

Cong. not to support POTO in present form

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 20. Pressure has mounted on the NDA Government at the Centre to incorporate changes in the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO), with the Leader of the Opposition and Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, making it clear that her party "will not support it in its present form."

Addressing the Congress Parliamentary Party (CPP) today, Ms. Gandhi made a strong pitch for a new legislation, brought about after due consultations involving all parties. "The Congress is for a larger consultative process to put in place a legislation to fight terrorism, that is not anti-democratic, and liable to abuse by a sectarian government".

Questioning the BJP's motive in springing the Ordinance on the Opposition without discussing or

consulting them, she said, "all that the BJP is interested in is the elections in Uttar Pradesh and the desire to portray the Congress as being soft on terrorism, but we don't require certificates from a Government that escorted three hijackers in a VIP-like manner to Kandahar." Ms. Gandhi addressed a host of issues ranging from the "threat" to social amity and peace, attempts to "communalise and saffronise" education and the "sorry state" of the economy.

Doing some plain speaking, she pulled up her party MPs for the "unsatisfactory levels of attendance in Parliament". She urged them to take Parliament seriously and ensure their maximum presence there and in the meetings of the various standing committees. "The Congress must stand out by its presence in both the Houses,

less time could be spent in central hall and more in the House."

Expressed her concern over the incidents of communal violence, Ms. Gandhi said, "these are extraordinary fragile times and the party Chief Ministers must actively maintain social amity. Secularism, multi-religiosity, and religious accommodation is India's destiny, let us not lose that distinctiveness which the BJP is trying to destroy."

Accusing the Government of pampering communal elements, she referred to the manner in which the Vishwa Hindu Parishad activists had, in violation of the Supreme Court order, trespassed upon the protected area around the disputed site in Ayodhya, and how BJP activists had vandalised the precincts of the Taj Mahal.

A group under Dr. Manmohan Singh had been set up to make

recommendations on the measures to be taken to sustain the campaign against the BJP's attempt to "communalise and saffronise" the education system. "This debate must go on and we should not relent or ease the pressure," she said.

Referring to the economy, Ms. Gandhi said it was in doldrums, growth had plummeted, there was an investment famine and business sentiment was depressed because of the NDA Government's policies. She demanded a full-fledged debate on the Doha meet. On the reinduction of Mr. George Fernandes into the Union Cabinet, she said, "even while the commission is still investigating the scandal, the Prime Minister has given a clean chit to a tainted person and restored him to his original position."

THE HINDU

NOV 21

Govt has a problem: Congress trashes POTO

POTO," the statement said.

It added, "The Congress believes that combating terrorism is the need of the hour. However, a larger consultative process involving all political parties is necessary to put in place an appropriate legislation."

In a nutshell, this means that the virtually the entire Opposition will vote against the Bill and it is likely to be defeated in the Rajya Sabha where the Opposition has a clear majority.

Congress sources said the only compromise that the party is ready to consider is for the Government to withdraw the ordinance and send the bill to a select committee for discussions. This would pave the way for a consensus as the bill could be suitably amended to satisfy

its critics.

The strong stand taken by the Congress today is a setback for the Government, which was hoping for cracks in the Congress because two of its state governments, Maharashtra and Karnataka, have similar ordinances.

However, Sibal's argument that the state bills and POTO are "as alike as apples and potatoes" carried the day and the party has decided to brazen it out by focusing on the differences.

There is a rider to this which Congress spokesman Jaipal Reddy hinted at after the meeting. He said that the Maharashtra and Karnataka Chief Ministers agreed that if the state bills had any harsh provisions, these would be amended. It

was suggested to the two CMs to say this tomorrow, either at the Inter-State Council meeting or in a press statement later, so that there are no contradictions in the party's conscious decision to take a liberal stand on the issue.

In fact, Maharashtra CM Vilasrao Deshmukh is reported to have stated at this evening's meeting that the law in his State has proved effective in combating organised crime. He quoted figures to buttress his claim that it was not being misused. According to him, in two years, only 50 cases have been booked under the Maharashtra Organised Crime Act (MOCA). Of the 13 cases decided so far, ten have resulted in convictions.

The party's defence revolves

around legal and political points. Legally, it has decided to argue that the definition of terrorism in POTO is imprecise and therefore liable to abuse, that the provisions relating to bail, etc. are draconian and dweeping, that the provision relating to journalists violates the freedom of the press and that organisations like PWG, MCC and NSCN, which use violence as a political tool, are not listed in the schedule of terrorist organisations.

Politically, it will point out that the Government has reneged on its promise to consult political parties on an anti-terrorism law. It will insist that there is a clear political motive behind the decision to promulgate an ordinance on the eve of the winter session of Parliament.

ATTENDER NOTICES

INDIAN EXPRESS

17 NOV 2001

Cong CMs support Sonia on Poto

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 16. — In a show of unity on the eve of the chief ministers' meeting on Poto, all the Congress chief ministers tonight extended their support to the party leadership's opposition to the controversial Ordinance even as the Prime Minister renewed his appeal for a consensus on the issue.

Even though the Opposition parties, except the vacillating AIADMK, are now standing united against Poto, there is a virtual alert in their camps, sensing the BJP weighing the extreme option — a joint sitting of Parliament — to push the Ordinance through.

