should be enough, Mr Fernandes told the meeting.

On the issue of apology, he said Miss Banerjee had expressed apology to Mr Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani. Will the Trinamul and PMK be given ministerial berths? Mr Fernandes said that was the Prime Minister's prerogative.

Mr Murasoli Maran (DMK), who didn't attend the meeting to frame the code of conduct, was present at today's meeting. Mr Fernandes said Mr Maran was not invited to the earlier meeting. "It was my fault."

The BJP spokesman, Mr Vijay Malhotra, welcomed the Trinamul to the NDA. The BJP's West Bengal unit, which had opposed Miss Banerjee's re-entry into the alliance, will abide by the central leadership's

stand, he said.

Anil's reaction: Beggars have no choice, Mr Anil Biswas said today while reacting to the Trinamul's return to the NDA, SNS adds from Kolkata. "I gather some Trinamul leaders had said if they were to return to the NDA, they would do so with their heads held high. My question is do they have heads at all?"

The Trinamul has returned to the NDA "like beggars", he said. "If it's not humiliation, what else is it? So many conditions were set off and on for the return."

State BJP: The state BJP president, Mr Asim Ghosh, said it was clear that the Trinamul had decided to accept the NDA's code of conduct.

"Some Trinamul leaders had been saying that they wouldn't accept any insulting terms. This meant they were refusing to accept the code of conduct... But now they have had to accept the code."

He said his party would go it alone in the state for the time being. No directive has been received from Delhi to revive the alliance in the state.

Congress: The Congress today lashed out at Miss Banerjee, saying her claims of practising value-based politics were "totally false".

The PCC vice-president, Mr Pradip Bhattacharya, said the Trinamul has rejoined the coalition at a time when the NDA government was facing charges of cheating US-64 investors. "This is politics of convenience. Miss Banerjee has frustrated the hopes of millions of people in Bengal by rejoining the NDA."

Will the Congress snap ties with the Trinamul in municipalities and panchayats? Mr Bhattacharya said that would depend on local factors and objectives.

■ More reports on pages 4, 8

THE STATESMAN

An RSS evening at PM's house

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, AUG. 18. After a gap of 13 months the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) chief, Mr. K.S. Sudarshan, shared the dais and the limelight, and both of them sang songs of praise to the spirit of the Hindu organisation. In a public display of ideological bonding, the two managed to bury, at least for now, the impression of estrangement between the Prime Minister and the RSS.

The occasion for this synergising was the release of a book on a RSS leader, the late Lakshmanrao Inamdar, also known as Vakil Saheb. The book is written by Mr. Narendra Modi, BJP general-secretary. Mr. Sudarshan was the chief guest. The place was the Prime Minister's residence. The evening was not without its political messages.

Mr. Vajpayee, for once, was not at all apologetic about identifying with the RSS. Unembarrassed he talked about growing with the RSS 'shakha' culture, and how he had felt enriched from knowing so many "pracharaks" (preacher/propagandist). He even equated Lakshman Rao with Jawaharlal Nehru; just as Nehru had donned the lawyer's robes to defend the INA heroes, Lakshman Rao had resumed his legal role to defend those RSS cadres who were implicated in the conspiracy of Mahatma Gandhi's assassination.

Mr. Vajpayee also endeared himself thoroughly to the RSS crowd by lamenting that the media in general was unappreciative of the activities and sacri-



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, releasing the book, *Sethubandh*, at his residence in New Delhi on Saturday. On his left is the RSS chief, Mr. Sudarshan, and to his right, Mr. Narendra Modi, BJP general secretary and one of the authors of the book. — Photo: S. Arneja

lices of the RSS cadres. In particular, he complained that the media virtually blacked out the kidnapping and eventual killing of four RSS swayamsevaks in Tripura.

And, then, he chose to go the extra mile. He equated the dedication of the RSS cadres to that of the Christian missionaries who fanned out into distant areas. He disapproved of the missionaries' proselytising activities, though hastened to enter the caveat that they were within their rights to do so.

In his 15-minute speech, Mr. Vajpayee confined himself to eulogising the RSS because, as he pointedly observed, he wanted the limelight and focus on the

RSS leaders. Unfortunately, Mr. Sudarshan had nothing new to say. Expectedly, the RSS chief praised his organisation, its men, its mission, its love for the nation, and its ideology; and, also expectedly, he juxtaposed the Indian way of life and its unselfishness with the materialistic, unfeeling, insensitive western society. And, he had a word of advice to the cadres: 'do not worry about carping criticism, carry on the good work.'

It was a remarkable gathering. In the front-row were old Sangh Parivar hands such as Mr. Nanaji Deshmukh, the VHP leaders, Mr. Vishnu Hari Dalmia and Acharya Giriraj Kishore; then, there were new converts like Mr. Vinod

Khanna and Mr. I.D. Swamy; but, the oddest of new convert, Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain, chose to be right at the back.

For a discerning observer, the evening offered a few insights into the changing world of the RSS. The majority of 300 or so crowd belonged to prosperous-looking, safari-donning "sympathisers" while the RSS "pracharaks" were rather conspicuous in their hand-washed kurtas.

The women too were fashionably dressed; if not exactly the India fashion week crowd, they certainly did Karol Bagh proud. And, the shiny cars of the swayamsevaks told a tale of new-found prosperity.

THE HINDU

18 AUG 2001

NDA MPs give it back to tehelka

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 22

MONTHS AFTER it took the country by storm with its expose on how defence deals are fixed, tehelka.com returned to the centre stage today when angry NDA MPs disrupted Lok Sabha proceedings over revelations that the portal had used prostitutes to build its tell-all story.

A newspaper report this morning said the tapes handed over to the Venkataswami panel and the Army court of inquiry contained explicit footage of Army officials with prostitutes provided by the portal's reporters posing as arms agents.

Treasury Bench MPs took offense to this and paralysed the House in the post-lunch session. This was after Opposition MPs disrupted the morning session over a Government decision to withdraw three office orders.

The use of prostitutes to trap Army officers was unethical, the NDA members said and demanded that strong steps be taken against the portal's editor-in-chief Tarun Tejpal. Samata Party and BJP MPs gathered in the Well of the House shout-

TARUN TEJPAL COOL

"EXTRA-ORDINARY STORIES need extra-ordinary circumstances," Tarun Tejpal, the man in the eye of the storm said today.

Unflappable and cool the tehelka editor-in chief said his motive was to expose corruption in defence deals and his team hadn't done anything wrong in using the dubious women.

"Tehelka has acted in a most honourable manner. It has neither exploited them nor suppressed them. The tapes were handed over to the Army court and the Venkataswami panel. The tapes were never released in the public domain for they were much too sensitive," he said.

HTC, New Delhi

ing "hang them" (the tehelka reporters).

With the ruckus refusing to die down, Speaker G M C Balayogi was forced to adjourn the House. Around 2.30 pm, when proceedings resumed, ruling alliance MPs once again began shouting, drowning the Speak-

er's repeated pleas for order.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan tried in vain to pacify the BJP and Samata Party MPs, but even this didn't help. Having failed to restore order, Balayogi adjourned the House for the day.

Outside the House, Samata leaders insisted that the entire tehelka investigation team be put behind bars. The Government should book the portal under the Immoral Traffic Act, they said.

"The portal has committed a grave crime by demoralising the morale of the Army," George Fernandes said.

Fernandes had stepped down as Defence Minister after the scandal broke.

Congress reaction: The methods used by tehelka were controversial, said the Congress, but this did not lower the merit of the sting operation findings, Congress leaders said.

"The fact remains that Bangaru Laxman and Jaya Jaitley were filmed accepting bribes. The methods certainly don't take anything away from the merits of the findings," party spokesman Jaipal Reddy said.

Mamata is welcome to NDA: George

Arindam Sarkar
Contai (Midnapore), August 9

MAMATA BANERJEE is welcome back to the NDA, alliance convener George Fernandes said today. "We've entrusted this matter with Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who is the chairman of the NDA. He will take a decision soon."

Mamata reciprocated saying: "Fernandes has welcomed us to the NDA and I want to say that whenever the Prime Minister wants us, we're at his beck and call. We will return to the alliance because we don't want the Vajpayee Government to fall. People don't want elections every year. In Bengal, we have decided to walk alone as of now. But in national politics, we're ready to go back to the NDA."

The leaders were addressing a mammoth rally here, ostensibly organised to pay tributes to the martyrs of the Quit India Movement.

Titled Shahid Divas meeting, the turnout at the Trinamool Congress show was impressive. Every inch of the the Sri Aurobindo Stadium was full with Trinamool supporters. Thousands stood outside to hear Fernandes welcome the Trinamool back to the NDA. They were also eager to hear their leader reciprocate the call.

And there was more for the gallery. When Mamata looked at Fernandes and said: "Fernandesji, I want you to convey to Vajpayeeji that we have nothing to do with the Congress since it has joined hands with CPI(M), our enemy," the audience went into raptures.

"We had a pre-poll alliance with the Congress, but they stabbed us in the back by putting up candidates against us. Even after leaving the NDA, I didn't say a word either against Vajpayeeji or the NDA. For that mat-

ter, We left the NDA after the Tehelka scam broke, but the Prime Minister fulfilled our demand to investigate the case. So we'll never weaken his hands. Tell him that we are with him and his Government," she went on.

To drive her point home, she reminded Fernandes that that was why she and her MPs had stood beside Vajpayee when the NDA was up against severe criticism from the Opposition over the UTI bungle. She had requested Vajpayee not to quit office, when he threatened to stepped down.

It was Fernandes who set the ball rolling. Mamata had blundered by leaving the NDA in a huff, he said. "After the Bengal polls, everybody asked me what to do with Mamata. I told them she should be brought back. Not many supported me then. But today it appears many people are willing to have Mamata back. She met the Prime Minister and Home Minister LK Advani and discussed the issue with me. I welcome her back."

His message to both the BJP leadership and Mamata: "Forget the past, think about today and look ahead."

Both Mamata and Fernandes spewed venom at the CPI(M). The former Defence Minister said the leadership of the Left Front had changed, but not the attitude or behaviour of the CPI(M). The attacks on Trinamool workers haven't stopped. None of these criminals have been arrested.

Hours after Fernandes's statement came, BJP State president Ashim Ghosh expressed dissatisfaction over Fernandes's invitation to Mamata. "It goes against the sentiments of BJP workers here. However, the State unit is duty bound to follow the central leadership's orders."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1. 11. 2001

NSCN shuts door on Sangma, Govt waits for miracle

■ No N-E politician acceptable, says militant outfit

AJAY SURI
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 5

ALL dressed up and nowhere to go. That's the plight of P A Sangma, who is the latest victim of the Government's policy in the North-east: look after you leap. The Centre has all but named Sangma as its chief negotiator with the NSCN (I-M) and the former Lok Sabha Speaker, who represents Tura, Meghalaya, in Parliament has indicated his "availability". Now comes the news that the NSCN (I-M) is flashing the red signal and the government doesn't know what to do.

Union Home Minister L K Advani has discussed the matter with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee but has so far found no way out. Having been forced to take a U-turn on its decision to extend the cease-fire with NSCN (I-M) to Manipur and other states in the region, the government is treading with extreme caution.

The NSCN's message, said sources, reached the Union home ministry through intelligence agencies a few days ago. By then, Advani had already spoken with Vajpayee's current emissary for the Naga negotiations, K Padmanab-

haiah. In fact, North Block was on the point of naming Sangma as the chief negotiator when Th Muivah and Issac Chu poured cold water over its plan.

The Naga militant group has told New Delhi that it would not welcome any political leader with north-east connections for conducting negotiations. They have nothing against Sangma — the condition applies to him as well as to any other politician from the region.

The NSCN's argument is that asking Sangma to thrash out the complex Naga issue would be like involving P K Mahanta or Tarun Gogoi to talk peace with ULFA in Assam. It would be neither prudent nor practical. In fact, observers say the NSCN (I-M)'s stand is not all that new. New Delhi has always accepted this and, therefore, none of its two emissaries — Padmanabhaiah and Swaraj Kaushal — had any active involvement in north-east politics. Sangma is widely seen as an interested party in the Naga-New Delhi dispute.

At least two chief ministers in the north-east have also opposed the move to send Sangma to the negotiating table. They are Nagaland's S C Jamir and Mizoram's Zorem Thanga. Congress chief Sonia Gandhi is also unhappy with the move since Sangma is in the Sharad Pawar camp.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

INDIAN EXPRESS

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

6 AUG 2001

Left Front, Mulayam skip Sonia's tea party

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 23

SONIA GANDHI'S efforts to chalk out a joint strategy with other Opposition parties in Parliament today suffered a setback when the Left, along with the Samajwadi Party and the Nationalist Congress Party, stayed away from the meeting called by her as the Leader of the Opposition.

The decision of the CPI(M) and the CPI to stay away came as a surprise as they had attended similar meetings called by her during previous parliamentary sessions.

Interestingly, the leaders of the CPI(M), CPI and the RSP turned up for a meeting convened by Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Manmohan Singh, in an adjoining room in Parliament House at almost the same time.

In a bid to show that no personal affront was intended, CPI(M) Parliamentary Party leader Somnath Chatterjee held a half-an-hour interaction with Gandhi. But he left minutes before the scheduled meeting called by her.

Chatterjee told waiting newsmen that he had come in his indi-

HOUSES ADJOURNED

THE MONSOON session of Parliament began on a sombre note on Monday with both the Houses of Parliament adjourned for the day without transacting any business in memory of Nepal's King Birendra and Queen Aishwarya who were murdered on June 1.

PTI, New Delhi

vidual capacity; he was not representing his party, the Left Front or the People's Front. "I was invited in my individual capacity and I had a good tea with Mrs Gandhi."

Those who turned up for the meeting essentially represented the Congress' allies in the States — Raghuvansh Prasad Singh (RJD), P H Pandiyan (AIADMK), G M Banatwala (IUML) and Prakash Ambedkar (Bharatiya Republican Party-Bahujan Mahasangh).

BSP leader Mayawati, who was not present, sent a "regret letter" to Gandhi, saying that she would not be able to come because she was "caught up in a dharna".