In their meeting with Mrs Sonia Gandhi, the party chief ministers passed a unanimous resolution, rejecting Poto.

Later the party spokesman, Mr Jaipal Reddy, said in view of the allegations that some Poto-like elements are present in the anti-terrorist laws of

Karnataka and Maharashtra, the state governments would be prepared for a review of these laws if found necessary.

Mr SM Krishna and Mr Vilasrao Deshmukh made this commitment at the meeting, in order to plug a potential loophole in the Opposition armour against Poto.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today reiterated that there was a need to evolve a consensus on Poto to "answer adequately to the national need".

Mr Vajpayee said Poto has been promulgated as there was no law in place to "deal effectively with terrorism" after the lapse of Tada.

"Our experience against terrorism has clearly demonstrated that we have to have a combat programme, whose crucial ingredient has to be sustainability. Sustainability is a product of strong political will, capabilities of the security forces and last but not the least, an enabling legislative framework."

"The Law Commission has opined

that such a law was needed. It has also seen the longstanding demand of our security forces," he said.

He urged chief ministers to build a consensus on the issue.

Warning of the extreme severity of the threat posed by terrorism and religious extremism, the Prime Minister asserted that a sustained campaign, assisted by a legal framework, was needed to tackle the twin menace.

Dwelling on some major problems facing the Centre and the states, the Prime Minister said, "chief among them is the threat posed by terrorism and religious extremism. The recent terrorist attacks in the USA have starkly highlighted both the global scope and the extreme severity of this threat."

But the resolution passed in the Congress chief ministers' meeting with Mrs Sonia Gandhi and other senior party leaders said, "In the chief ministers' conference held in August 2000, the government of India committed it-

self to a larger consultation process with all political parties involving a consensus for enacting a legislation to effectively deal with terrorism. Without consulting political parties in the absence of any urgency, the government of India has promulgated Poto. This legislation is anti-democratic, suffers from serious legal infirmities and is liable to abuse. The Congress party therefore strongly opposes Poto".

The resolution said the Congress believes that combating terrorism is the need of the hour.

However, a larger consultative process involving all political parties is necessary to put in place an appropriate legislation.

The party chief ministers will oppose Poto in tomorrow's meeting, called by the Prime Minister, on similar grounds.

Earlier, Mr Jaipal Reddy said the party stand to oppose Poto in Parliament through a resolution and amendments stand.



Mrs Sonia Gandhi

THE STATESMAN
NOV 16 2000

Cong sets up team to study POTO

HARISH GUPTA
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 12

THE Congress has constituted a group of legal experts to examine provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO) and help the party formulate its views on the issue when the bill is taken up for discussion and passage in Parliament.

The group comprising Rajya Sabha MP Kapil Sibal, chairman of party's intellectual cell Salman Khursheed, former Law minister H.R. Bhardwaj, senior advocate Abhishek Manu Singhvi and a handful of other functionaries will be meeting in the next couple of days. Newly appointed Deputy Leader of party in Lok Sabha, Shivraj Patil, was guarded when he told *The Indian Express* that the committee's task is to scrutinise some of the provisions which some say were draconian in na-



Kapil Sibal; Salman Khursheed

ture. For instance, he felt that a special provision relating to granting bail for a period of one year was too harsh.

Abhishek Manu Singhvi went a step further in saying that the intentions of the ruling BJP were clear from Day One when Home Minister L.K. Advani said "it's a win win situation". "If the Bill is passed by Parliament it

will be good for the government. If not passed, the Opposition will be blamed for helping the terrorists." Singhvi felt that it is clear that the purpose of POTO was propaganda and not fighting terrorism.

He said the committee would only go into the merits of the provisions and "it is for the political leadership to take a final view on the issue". Some legal experts assisting the Congress admit that some provisions were a shade better than the defunct TADA. While TADA had a provision that no bail can be granted for the six-month period, POTO provided for bail after three months. Secondly, several suggestions made by Supreme Court while hearing a TADA case had been incorporated in POTO, including the one that relatives of the arrested person have to informed the same

day and the arrested will be provided with the assistance of a lawyer without delay.

The expert committee will also interact with chief ministers of Congress, who will be coming here on November 17 to attend a conference called by the Prime Minister on POTO. Though there are laws in Maharashtra and Karnataka to deal with organised crimes, it is clear from the deliberations in the party that hardliners may have their way. Though the ruling NDA will have no difficulty in getting the Bill passed in the Lok Sabha despite the Congress and others opposing the Bill, the test will be in the Rajya Sabha which will take it up later.

Another formula being suggested by some of the intermediaries is that the Bill be referred to the select committee which can give its report within a stipulated period. The PM will be holding a series of discussions on the issue after the CMS' conference.

INDIAN EXPRESS

13 NOV 2001

Cong chooses middle path on

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Nov. 11: Taking a leaf out of Narasimha Rao's survival book, Sonia Gandhi is planning to follow a "middle path" on major economic, international and political issues.

The Congress chief is now willing to extend an olive branch to Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee on the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance if his government comes forward with some amendments.

The rethink on the terror Ordinance comes in the wake of the reluctance of Congress-led governments in Maharashtra and Kar-

nataka to drop the Tada-clone-like features in the state terror laws.

The Maharashtra government said the Act against organised crime was crucial for the arrest of the likes of film producer Bharat Shah, accused of a nexus with the underworld, and associates of don Dawood Ibrahim.

The Congress is adding final touches to its parliamentary strategy based on two principles. Its priority is to thrash out Opposition unity and act as a "constructive Opposition" in the Lok Sabha. The choice of Shivraj Patil as the new party deputy leader in Parliament is an indication that Sonia wants to restore a "functional re-

lationship" with the Vajpayee regime and is willing to consider the passage of the controversial Ordinance if the government agrees to move certain amendments.

Congress leaders said they have examined the terror Ordinance and found it wanting in many areas. "We want the government to correct certain lacunae and we will consider it," a Congress functionary said.

The party leadership has also taken a "principled stand" not to alter the existing Acts in Maharashtra and Karnataka. The feedback from the state governments is that the Ordinance should not be compared with state laws.

First, the Acts have come into force after debates and discussions in the Assembly. Second, they are aimed at particular sections of criminals and, so far, there have been no complaints of misuse.

In the month-long winter session of Parliament beginning November 19, Sonia wants party MPs to force as many discussions and debates as possible on the global and internal security scenario, the WTO, Ayodhya and saffronisation instead of staging walkouts and disrupting proceedings.

The Congress is keeping a close tab on the WTO deliberations in Doha. The party plans to restrict its criticism of the gov-

ernment
privatization
Marathon
national
da an
port
count

In
nomination
decide
It was
distrust
units

So
a leader
meetings
Party
fore il

THE TELEGRAPH

12 NOV 2001

Tada clone

ment on the issue as its leaders
openly acknowledge Murasoli
Murugan's success in keeping na-
tional interests high on the agen-
da and succeeding in getting sup-
port from several developing
countries.

In the overall context of eco-
nomic reforms, the Congress has
decided to not oppose them per se.
It wants to confine its criticism to
the sales of public sector
enterprises and lack of transparency.
The government is also unwilling to take
part in holding a pre-session
with other Opposition par-
ties. The Left and the Samajwadi
party had "boycotted" the one be-
fore the monsoon session.

Feb 12/11
The difficult task of striking
Opposition unity and thrashing
out floor coordination has been
left to Patil. He will be attending
all business advisory committee
meetings with chief whip Priya
Ranjan Das Munshi.

The party today criticised for-
eign minister Jaswant Singh, ask-
ing him to restrain from speaking
"too much".

Natwar wondered how the gov-
ernment could describe the US as
a "natural ally". "The phrase nat-
ural ally could and should have
been avoided as such a term gave
an impression that India was
no longer a non-aligned country,"
he said.

Congress to oppose POTO in Parliament

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 8. The Congress today formalised its strategy for the winter session of Parliament commencing from November 19. The party has decided to oppose the controversial Prevention Of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO), promulgated by the Government, in its present form.

The decision was taken at a meeting of the office-bearers of the Parliamentary party and senior leaders today. The party shortlisted a host of issues, ranging from the reinduction of Mr. George Fernandes into the cabinet to the U.S. bombing campaign in Afghanistan and the Tehelka issue, which it proposes to raise forcefully in the House.

Conscious of the fact that the POTO would dominate the ses-

10-15 9/11
sion, the leadership has begun to put its act together. A major part of today's meeting was devoted to discussing the ramifications of the ordinance as well as the propaganda launched by the BJP in its bid to pin down the Opposition.

The party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, wanted the partymen to be fully prepared and to meet the Government's onslaught. A team of leaders and legal experts has been asked to sit together and prepare a brief to be distributed to the MPs.

Today's meeting was attended by Dr. Manmohan Singh, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Mr. Arjun Singh, Ms. Ambika Soni, Mr. Kapil Sibal, Mr. Suresh Pachouri, the new deputy leader of the party in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Shivraj Patil, Mr. Priya Ranjan Dasgupta, Mr. Kamal Nath and Mr. Jaipal Reddy.

THE HINDU

9 NOV 2001

Cong. looking for ways to justify anti-POTO stance

By Anita Katyal
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The Congress is in a fix. Having decided to oppose the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (POTO), it is now trying to find a way to justify its stance, since several Congress-ruled states, like Maharashtra and Karnataka have similar anti-terrorism laws in place.

It has asked its programme and policy planning cell, headed by Salman Khurshid, to scrutinise the legislations in the states and see how effective they have been. It has asked for inputs to enable the party to formulate its position.

There is a view in the party that if push comes to shove, the Congress-ruled states should be asked to withdraw these laws. In fact, when the Congress first announced its decision to oppose POTO, party spokesperson S. Jaipal Reddy had categorically stated that "the party's decision will be binding on all its chief ministers". Several leaders are citing the example of the CPM which has disallowed its West Bengal government from enacting an anti-terrorism law since it is opposing a similar legislation at the Centre.

The dichotomy in the Congress position surfaced during party meetings on Friday when several senior leaders, including Arjun Singh, K. Natwar Singh and Manmohan Singh, discussed the issue. It was felt that the Congress would be hard put to defend itself when POTO comes up for voting in Parliament.

"This question is bound to be raised... how do we justify the fact that it was okay to support TADA when we were in power and but not when we are in the opposition," remarked a senior Congress leader. The Congress position on POTO is crucial as it can have the ordinance defeated in the Rajya Sabha where the opposition is in a majority.