Though upset by the development, Congress leaders refused

to say they were disheartened by a majority of the Opposition staying away from the meeting.

"We performed our duty by extending an invitation to all the Opposition parties. It is now for them to explain why they did not respond to the invite. The onus for explanation is on them and not on us," a senior Congress leader said.

The Congress leaders viewed the Left's decision as essentially to show solidarity with Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav with an eye on the coming elections in Uttar Pradesh. One leader chose to term the Left parties' decision as naive since they did not have much of a hold in Uttar Pradesh.

The Congress leaders also said the Left's behaviour pointed to confusion in their ranks. Some Left leaders attended a meeting called by Manmohan Singh, they said. "There is complete lack of coordination between the Left leaders in the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha. It appears that the decision to stay away from Gandhi's meeting was taken at the last moment and they could not communicate the decision to their counterparts in the Rajya Sabha," a Congress leader said.

People's Front focusses on secularism, federalism

By Javed M. Ansari

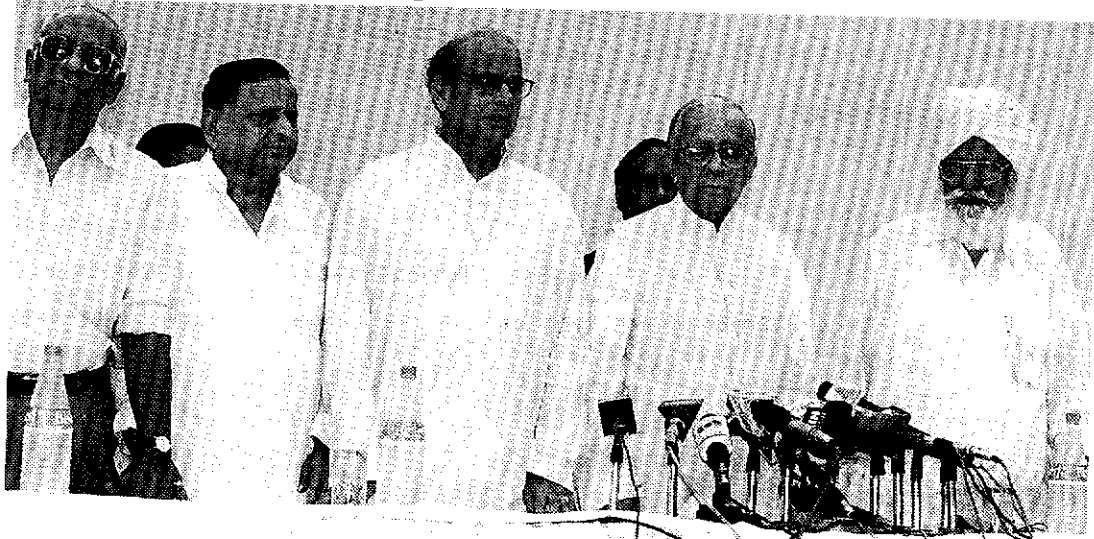
NEW DELHI, JUNE 2. The People's Front today unveiled its programme, listing its priorities and underlining the issues on which the front seeks to build itself as a viable, third alternative at the national level. It said it was determined to emerge as the "real third alternative" to both the BJP and the Congress.

Releasing a document this morning, the front chairman and former West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Jyoti Basu, said the constituents had come together after agreeing on certain basic issues. "Our programme and policies are before the people now, it's for them to judge us."

The programme highlights the issues that the anti-BJP anti-Congress forces, specially the Left parties, have been espousing all along. The highlight of the 10-page document is its strong emphasis on secularism, federalism, the public distribution system and the public sector units.

It calls for legal steps against the "misuse" of religion in politics and the implementation of the Places of Worship Act. It demands amendments to Article 356 to check "the draconian powers of the Centre to dismiss the State Governments" and opposes any trifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir. There is strong support for electoral reforms, the Lok Pal Bill and the need to protect domestic industry.

The programme was released in the presence of front convener and Samajwadi Party leader, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, the former Prime Minister, Mr. V.P. Singh, the CPI(M) general secretary, Mr. Harkishan Surjeet, his CPI counterpart, Mr. A.B. Bardhan, the CPI(M) politburo member, Mr. Sitaran Yechury, and Mr. Abhani Roy Chaudhary of the RSP. The front will strengthen the "principles of



The leaders of the People's Front, Mr. A.B. Bardhan, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, Mr. V.P. Singh, Mr. Jyoti Basu and Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, at a press conference in New Delhi on Saturday. — Photo: S. Subramaniam

secular democracy, federalism, social justice and self-reliance". But the programme underplays the issue of the women's reservation Bill as a deference to Mr. Yadav who has a different view on the issue.

Severely critical of the BJP and the Sangh Parivar, the document says that at no time had the communal forces posed such a serious threat to the secular democratic foundations of the country. It accuses the BJP-led Central Government of "harming the country in every respect". On the economic front, the Government was "mortgaging" the economic sovereignty and harming the national unity through its "narrow, sectarian and fascistic policies".

The document also criticises the Congress. Accusing it of compromising with communal forces, it says the party has forfeited its position to protect and transform the country. It was the Congress

which had initiated the economic reforms of 1991, causing "untold suffering and misery to the people".

Most of the leaders who spoke today said the front would prove its strength in Uttar Pradesh which was "almost half of India". Mr. Bardhan and Mr. Surjeet said the process of realignment of forces would get a fresh impetus after Uttar Pradesh polls. The front's leaders made it clear Mr. Yadav would be the lynchpin in Uttar Pradesh. Mr. Yadav said the recent byelection in Uttar Pradesh had proved that the people had "made up their minds" in favour of his party.

Mr. Surjeet criticised the Congress for opposing the CPI(M) in West Bengal and Kerala rather than making the BJP its main enemy. He did not consider the Congress communal but said it did not have the fire to fight the BJP.

The former Prime Minister, Mr. V.P. Singh, said apart from Uttar

Pradesh elections the major thrust of the front would be to agitate on people's issues and to involve the people in the campaigns of the front.

Janata Party to contest U.P. polls

LUCKNOW, JUNE 2. The Janata Party has decided to field candidates in the coming Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh, the party president, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, said today. Dr. Swamy told newsmen here that his party would provide a "viable alternative" to the people of the State who had no choice among the caste-based Samajwadi Party and Bahujan Samaj Party, the communal BJP and the Congress.

"The State is facing one of the worst economic crises and these parties are busy talking about temple issue and reservation facility for SCs, STs and backwards", he said. — PTI

THE FRONT

5 JUN 2001

Mamata goes to Atal with rig agenda

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, May 27: For the first time since their split in March, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee will meet in Delhi within the next few days.

Fuelling speculation about Trinamul's possible return to the coalition at the Centre, Mamata said tonight she would meet Vajpayee between May 29 and June 1 primarily to apprise him of the rigging in the Bengal

Assembly elections.

"I do not want to make any comment on this issue (rejoining the NDA) now. My priority is to expose how the ruling party in Bengal rigged the Assembly elections. To that end, I will meet the Prime Minister to inform him under what kind of state-sponsored terrorism the elections were held in West Bengal," Mamata told **The Telegraph**.