The Congress is worried that the BJP will use its opposition to POTO to accuse it of not being serious about combating terrorism. Party leaders worry about the effect this issue may have in UP which is going to the polls. The BJP is using the September 11 attacks to stoke communal passions by bringing in POTO, banning SIMI and reviving the Ayodhya issue.

There is a sense of unease in the Congress over the possible fall-out of the ongoing international situation on the domestic scene, with the BJP seeking to create a communal divide. This matter came up at the Friday meeting, especially in the light of the Malegoan communal riots. It was felt that polarisation in the country had not been as sharp as was wished by the BJP since opposition to the US attacks on Afghanistan cuts across communal barriers. However, the Congress is not sure how the situation will unravel in the coming months. "Today's meeting was meant to formulate the party view. It suits the BJP and the SP to take extreme positions but we have to see how we should respond so that we neither provoke nor become irrelevant," explained a senior leader.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

4 NOV 2001

Cong rejects BJP plea 51-8 on Poto 811

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 2. - The Congress today rejected the BJP national executive's appeal to reconsider its opposition to the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance.

The Congress spokesman, Mr Jaipal Reddy, said, the Congress would oppose Poto not only in the Parliament, but also through a statutory resolution and by moving amendments.

"This appeal of the BJP should not cause any surprise because the Ordinance was promulgated with the view to making such hypocritical appeals.

If the Bharatiya Janata Party was interested in the Ordinance, it could have consulted the Congress and other opposition parties in advance," Mr Reddy said. The promulgation of Poto was mala fide and intended to confront the country with a fait accompli, he remarked.

THE STATESMAN

4 NOV 2001

Outraged Sonia cries shame

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI
AND ANAND SOONDAS

Oct. 15: Finally getting its act together, the Congress today served an ultimatum to the BJP with Sonia Gandhi claiming that the Rajnath Singh government's crimes of omission and commission could not be washed away even by "mother Ganga".

Addressing a parivartan rally that kicked off the Congress campaign for Uttar Pradesh, Sonia charged that corruption had assumed industry status under the BJP. "There is so much dirt, so much corruption in UP government that even Ganga *maiya* cannot wash it off."

Capitalising on George Fernandes' reappointment as minister for defence, Sonia asked her audience not to forgive the BJP for placing the responsibility of the nation's security on someone facing corruption charges. "UTI, Tehelka, telecom... how long can we keep forgiving and hoping for the better?" Sonia asked, adding: "And now they want to give someone whose role in a scam is under the scanner the job of looking after the nation's defence."

The Congress chief said Fernandes' reinduction was a "shame" and her party would do whatever possible to oppose it.

The dais was packed with the who's who of the Congress — former Union ministers and former chief ministers sitting side by side with other senior functionaries. Various factions of the party were coming together for the first time in an unprecedented show of unity.

Sonia touched upon a wide range of subjects such as the current international situation, the plight of farmers and the lack of development in Uttar Pradesh. While her party was in agreement with the government on the fight against terrorism, she said she

was opposed to the idea of punishing the innocent and poor citizens of Afghanistan. "Such a strategy cannot work against terrorism and could even prove counter-productive," she said.

Sonia also made it clear that the Congress would not get into any alliance with the Samajwadi Party or the BSP, ending speculation that the two sides were inching closer. The Congress alone can fulfil voter aspirations in Uttar Pradesh, she added. In the past 12 years of non-Congress rule, development had come to a standstill in Uttar Pradesh, Sonia said, accusing the BJP of betraying the voters.

"By changing face, you cannot change character," Sonia said referring to Rajnath's appointment as chief minister. "People's aspirations have been betrayed. Instead of *sewa*, they betrayed. Instead of development, they plundered," she added.

The Congress chief reminded her audience about the Congress' contributions to the freedom struggle and nation building. "Remember who incorporated reservations for weaker sections in the Constitution," she said.

"The Congress wants social harmony. It is a party that thinks beyond winning elections," Sonia said, adding that her party had never indulged in communal or casteist politics to enhance its electoral prospects.

Left slams govt

Left parties have come down heavily on the Vajpayee government for reinducting Fernandes into the Cabinet and said the move vindicates their position that the NDA is nothing but an "opportunistic combine".

Rounding on the government on the same issue, the Left's ally, the Samajwadi Party, said it would take the Tehelka campaigns that had forced Fernandes to quit to the streets.

THE TELEGRAPH

THE TELEGRAPH

15 OCT 2002

Sonia warns PM about 'perilous' situation

9 P P
10/10

15/10

By Neena Vyas

HO-1
NEW DELHI, OCT. 14. The "perilous situation" of war and conflict in our neighbourhood calls for the exercise of "extreme caution and wisdom" on India's part if it wishes to avoid a "major communal conflagration" here, the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, has said in a letter to the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee.

The situation could get "out of hand" considering the daily dose of television which is showing disturbances and demonstrations in Pakistan. "This is bound to have an effect on our minority community," she said, suggesting that a "close watch" needed to be kept on it as even a minor incident could spark a "major communal conflagration."

She has said that the country must avoid such a situation at all costs. She had written to all Congress Chief Ministers asking them to remain vigilant, and she wanted to share her view with the Prime Minister. Although Ms. Gandhi did not refer to the coming Uttar Pradesh elections and the attempt to revive the Ayodhya issue by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the recent announcement that an Ayodhya cell would be started at the Prime Minister's Office, the timing of the letter clearly showed that she may have

had the delicate communal situation in Uttar Pradesh in mind. There have also been reports that some parties may want to start a riot in U.P. with a view to polarising Hindu Muslims votes.

The letter was written four days ago, on October 9, but released today by the party along with another letter dated October 12 in which Ms. Gandhi opposed the "secrecy surrounding the development of a new syllabus for schools" and the writing of new textbooks. In the second letter, Ms. Gandhi pointed out that the National Policy on Education was endorsed and sanctified by Parliament in 1986. "Its core and secular values cannot be changed without the consent of the supreme legislative body," she said, reminding the Prime Minister she herself had demanded that such changes should not be contemplated without consulting the States and a broad spectrum of experts.

If the Government did wish to change existing textbooks, it should demystify the process and announce the names of experts writing and scrutinising the new textbooks. Her demand was the new texts be examined by a panel of experts and academicians constituted through consensus before they are introduced in schools. She hoped this would get the Prime Minister's "immediate attention."

THE HINDU

15 OCT 2002

FOUR SCRIBES AMONG DEAD, DGCA ORDERS PROBE

J.P.P. - eptt
conf

HD-1
1110

Scindia killed in plane crash

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 30. The entire political establishment and the country went into a state of shock today as the news of Mr. Madhavrao Scindia's death in a plane crash came in. Mr. Scindia, who was deputy leader of the Congress in the Lok Sabha and one of its senior-most members, was killed along with seven others, including the pilot, a crew member, an aide and four journalists.

The 10-seater Cessna aircraft belonging to the Jindal group had on board, besides Mr. Scindia, the four journalists, Ms. Anju Sharma of *Hindustan Times*, Mr. Sanjeev Sinha of *Indian Express*, Mr. Ranjan Jha and Mr. Gopal Bisht, correspondent and photographer of *Aaj Tak* — Mr. Scindia's public relations man, Mr. Rupinder Singh, and pilot, Mr. Ray Gautam and co-pilot, Ritu Malik. The bodies have since been recovered, but reports indicated that they were charred beyond recognition.

The Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) has instituted an inquiry into the plane crash.

By late afternoon, when the news of Mr. Scindia's death was confirmed, a pall of gloom set over the capital — the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Leader of the Opposition, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi along with her daughter, Ms. Priyanka, the Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, and hundreds of politicians from all parties, well-wishers and friends gathered at his residence here at 27, Safdarjung Road, to condole the death.



Messages of condolences started pouring in. The President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, sent a personal letter to the bereaved wife, Ms. Madhavi Raje Scindia. The former Prime Ministers, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, and Mr. Inder Kumar Gujral, were among those who met the family to express their grief.

The plane had taken off from here at 12.50 and was to reach Kanpur an hour later, where Mr.

**President, PM express shock;
Personal loss: Sonia
— Page 14
A sudden halt to a marching
hero — images: Page 15**

Scindia was to have addressed a Congress rally, part of the series of pre-election meetings planned by the Congress, and named Parivartan Yatra. But at 1.33 pm, 17 minutes before the plane was due to land in Kanpur, the Air Traffic



Wreckage of the private plane which crashed near Lucknow on Sunday, killing senior Congress leader, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, and six others. — AP

Control in the city lost contact with it. Later, it was said that the plane caught fire in mid-air and the pilot may have tried to make an emergency landing in a field. But it had become a ball of fire by the time it hit the ground. The accident occurred near the Motta railway station in Mainpuri district of Uttar Pradesh.

Heavy rain in and around the crash site apparently hampered and delayed retrieval operations. Senior police officials in Uttar Pradesh said that the site of the accident could be approached only on foot. Huge pools of water as a result of the rain added to the problems.

As news came in of the accident, there was little hope of any survivor, but at the Congress Party of-

ice people kept hoping against hope. But around 4 p.m. it was confirmed that all on board had died.

Mrs. Sonia Gandhi was among the first to arrive at Mr. Scindia's residence while other party leaders and Union Ministers began soon streaming in. Police had to move into the area in strength as cavalcades of VVIPs started arriving. Mrs. Gandhi spent considerable time with the family. Mr. Advani and Mr. Atun Jaitely, the Law Minister, took personal charge and issued instructions for arrangements to bring Mr. Scindia's mortal remains to Delhi.

Ms. Sheila Dixit, Delhi Chief Minister, and Congressman, Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyar, both said that they had earlier planned to make the visit to Kanpur with Mr. Scindia.

What has especially shocked the party is that recently death has claimed several of its young and promising leaders. Rajesh Pilot had died in a road accident, Jiten-

dra Prasad fell victim to a brain haemorrhage, and now Mr. Scindia. Mr. Kamal Nath, another prominent young Congress leader narrowly escaped when a small plane he was travelling in crashed, killing some others on board.

CWC condoles

At an emergency meeting of the Congress Working Committee, a condolence resolution was adopted placing on record its profound sorrow and grief at the tragic and untimely death of Mr. Scindia and others in the plane crash.