Mamata will also meet another key BJP leader, L.K. Advani, on the same issue.

The official reason for Mamata's visit to Delhi is a meeting with

President K.R. Narayanan. Mamata, who is scheduled to leave for Delhi on Tuesday with a 20-member party delegation, will call on the President on Thursday and complain about the "violence and unfair means" used by the CPM to win the elections.

She is also expected to meet Congress president Sonia Gandhi and inform her about "the serious constraints" under which the Congress-Trinamul combine's candidates contested the polls.

Mamata's Delhi tour coincides with an admission by her party officials that she was increasingly

growing view that Trinamul must return to the NDA if its identity and honour are respected," said a senior official who is part of Mamata's think-tank.

Another official said Mamata was being pressured by her party to first forge a "strategic relation and, thereafter, return to the alliance.

However, sources close to Mamata said, this time she was against taking a hasty decision on rejoining the alliance.

"Whatever step we take, it has to be justified. The Tehelka issue,



Mamata, Atal

coming under pressure from within her party, as well as the BJP and its partners, to return to the National Democratic Alliance.

"Inside the party, there is a

Pradesh polls, the NDA will badly need the support of Trinamul MPs to consolidate its position at the Centre," a Trinamul official said.

Mamata is believed to have indicated to her aides that Trinamul's response to the current overtures from the NDA would depend on a number of interlocked

issues like the Samata Party's relationship with the BJP and the position Chandrababu Naidu's Telugu Desam Party will adopt in the days ahead. The Samata-BJP ties have come under strain after the Manipur standoff.

over which we quit the NDA, has virtually died down. But we have to be very cautious. Many of our sympathisers believe that breaking out of the NDA in the wake of Tehelka was hasty enough. So, we do not want to repeat the same mistake," a Trinamul official said.

The politician in Mamata is also waiting to gauge how the BJP will perform in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls. The state elections are due in March next year, but the BJP has started weighing the option of an earlier date. "If

the BJP fares poorly in the Uttar

Parties explore honourable exit from Manipur mess

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: After dithering on the brink, the BJP and the Samata Party attempted to thrash out a face-saving formula on the Manipur imbroglio at a meeting at the Prime Minister's residence on Tuesday, and the BJP hoped that the threat of President's rule in the state might impel both sides to arrive at an understanding and possibly form a coalition ministry.

The Samata Party seemed unwilling to precipitate a crisis immediately in the National Democratic Alliance with its seniormost leader, George Fernandes, stating that his party would not pull out of the alliance "at least for now".

After meeting Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee over lunch, Mr Fernandes said, "We all have a stake in this government. How can it (Manipur development) affect the government at the Centre? It cannot." However, he said there would be more meetings "in order to reach a conclusion and resolve the problem that we are at present

facing". Mr Fernandes said leaders from Manipur would also be present at a meeting of the two sides at the central level on May 28.

During the "very frank" discussions between Mr Fernandes and the Prime Minister, BJP president Jana Krishnamurthy was also present. Replying to a question as to whether President's rule was being imposed in the state, Mr Fernandes said no particular formula was discussed.

Having made the conciliatory gesture of forbidding its MLAs from staking their claim to forming the new government, the BJP was in no mood to relent further. While the scheduled meetings seem to have put on hold the current crisis, the Samata's demand for the restoration of the Kojiam ministry appears doomed. A senior BJP leader, closely involved in the talks, said, "The Kojiam government has been defeated on the floor of the house and has the support of just 17 of the 60 MLAs. What legitimacy does it have now? On the other hand, the other group of 41 has a clear majority."

Aware of the fact that it has little or no control over its 26 MLAs, of whom only six were elected on BJP tickets, the BJP is not averse to these MLAs forming another party and even forming a government, which may join the NDA at a later stage.

Later, the Samata Party described the ongoing discussions, including the two-hour luncheon meeting between Mr Fernandes and the Prime Minister, as unsatisfactory. But Samata appeared willing to delay any final decision on its future in the NDA, expressing hope that a solution could be found through the dialogue already under way. Between now and the May 28 meetings, R.B. Kojiam will continue as chief minister in the absence of any alternative arrangement.

Samata spokesman and general secretary Shambhu Sharan Srivastava said, "The problem is not of the chief ministership but of breach of trust. Unless trust is restored between the BJP and the Samata, we cannot find a satisfactory solution either for Manipur or for its consequences elsewhere."

THE TIMES OF INDIA

23 MAY 2001

The third force alternative

By Muchkund Dubey

The third force must be kept alive... as a reminder of the direction in which the Indian economy and polity should move.

11D-12
24/4

THE THIRD force in Indian politics, by definition, is the political coalition that offers an alternative to the two major political parties — the Congress(I) and the BJP. In essence it has to be the coalition of Left, secular and democratic forces in Indian politics. It has also to lean heavily on regional parties. The third force rejects the Congress(I) because of the way it has compromised secularism, its pronounced lurch towards neo-classical economic policies, its dynastical tradition and its image as a party symbolising corruption. The third Force has to be strongly opposed to the BJP because of its communal origin and character and its proclivity to resort to fascist means to impose its Hindu majoritarian view.

However, in spite of its basic rationale of being an alternative to the Congress(I) and the BJP, the third force need not be seen as a mere negation of these two political formations. It has a positive ideology of its own and hence a distinct space in the Indian political spectrum. The third force ideology was best delineated in a publication "Towards a New Politics: Agenda for Third Force" (New Age Publishers, 1996). This agenda would, of course, require adjustments in view of the recent changes. However, its basic tenets and principal components remain valid.

The core elements of the agenda are: No compromise with forces of communalism and the launching of a proactive programme for the progressive secularisation of the Indian society. Consciously working for the welfare and empowerment of the minorities and the marginalised sections — Dalits, tribals, other backward classes and women. Offering a clear-cut alternative to the policy of unbridled and indiscriminate liberalisation and globalisation; among others, pursuit of a employment-oriented and people-centred development strategy. Correcting the tilt of Indian politics towards centralisation by radical devolution of power to the States and to institutions at the grass-root level. No compromise with forces of corruption and crime and providing a clean government that works and delivers what it promises. There have been two occasions when a third force Government

was in power at the Centre, first the National Front Government in 1989 and second, the United Front Government in 1996-1998. Both these Governments had to seek the support of one or the other of the two major political formations. This could not but dilute the ideological character of the third force. At the same time, it lent pronounced instability to these Governments as their survival depended on the continuing support of these major formations.

With the exception of the signing of the Agreement with Bangladesh on the sharing of Ganga waters, the second third force Government did not do anything which would mark it out as a Government with a difference. It devoted most of its tenure to ensuring its survival. In most respects, it continued the policy of the previous Government. It not only continued the policy of liberalisation but also fine-tuned it and took several steps to impart it further momentum. It resorted to worst forms of profligacy. Some of its constituents openly aligned themselves with criminal elements. Far from setting personal examples of austerity and renunciation, its leaders led an opulent lifestyle.