The mortal remains of Mr. Scindia and other passengers aboard the C-90 Beechcraft plane would reach the Capital early on Monday morning. The body of Mr. Scindia would be kept at his official residence for people to pay their last respects. On Tuesday, the body would be taken to the AICC(I) headquarters here for some time. Later in the afternoon, the body will be flown to Gwalior by a special plane.

THE HINDU

1 OCT 2011

Embarrassed Cong stands by Das Munshi

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 24 AUGUST

THE CONTROVERSY over the "forged" letter on Air-India (AI) disinvestment, tabled by Congress MP Priya Ranjan Das Munshi in the Lok Sabha on Thursday, is turning out to be a major embarrassment for the party even as it attempted to put on a brave face on Friday.

The party stood by Mr Das Munshi this evening, but the episode has clearly raised doubts about the main Opposition's effectiveness in putting the government on the mat in Parliament. Its inability to take along all other par-

ties in the opposition spectrum and launch coordinated offensives against the government has only been to the benefit of the latter.

Mr Das Munshi's blunder is not the first one that has forced the Opposition to be on the backfoot and caused many red faces in the Congress. At the beginning of this session, he had sent the corridors of Parliament into a tizzy after giving the impression that he had a "bombshell" in his hands on the UTI debate. The story was that he had apparently got hold of some tapes purportedly about conversations between Sinha and the former Yashwant Sinha and the former



Das Munshi: The letter man

UTI chief P.S. Subramanyam. While he denied making any claims the next day, the party had to cut a sorry figure over the disappointing performance by Congress members during the UTI debate.

Mr Das Munshi's "quick-gun" approach, in fact, has been resented by several in the party, who are now privately satisfied that he has ended putting his foot in his mouth. Party circles charge that Mr Das Munshi has been using his official position as party chief whip to effectively ensure that either he or favoured colleagues are in the limelight.

They are now expecting

Thursday's episode to clip his wings a bit, if not invite a sharp rebuke from party president Sonia Gandhi, who left on Friday on a day's trip to Pune.

On his part, Mr Das Munshi on Friday sought to reduce the embarrassment by going on the offensive. While conceding the possibility that he may eventually end up on the wrong side, he attempted to stand his ground by saying the basic issues on disinvestment that he had raised were pertinent. He, however, admitted that he may have erred in placing the document without covering his ground adequately.

Centre lacks planning on major issues: Sonia

H0-1
29/8

J.P.S. - Centre

By Sajay Mehudua

NEW DELHI, AUG. 19. The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today charged the NDA Government with compromising the country's internal security which had led to escalation of terrorist violence in Jammu and Kashmir and sharp rise in insurgency in the North-East States.

Warning the Centre of the "growing unrest" in the country against its performance, she said: "They went to the Agra summit without any preparation. The talks failed and nothing came out of it. We are not against the process of dialogue but the Union Government has shown a totally confused and chaotic approach to major issues which had eroded the standing of the country at the international level."

Ms. Gandhi was addressing a massive "Dalit Chunauti Rally" organised by the Delhi Pradesh Congress at Sultanpuri on the eve of the 57th birth anniversary of former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. The rally, convened by the former MLA and Dalit leader, Mr. Jaikishen, was attended by Delhi Government Ministers, MLAs, Councillors and party leaders. The Chief Minister, Ms. Sheila Dikshit, could not attend the rally as she was unwell.

She said the Centre's policies had put the country behind by years. The situation in Jammu and Kashmir had deteriorated and militants continued to massacre innocent people, with the Centre watching helplessly. The North-East was also burning due



The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, being presented an Adivasi headgear by the Chhatisgarh Chief Minister, Mr. Ajit Jogi (left), at a Dalit rally in New Delhi on Sunday. The DPCC president, Mr. Subash Chopra, looks on. — AP

to its directionless and unimaginative policies. The economic situation had gone from bad to worse with people suffering under the impact of increase in prices and decline in earnings.

Referring to the BJP, she said the party which had promised a clean and healthy administration was today involved neck deep in corruption. It had been rocked by multi-crore scams in which the money of the poor citizens had been swindled under the very eyes of the Government. They had accused Rajiv Gandhi of corruption, today they themselves are caught, Ms. Gandhi said.

She said since the NDA came to power, atrocities against Dalits

and minorities had increased and the Government had failed to initiate any action. She demanded that all the notifications issued by the Centre in recent months putting hurdles in the path of promotional and employment opportunities of the Dalits and Scheduled Tribes be withdrawn immediately.

On Constitutional review, Ms. Gandhi said her party would oppose any attempt to tamper with or change the Constitution. The BJP had set in motion this exercise to deprive the Dalit and other sections of their rightful share guaranteed by the Constitution whose architect was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar, she said.

THE HINDU

19 AUG 2004

100 200

PM must clarify on UTI, says Congress

The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The Congress party brushed aside Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's offer of resignation on Tuesday as a "diversionary ploy," meant to divert the attention of the people from the UTI crisis, particularly in the wake of details about the alleged involvement of the PMO.

The Congress, which along with other opposition parties stalled proceedings in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday to press its demand for an explanation from the PM, has decided not to get sidetracked by the 'resignation' issue. It will persist with the demand that the Prime Minister "come clean in both Houses on all these facts," said Congress spokesperson S. Jaipal Reddy on Tuesday. He indicated that the issue would snowball in

Parliament on Wednesday again. While the debate on the UTI crisis in the Rajya Sabha remains inconclusive, the Lok Sabha is scheduled to take it up on Thursday with the Congress party having moved an adjournment motion on this issue.