Some political leaders who had in the past led or supported third force Governments are attempting to revive the third force. Some of them have started movements around the themes of the adverse effects of liberalisation and globalisation, impact of the WTO Agreement on Agriculture on Indian farmers, displacement of those living in urban slums and the problems created by the relocation of the polluting industrial units outside urban centres. These essentially single-point issues are designed to serve as an entry point for launching a full-fledged political movement for reviving the third force. These movements are unlikely to become a basis for reviving the third force. Economic reforms by themselves have not very much influenced the outcome of

elections in India recently. In spite of the turnaround in the economy brought about by the economic reforms during the Congress(I) rule in 1991-1996, that party has gone on losing ground starting from the 1996 elections. Similarly the CPI (M) and the CPI which made opposition to liberalisation a principal plank of their political platforms have also lost some ground. Besides, the single-point issues affect different sections of the population differently. Further, it is believed that these leaders themselves would not be able to adhere to these platforms once they ascend to power. Therefore, the movements launched around them are seen as opportunistic. It will be irresponsible for any Government in power to renounce the WTO Agreement on Agriculture or not to implement the verdict of a WTO adjudication panel to eliminate quantitative restrictions within a timebound framework. No responsible state can ordinarily renege on international agreements to which it is a party. The best it can do is to seek improvements in them within the framework of the prescribed procedure.

The prospects for reviving the third force do not appear to be promising. In the context of the upcoming Assembly elections, the CPI(M) and the CPI, which have publicly announced their intention to revive the third force, have already put it on the backburner in their desperate bid to retain political influence in the States going to the polls. Moreover, we see the repetition of opportunistic and shifting alliances. Ideology becomes the first casualty in this process. The overriding objective is to ensure political survival. Alliances are, therefore, made with a particular party in some States and against the same party in other States. Alliances are made with political parties and leaders steeped in corruption and deeply involved in criminal activities. Such alliances are often called secular alliances. But this is a mere slogan. For, can

a political leader or his party be trusted to practice the value of secularism when he is seen to be habitually violating all other basic values or norms of social behaviour?

Though there is no prospect for an early revival of the third force, there are compelling reasons why the idea will survive in the foreseeable future. This is mainly because neither the Congress(I) nor the BJP can emerge as a political party with an absolute majority in Parliament. Even though the BJP sometimes projects a liberal non-communal image and it has, by virtue of this and other factors, somewhat succeeded in widening the base of its political support, it remains fixated in the public mind as a Hindu party. If the BJP really changes its face to lure away minority, Dalit, tribal and OBC vote banks, there is a danger of its losing its huge votebank of believers in the Hindutva ideology which has expanded phenomenally in recent years. Thus, there is a self-operating limit on the extent to which the BJP can expand its support base. The Congress(I) has long ceased to be a party of consensus combining in it all the mainstreams of Indian politics and like the BJP it remains severely compromised on some of the burning issues in the country such as secularism and corruption.

Even though a strong genuine third force is unlikely to emerge in the near future mainly because of the evils that have come to afflict all political parties in India, the third force must be kept alive as an ideology, as a mirror for all political parties to enable them and the people at large to see their true face, and as a reminder of the direction in which the Indian economy and polity should move. There is also the need for a ginger group which keeps on working on the ideology of the third force and mobilising support for it. For all one knows the third force may once again come into the reckoning on the Indian political scene, once, on account of the continuing crises of the Indian polity and economy, things start sharply deteriorating — when the unity of the nation is jeopardised, the economy starts stagnating and the current disregard for law and order and resort to violence assumes endemic proportions.

THE HINDU

24 APR 2001

GOVT. HAS ITS WAY AND CONGRESS ITS SAY

Vajpayee relents on JPC, Sonia on business

HD-1
29/4

J-Parliament

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, APRIL 23. The six-week stalemate in Parliament was finally resolved today with the Government professing to have an "open mind" on the Congress demand for a joint parliamentary committee (JPC) on the Tehelka expose, and the Congress agreeing to an orderly discussion of the financial business before the House. The resolution of the deadlock thus ends one of the ugliest chapters in Parliament's history.

As per the agreement, the Lok Sabha will discuss on April 24 the demands for grants for the Ministry of Rural Development and the Ministry for Disinvestment, and on April 25 the Financial Bill will be discussed and passed. On April 26, the two Houses of Parliament could take up discussion on the Tehelka expose; during this discussion the question of setting up a JPC would be thrashed out with an "open mind". The modalities of this proposed discussion would be argued out in the Business Advisory Committee tomorrow.

This "pact" was "initialled" by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, in the chamber of the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, this evening. Also present were Mr. Pramod Mahajan, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs, while Ms. Gandhi was accompanied by Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, Congress Deputy Leader in the Lok Sabha, and Mr. Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, chief whip.

The crux of the "pact" is that the



The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, with the Lok Sabha Speaker, Mr. G. M. C. Balayogi, and the Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, in the Speaker's chambers in Parliament House on Monday. — Photo: S. Armeja

Government has secured a concession from the Opposition that the financial business must be allowed to be discussed and debated, while the Government has conceded the feasibility of the idea of a JPC probe. The "pact" conforms to the classic parliamentary dictum that "the Government must have its way and the Opposition should have its say".

The Congress managers are proceeding on the assumption that the Government would keep its word on the JPC, a word sanctified in the Speaker's chamber. After the "summit", Mr. Mahajan noted, as a matter of fact, that unless the two Houses discussed the Tehelka

matter and unless there was a resolution in both the Houses on the need for a JPC, no joint panel could theoretically be conceded or constituted.

Though the shape of the "pact" had been negotiated by the floor-managers, a formal "summit" did take place in the Speaker's chamber. In a courtesy move, the Prime Minister had earlier sent an invitation to Ms. Gandhi for the meeting. Playing host, Mr. Balayogi complimented the leaders for a belated truce but articulated his "unpleasant" experience of having to preside over the Lok Sabha when the Railway budget got passed in the most undignified

manner. The Speaker put on record his appreciation of the helpful approach of Mr. Mahajan and Mr. Scindia.

On his part, Mr. Vajpayee referred to his letter to Ms. Gandhi as well as to her reply and then put on record that his Government had an "open mind" on the JPC demand. He added, "We are ready to do so." Ms. Gandhi, in turn, referred to her reply to the letter, and argued that her party was not exactly happy that parliamentary business was getting disrupted but remained insistent on raising the Tehelka issue because it was a matter of national security.

Speaker's role: Page 15

THE HINDU

24 APR 2001

Vajpayee has lost the right to govern: People's Front

By K.V. Prasad

AZAMGARH (U.P.), APRIL 17. The People's Front today went ahead with its first mass rally in the country holding both the Congress and the Bharatiya Janata Party responsible for the current situation in the country asserting that the Vajpayee Government had lost the right to govern in the wake of recent scams. Nearly a month after the new combination of left, democratic and secular parties came together as the third alternative in the country, the combination showcased its strength at this eastern U.P. city, projecting its convener and the Samajwadi Party president, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, as a principal force behind the front.

With Assembly elections in Uttar Pradesh barely a year away, front leaders shared a platform which saw the former Prime Minister, Mr. Viswanath Pratap Singh, in the company of Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav. Others included the Left leaders, Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet (CPI-M), Mr. A.B. Bardhan (CPI), Mr. Abani Roy (RSP) and Mr. Debabrata Biswas (AIFB) and Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda (JD-S). Missing from the line-up was the Rashtriya Janata Dal chief, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, who despite being in the front is yet to share the dais with its leaders since formation.

Although the rally was to be a counter to similar expositions by the NDA in the wake of Tehelka expose, leaders expanded the scope of attack while choosing to remind the BJP, that its allies in the National Democratic Alliance preferred to distance themselves from the party which claimed to be a party with a difference.

They said the stock-market crash, the Lucknow consultancy firm closure and whispers against involvement of officials in the PMO had now affected Mr. Vajpayee's image leading to the Prime Minister stranded in company of the Samata leader, Mr. George Fernandes, and this also made the judicial probe meaningless.

By identifying the Telugu Desam and the



The third front leaders, Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav, Mr. H.D. Deve Gowda, Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, Mr. A.B. Bardhan and Mr. V.P. Singh at the first-ever rally since the front was formed, in Azamgarh on Tuesday. — Photo: Akiresh Kumar

Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, at one end of the spectrum, and the Shiv Sena at the other which kept away from the NDA rallies, Mr. Deve Gowda hinted at a possible realignment after the May 10 Assembly elections.

The CPI(M) general secretary, Mr. Surjeet, charged the BJP of reviving the Ram temple controversy to deflect the heat generated account of Tehelka, a thought echoed by the CPI general secretary, Mr. Bardhan. Mr. Mulayam Singh Yadav charged the Vajpayee Government with opening up the economy under pressure from multi-nationals, stating farmers

of the country would now have to compete with heavily-subsidised produce of the West which would flow freely now, with removal of Quantitative Restrictions under WTO.

Mr. V.P. Singh and Mr. Bardhan reminded that the BJP's policies were being opposed even by its Sangh Parivar affiliates. Pledging that the front would take up the fight on behalf of the poor, the downtrodden and the have-nots, the leaders promised to work to build the front as a potent force on the basis of a common programme to be unveiled shortly.

THE HINDU

17 APR 2001

Mamata, Congress set talks table

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, March 19: Decks have been cleared for seat adjustment talks between the Trinamul Congress and the Congress with the high command directing the state unit to adopt an anti-CPM stand.

State Congress leaders who returned from the plenum in Bangalore expressed willingness to discuss seat-sharing with Trinamul. Pankaj Banerjee, chairman of the Trinamul policy-making body, welcomed the Congress gesture, saying "we intend to initiate a dialogue within a day or two".

Bengal Congress chief Pranab Mukherjee is expected to hold discussions with Trinamul leader Mamata Banerjee on Wednesday. Mukherjee, who held a round of talks with Mamata earlier this month, will return to the city from Delhi tomorrow. Congress presi-

dent Sonia Gandhi has ridden roughshod over state leaders, not too happy about the prospect of allying with Mamata, telling them to work out a seat-sharing deal.

At the instance of Sonia, a senior Congress leader is expected to speak to Mamata before formal talks begin.

Former PCC chief Somen Mitra and vice-president Pradip Bhattacharya said this afternoon that seat adjustments with the Trinamul should not pose any problem as the Congress has agreed to accept Mamata as leader of the anti-CPM movement in Bengal and project her as the chief ministerial candidate. "We are hopeful about having a fruitful discussion with Trinamul leaders as soon as possible," Mitra said.

But he underscored the party's political compulsion at the national level to fight the BJP. "Mamata should not object to our party put-

ting up nominees in 39 seats which she allotted to the BJP. There can be seat adjustments between us and the Trinamul in rest of the seats to ensure one-to-one contests against the Left Front," a Congress leader said.

The state Congress envisages a scenario in which it will be free to field nominees against the BJP and the Left Front in 39 seats and contest in 55 other seats, leaving the remaining 200 for Trinamul.

Mamata had released a list of 227 party nominees earlier this month, keeping aside 39 seats for the BJP, six for the Kamtapur People's Party and the rest for the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha and some pro-mahajot Congress legislators.

Since the KPP has pulled out of the alliance with Trinamul, Mamata will have some leeway in offering seats to the Congress if a deal comes through.

Pankaj Banerjee, however, in-

sisted on having "both the BJP and Congress as co-travellers". "We have been asking the Congress to come and join hands with us. We expect some positive developments in the wake of the Bangalore AICC session which will help both the parties reach an understanding," he said.

State BJP vice-president Muzaffar Khan said the central leadership has endorsed the party's demand for "safe seats" from the Trinamul. A BJP delegation today briefed the Prime Minister in Delhi on the issue. Khan said if Trinamul allowed the Congress to contest in the 39 seats allotted to the BJP, "we will also field nominees against Congress candidates in other constituencies."

Trinamul insiders said Mamata "wants the state BJP to begin the process of confrontation. That will make it easier for her to break ties with the state BJP".

THE TELEGRAPH

9 APR 1991

The ubiquitous party fund

By K. K. Katyal

Our political elite has for decades sought to cover their sins in collecting huge sums by invoking the name of their party.

HD-12
19/3

JUST UTTER the two magic words "party funds" and get away with murder. This had been the case with our political elite for decades — they sought to cover, blatantly and shamelessly, their sins in collecting huge sums by invoking the name of their party. In most cases, it was ill-gotten money that was passed on to the party functionaries, including those who were not authorised, there being no check on how the recipient made use of it. No receipts, no accountability, no record of whether and, if so, how much of it found its way into the party coffers. The politicians concerned were obliged to the donor and, in case of their assuming office, did not hesitate in bending rules to serve his interests. The pernicious influence of money power was particularly evident in electoral politics — at the very start of the processes employed for choosing the rulers — and was reflected in the quality of administration provided. As had been often stated, "the Ganga could not remain clean, if Gangotri is polluted".

All this was disturbing but equally disconcerting was the failure of the system to counter these practices and to root out the malignity. And also the manner in which the people came to accept these trends and actions as an essential part of the functioning of democratic institutions. Their conscience had been blunted: it did not evoke a sense of revolt.

Had that not been the case, those caught in dubious roles by the Tehelka tapes would not have sought to use the escape route of "party funds". By linking their conduct with the party and its monetary needs, they counted on the people's understanding and tolerance. It was not the first time that this issue came to light though never before had the camera caught the president of a party accepting wads of currency notes and the head of another openly talking of party funds at the residence of the Minister holding the sensitive portfolio of defence with the "representatives" of an enterprise supplying arms. The defence of the political bosses was disgusting, indeed.

The issue of regulating collection of party funds did engage the attention, perfunctorily though, of the Government and politicians from time to time but was not pursued, obviously because of the com-

pulsions of party politics. In the past, the leaders of the Jana Sangh, some of whom are in power now in a changed incarnation, the BJP, had taken the lead in calling for reform of the election process. It is one of the cruellest ironies, therefore, that top persons of this very party and that of its allies should have figured in dubious roles — caught red-handed as it were. As in many other cases so in the matter of party funds, a regulatory mechanism could not be devised because those required to take decisions had themselves been the guilty elements.