Mr Reddy alleged that the facts about the PMO's intervention in certain UTI investments are too specific and too startling to be sidetracked by a mere resignation drama.

The silence of the PMO regarding these facts during the last 24 hours amounts to an admission of guilt, Mr Reddy said, adding that everybody knows that Cyperspace Co is promoted by the Johari brothers who have been attached to the RSS for the past two decades.

The Left urged Mr Vajpayee to explain in Parliament his reported

statement expressing a desire to resign.

CPM parliamentary party leader Somnath Chatterjee told reporters that Mr Vajpayee's remarks at a meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) MPs seemed to suggest he had lost the confidence of the National Democratic Alliance.

Terming Shiv Sena MP Sanjay Nirupam's charges about the PMO's involvement in the UTI scandal as sensational, Mr Chatterjee said Mr Vajpayee was expected to come to the House to give an explanation. "Instead he has created a situation to prevent NDA partners from raising such issues."

He claimed that the PM's presence at a function of a fly-by-night company in Lucknow had its impact on the subsequent UTI decision to invest in it.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

1 AUG 2001

Congress snaps ties with Trinamool

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, July 29

STATE CONGRESS president Pranab Mukherjee today declared that his party was snapping ties with the Trinamool Congress and the Bangla Bachao Front. A few days ago, Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee had announced that her party would go it alone in West Bengal.

Pranab used the political training camp organised by the Mahila Congress to announce his decision. "We entered into an alliance with the Trinamool only after it pulled out of the NDA. But now we find Trinamool MPs taking seats in the Treasury benches. The premise of the alliance, therefore, doesn't exist."

He said: "The alliance can't go on at our initiative only. The other partner has to reciprocate too. Mamata has of late been saying that the Congress has become a burden to her and that she is no longer with the Congress. We didn't respond to this because it was a pre-poll alliance. We were committed to the people to carry on the alliance."

Senior PCC leaders such as



PRANAB MUKHERJEE

Somen Mitra and Atish Sinha have for some time been voicing their displeasure over the tie-up. "Why is Mamata still with the alliance when we have become a burden?" Somen had said recently.

Yesterday, Pranab had told Congress workers to dissociate from the Trinamool path.

"A political movement is not about violence and blockades. Its success depends on a party's mobilisation strength." Atish had also urged workers to assert their separate identity in the districts and the Assembly.

Taking a dig at the Trinamool's bonhomie with the NDA in Parliament, Pranab said it would only strengthen communal forces. "Never before did the BJP get a seat from West Bengal. It did so only after its tie-up with the Trinamool."

Cong. team to study situation in N-E

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 9. The Congress continued to criticise the Union Government for its "mishandling" of the situation in the northeast. "This Government has no perception or idea about the northeast. This situation has been created by its inconsistent approach," the party spokesperson, Mr. Anand Sharma, said.

The party decided to despatch a four-member delegation, headed by the Lok Sabha MP, Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyer, to tour the area and get a first-hand view of the situation.

The other members are Mr. P.R. Kyndiah, Mr. Vijoyen Handrique, Lok Sabha MP from Assam, and Mr. R.P. Rebia, Rajya Sabha MP from Arunachal Pradesh. As a part of its consultative process, a meeting of PCC leaders from the area has also been scheduled later

in the week. Mr. Sharma said the turmoil had started with the destabilisation of a duly-elected government in Manipur. He also called on the Centre to take steps to restore peace in the area.

Welcoming the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's announcement that the Government would review the ceasefire with the NSCN (I-M), the BJP appealed to the people of Manipur to maintain peace.

In a statement here, the BJP general-secretary, Mr. Sunil Shastri, said the Government's decision to agree to a review of the entire framework of the ceasefire agreement was a welcome step.

"The Centre had signed the agreement in good faith but the widespread adverse reaction in Manipur focussed on the rather misplaced perception that it could be a prelude to the reorga-

nisation of the territorial boundaries of Manipur."

Appeal for peace

The Manipur MPs and MLAs Forum has appealed to the people to maintain calm and peace in the wake of the assurance by the Prime Minister. It said it was hopeful that the review would be conducted in due course and described the assurance as a step forward.

The Janata Dal (United) has also asked the people to remain alert and prevent violent elements from taking advantage of the situation. The JD(U) spokesman, Mr. Mohan Prakash, appealed to the State not to use force against peaceful protesters.

Meanwhile, the Speaker of the Manipur Assembly, Mr. S. Dhananjay Singh, said he was not satisfied with the Centre's decision to review the ceasefire agreement.

Cold shoulder to Sonia tea party

OUR BUREAU

Room No. 44, Parliament House, 5 pm: Fresh from her American odyssey, Sonia Gandhi waits for the Left and the Samajwadi Party to turn up for her tea party. None does and she leaves in a huff through the back door.

Room No. 43, Parliament House, 5.30 pm: On the tenth anniversary of his budget that launched India on the path of reforms, Manmohan Singh has for tea his harshest critic: the Left.

Sonia Gandhi has again scalded her fingers in hot tea.