Though not caught by camera, there had been abominable instances in the past of politicians seeking shelter behind party funds when found in possession of large sums of money, the acquisition of which could not be explained. There was the case of a former Central Minister (of the Congress(I) Government), the search of whose residence yielded a fantastically large amount. His explanation: "party funds". In another case, two MPs deposited several lakhs of rupees in a small branch of a bank in New Delhi and, when asked to explain, said it was the money given to them by their grateful followers for the use of the party.

Initially, the amounts involved were modest. The techniques for collections were simple too. There was, for instance, the trick of political worthies possessing large unaccounted sums distributing the money to their trusted followers and confidants who, in turn, would offer garlands of currency notes to their beloved leaders at specially-organised meetings. The black money was, thus, converted into white in full public view. And the leaders were not required to pay income tax because it was meant for use by the party.

There used to be a lively debate in the past on the modalities of company donations by the corporate sector and business houses to political parties. What should be the percentage of the income that could be given? Whether the payment had to be by cheque or other means? Some time in the

second half of the 1970s, the political parties stopped looking to domestic business houses. The money available from kick-backs and commissions in the deals of the Government with enterprises abroad put vast sums at the disposal of the ruling elite. Particularly lucrative were the procurement of equipment for the armed forces. Never mind if there had to be a compromise on the quality of the military hardware or the public exchequer was required to part with avoidably large sums. The arrangement had the merit of meeting party needs. The domestic business houses were dismayed because of their irrelevance.

With the passage of time, the permissiveness acquired newer proportions. It was, therefore, not difficult for the Tehelka correspondents, posing as arms dealers, to pierce the tight security cordon of sensitive areas and engage top politicians, army officers and bureaucrats in conversations over the mechanics of decision-taking for the procurement of arms and offer money — accepted by the politicians concerned as "party fund". Had some steps been taken in the past to stem the rot, the country could have been spared the plunder and the ugly spectacle of the type witnessed last week.

Instead of initiating the process for the review of the working of the Constitution, the NDA Government should have concentrated on electoral reforms and on steps to streamline the functioning of political parties, in particular regulation of fund collection by them. The Constitution review commission does plan to address this issue. But the consultation paper it has circulated does not indicate any seriousness of purpose. It is clumsily-drafted and seeks to bury the inadequately-framed substantive points in a mass of verbosity.

The need for comprehensive legislation for regulating contributions to political parties is recognised and a case is made for legislation for 1) compulsory auditing of the accounts of the political parties, registered with the Election Commission by an independent authority (audited accounts

to be published and made available for public inspection); 2) making accountable both donors and recipients of political funds; 3) permitting individual and corporate agencies to make contributions to political parties within a prescribed ceiling (which could be higher than the present limit of five per cent of the profit); and 4) encouraging corporate bodies to establish an electoral trust to finance political parties on an equitable basis at the time of elections.

The country's interest would have been served if the Constitution review commission had been asked to confine itself to such core issues instead of spreading itself thin — and mooted proposals for the Ayub Khan-type indirect election, which had deservedly invited severe reprimand from the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan.

The permissiveness in regard to the finances of political parties led to bigger evils — the stranglehold of money power over the electoral process and democratic institutions. What else was the meaning of the sensational disclosures of the Vohra Committee — an official panel set up by the Government, with the then Home Secretary, Mr. N. N. Vohra, as its head? The committee's findings were not pursued and as such there was no attempt to deal with the situation arising from the "nexus between criminals, mafias and anti-national elements, on the one hand, and bureaucrats, politicians and other sensitively located individuals, on the other". The report mentioned the growth of criminal gangs with specific reference to the patronage of local level politicians, cutting across party lines, and the protection of Government functionaries: "Some political leaders become the leaders of these gangs, armed senas and, over the years, get themselves elected to local bodies, State Assemblies and the national Parliament. Resultantly such elements have acquired considerable political clout, seriously jeopardising the smooth functioning of the administration and the safety of life and property of the common man." Then there was another disturbing dimension — the linkages between these organisations and foreign intelligence agencies and other elements. Will the present episode serve as a trigger for rooting out the "party fund" malaise? And will those found guilty be awarded exemplary punishment?

THE HINDU

19 MAR 2001

19 MAR 2001

Youth Congress attacks BJP workers, 3 injured

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 14

THE DELHI Pradesh Congress Committee organised a demonstration at Parliament Street today to demand the resignation of the NDA Government in the wake of the tehelka.com expose, even as Youth Congress activists went on the rampage in the BJP headquarters at Ashoka Road.

Three persons, including a correspondent of the All India Radio, were injured when irate Youth Congress workers attacked the BJP headquarters, pelting stones and setting ablaze hoardings, demanding the dismissal of the NDA Government.

The Youth Congress activists went on the rampage when BJP central office bearers were meeting to consider the resignation of party president Bangaru Laxman.

AIR correspondent Sudarshanam, who rushed out of the office along with other media persons to witness the incident, was injured in the stone pelting. He was taken to the LNJP Hospital, where he was discharged after first aid.

Two BJP workers were also wounded in the incident, party sources said. Two cars were damaged; lamps at the gate broken and some BJP hoardings were torn down in the attack. The Congress workers fled as police arrived on the scene. One person has been detained for questioning. Reacting to the attack, senior BJP leader and Union Rural Development Minister Venkaiah Naidu said, "This expose would have no effect on the Government. Rather, it (the attack) has exposed the Congress which is indulging in such acts."

Meanwhile, scores of Con-



A Youth Congress demonstration in Mumbai on Wednesday.

AP PHOTO

gress activists led by senior leaders shouted slogans against the Union Government at Parliament Street and demanded its dismissal. They raised slogans against corruption saying there was widespread corruption in defence deals.

DPCC president Subhash Chopra said politicians and officials whose involvement in corruption is revealed in the tapes must be brought to book. He said the BJP Government should resign on this issue. "Corruption in defence deals is shameful and we will go to Rashtrapati

Bhawan and meet the President," he added.

The leaders present during the Parliament Street demonstration included MLA Mukesh Sharma, veteran Congress leader Jag Pravesh Chandra, and Sajjan Kumar. Mukesh Sharma demanded a probe into the defence deals.

In his statement, Youth Congress president Randeep Singh Surjewala demanded the immediate dismissal of the NDA Government and the arrest of its "corrupt and maligned senior leaders."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 MAR 2001

NDA allies welcome 'farmers budget'

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 28

IF IT was a strategy to prepare everyone for a "harsh" Budget and then impose a moderate dose of tough measures, the Government's plan appeared to have paid off—if one goes by the reaction of the BJP allies.

The allies were today pleased with the Finance Minister's proposals and some even claimed credit for some proposals, particularly sops for farmers.

The southern allies, the DMK and the MDMK, and the Trinamool Congress, who face an Assembly poll in two months,

were happy that the Centre had taken into account their concerns and refrained from any strong measure.

The Telugu Desam Party and the Trinamool said the Budget was "development-oriented and people-friendly".

TDP Parliamentary Party leader K Yerranna said his party was happy that the Government had paid heed to his party's suggestions for promoting agriculture.

Trinamool Congress chief whip, Sudip Bandhopadhyay said the Budget was "as good as the Railway Budget" as it had not imposed any section.

BJP chief Bangaru Laxman said Sinha deserved to be congratulated for containing the fiscal deficit to the targeted 5.1 per cent against all odds faced by the economy.

BJP Parliamentary Party spokesperson V K Malhotra said the Budget would "make people happy and the Opposition sad" as it had given better facilities to farmers and cut down government expenditure.

Describing it as a "farmers budget", the spokesperson said that there were numerous benefits for them with the kisan credit card being linked to insurance.

BUDGET AT A GLANCE

Rs crore	1999-2000 Actual	2000-01 Budget Estimates	2000-01 Revised Estimates	2001-02 Budget Estimates
Revenue Receipts	1,81,513	2,03,673	2,06,166	2,31,745
Capital Receipts	1,16,571	1,34,814	1,29,357	1,43,478
Total Receipts	2,98,084	3,38,487	3,35,523	3,75,223
Non-Plan Expenditure	2,21,902	2,50,387	2,49,254	2,75,123
Plan Expenditure	76,182	88,100	8,62,38	95,100
Total Expenditure	2,98,084	3,38,487	3,35,523	3,75,223
Revenue Deficit	8,75,96	77,425	77,369	78,821
Fiscal Deficit	1,04,717	1,11,275	1,11,972	1,16,314
Primary Deficit	14,468	10,009	11,305	4,014

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 MAR 2001

Congress to support BJD if it pulls out from NDA

HT Correspondent

Bhubaneswar, February 28

THE ORISSA Pradesh Congress Committee (OPCC) chief JB Patnaik on Wednesday offered his party's support to the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) if it withdraws support to the NDA Government at the Centre over "gross injustice" shown to Orissa in the Railway Budget.

"We are ready to extend cooperation to the BJD as long as it fights for the greater interest of the State," Patnaik said at a press conference here. The PCC chief said, "Naveen Patnaik should immediately withdraw support to the Vajpayee Government if he seriously thinks that injustice has been done to Orissa in the Railway budget".

He also supported the views of a majority of BJD MPs that their party should consider withdrawing support to the BJP-led Government at the Centre on this issue.

Expressing displeasure over the treatment given to Orissa in

the new Railway Budget, the former chief minister said Orissa has been grossly neglected in all spheres of railway development. Contrary to the claim by Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee that there was a 45 per cent hike at the national level on funds allocated for different projects, Patnaik said in case of Orissa it was reduced by 25 per cent.

The former chief minister questioned the efficacy of the BJD as an alliance partner at the Centre, when other allies could extract their demands.

Sufficient funds were not allocated for the East Coast Railway zone in the Budget. He demanded that the Government should immediately issue notification for this zone and give assurance to allocate adequate funds for an early completion of all ongoing projects in the State.

Criticising both Centre and State Governments for their failure to protect Orissa's interest, Patnaik said the State had got very little assistance from the Centre for post-cyclone rehabili-

tion compared to the Gujarat earthquake. Orissa's demand for a special category state was not considered either.

Similarly, Patnaik said the 11th Finance Commission has done great injustice to Orissa. The Commission has shown revenue expenditure of Rs.38,000 crore for Orissa against its actual need of Rs 60,000 crore. The State has incurred a loss of Rs 22,000 crore but the State Government put down the loss at Rs 800 crore only, Patnaik said.

The OPCC chief said the BJD-BJP Government, which is going to complete one year on March 5, had betrayed the people of the State by failing to protect the interest of masses and to take up developmental works.

Crucial decisions like power tariff hike and faulty implementations of Professional Tax and failure to tackle the drought situation have shown the inefficiency of the Government, he said. The PCC chief also alleged the involvement of the alliance Government in the Raico deal.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1 MAR 2001

Dealing with VHP

GIVEN THE saffron lobby's habit of indulging in double-speak, it is difficult to take either its threats or assurances seriously. The most obvious example of the hollowness of its statements is, of course, the demolition of the Babri masjid despite the promises made by its stalwarts before Parliament and the National Integration Council that the shrine will not be touched. So, one can never be sure how to respond to the latest observations by the VHP's various spokesmen about starting work on the Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya. To be fair, the VHP has never resiled from its determination to begin the construction. In fact, all the preparations that have been made in assembling the pillars and various other parts of the temple and then transporting them to Ayodhya are a clear indication that it is firm in its resolve to build the temple. The only thing that remains to be decided is the date for starting the work.

But even more unsettling than this determination is the challenge which the VHP has now thrown at the Vajpayee Government by saying that the organisation will 'force' it to hand over the undisputed portions of the land near the site to the builders of the temple. Not only that, the dismissive remarks which the VHP leaders have made about the judiciary and Parliament confirm that there is no place in its game plan for established authority. The contention of Vishnu Hari Dalmia, who is designated as the 'international president' of the VHP, that the Prime Minister's call for restraint is not binding on the organisation is evidence enough that it is ready to act outside the parameters of the law.

It is not known whether all of this is mere bluff and bluster, but what is undeniable is that the VHP is systematically raising the temperature over this highly emotive issue. There is no doubt that if it makes even the slightest move to start construction work, there will be widespread fears of a recurrence of the kind of communal violence which marked both L.K. Advani's *rath yatra* and the destruction of the Babri masjid. There is every need, therefore, for the Centre not only to reiterate that it will not allow such a brazen defiance of the status quo, but make it unmistakably clear that it will move swiftly to scotch any such endeavour. The UP Government, too, should be much more forthright in its promise to uphold the law than it has been so far. There should not be a repeat of the dilly-dallying and prevarication which marked the Centre's and the UP Government's attitude towards the demolition of the mosque eight years ago.

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Ramadoss ties up with Jaya

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, Feb. 6. ^{5/1} The PMK today formalised its alliance with the AIADMK.

Dr S Ramadoss, after a meeting with Miss Jayalalitha at her home, said: "I'm extremely happy with my meeting with *anbu sahodari* (affectionate sister). I leave to her any decision about seat-sharing for the Assembly polls."

The Prime Minister is yet to forward the resignations of the PMK ministers to the President, a PMO official said.

Dr Ramadoss said he had begun sounding out Miss Jayalalitha some five to six days ago. He said certain events in state politics had prompted the pullout, and blamed Mr Karunanidhi for the strain in his relations with the TRC chief, Mr VK Ramamurthy.

The PMK leader said he had met Mr Karunanidhi six times and appealed to him to find a solution to the PMK-TRC feud. "Only once, last April, he convened an NDA meeting, but nothing came out of it."

Mr Karunanidhi dismissed the charge as baseless.

Dr Ramadoss was all praise for the Prime Minister. "We've parted with Mr AB Vajpayee with a heavy heart. I can't forget such a great person." He claimed Mr Vajpayee had asked him to stay in the NDA even after snapping ties with DMK, a proposal Dr Ramadoss had shot down as unethical.

The Tamil Maanila Congress said it won't announce immediately whether it would join the AIADMK alliance. It has received an invitation from Mr Karunanidhi to join the DMK front.

The BJP said the NDA would not be weakened, hinting it hopes to woo the TMC.

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