The Left left her out, but had a "full-fledged discussion" over tea with Manmohan in the room next to hers on floor coordination strategy in the Rajya Sabha. The Samajwadi Party, the Nationalist Con-

gress Party and Bahujan Samaj Party also ignored Sonia's invite. All of them had played a part in denying the right to hold "high office" to Sonia, feted as "Prime Minister-in-waiting" during her recent US trip.

"We did not know the venue and the menu of (Sonia's) meeting," said RSP's Abani Roy, explaining why he and representatives of the CPM, CPI and Forward Bloc skipped Sonia's tea party. But pressed harder, Roy admitted that "it was due to political reasons".

Only Somnath Chatterjee of the CPM had tea with Sonia and Madhavrao Scindia at the Congress' Parliament office, but that was half-an-hour before the official party. "Madhavrao Scindia made a request, and, therefore, I

had a cup of tea with Sonia. I did not go as a representative of either the CPM or the People's Front," said Chatterjee.

"We will have our own strategy. The problems facing the nation cannot be solved by the Congress and the BJP. The People's Front is the answer," the CPM leader said.

But only three months ago, Chatterjee had hummed a different tune. Sources said with the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections inching nearer, Mulayam Singh Yadav had made it clear to the Left that it has to choose between him and the Congress.

Today's tea party, which was boycotted by all except the IUML, RJD, ADMK and RPI (Prakash Ambedkar), sent shock waves in the Sonia camp. It also created a sharp division with-

in the Opposition.

This will come as a breather to the Vajpayee government which is likely to come under fire in Parliament for the failed Agra Summit, the UTI fiasco and the Nagaland ceasefire.

Mayavati of the BSP said she had "no time for tea parties" but sent a note to Sonia, regretting that she would not be able to attend. "At least she was consistent in staying away from Sonia and Manmohan's get-together. But what the Left has done is simply childish, naive and indefensible," a Congress floor-manager said.

In April 1999, Subramanian Swamy's tea party, attended by Sonia and Jayalalitha, managed to topple Vajpayee but the Opposition could not form an alternative government.

Congressmen want CWC to decide J&K strategy

BY VENKATESH KESARI

New Delhi, July 7: Even as the Congress continues to blame Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee for the delay in consulting with the main Opposition on the visit of Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf and the summit between the two countries, a section of the party said that a special CWC be convened to determine the party's strategy on it.

"We do not know what exactly is the Congress' stand on the Kashmir issue and feel that the party has become a B team of the BJP on it. In fact, the leadership should take a lead to consult with different sections in the society and thereby force the government to take a correct political line," Congress insiders said.

According to them, the Congress has not been able to take stand on foreign policy different from the BJP and others.

The Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, in her letter to party workers carried by the *Congress Sandesh*, the party mouth-piece in the June issue, said, "We welcome President Musharraf and do hope that Simla agreement will be the basis of the discussions."

In the same letter she said, "On the visit of President Musharraf, I wish to say that our line stands

vindicated. The National Democratic Alliance has all along insisted that no dialogue with Pakistan was possible with a military regime. We kept saying that we have entered into discussion and dialogue with military rulers in the past. We have also maintained that any initiative for the dialogue with Pakistan would be welcome. We are, therefore, happy that the NDA government has changed its stand and taken a U-turn, though the nation has the right to know the reasons for this sudden change in its stance."

She did not explain her party's view even for the benefit of the grassroots workers

But chairman of the Congress' foreign affairs department, Mr K. Natwar Singh, in a write-up published in the same issue of the *Congress Sandesh*, said, "A problem that has bedevilled bilateral relations for half-a-century cannot be resolved in one meeting. This is going to be a long haul. Confidence building takes time and perseverance. The very fact that the two heads of government are meeting sends its own message."

Significantly, in the same article Mr Natwar Singh asked Mr Vajpayee to take the former Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao into confidence before the Indo-Pak summit.

THE ASIAN AGE

Mixed Sonia reception

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, July 3: Both good and bad news await Congress president Sonia Gandhi on her return from a successful visit to the US and a brief stopover in London with son Rahul.

Senior leaders plan to tell her the good news first: Amma is back with the Congress. An ADMK delegation led by Thambi Durai today told AICC general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad and spokesman Jaipal Reddy that the party's alliance with the Congress was intact.

A fortnight ago, Jayalalitha had announced outside 10 Janpath that the tie-up was over and that she was negotiating with the People's Front.

Sonia has summoned a meeting of former governors tomorrow to discuss the Tamil Nadu de-

velopments. Party leaders Romesh Bhandari, Motilal Vora, Mahabir Prasad, Shafi Qureshi, Khurshid Alam Khan and Shiv Shankar have been invited.

The bad news is from Bengal: the alliance with Mamata Banerjee is on the brink. Though trouble was brewing, Sonia will be disappointed because she shared a personal rapport with Mamata.

She had even sought to intervene from the US when the war of words between Mamata and Somen Mitra had reached a flashpoint. She had also asked AICC general secretary Kamal Nath to get in touch with Mamata and ask her to wait till she returned to India.

In the Congress assessment, three compulsions are forcing Mamata's hand. One, after losing the Bengal Assembly polls, she has begun to look at the Congress as a

liability. Two, her MPs may revolt if she stays with the Congress. Three, a section of the Bengal PCC is keen on breaking the alliance.

Though the Congress still hoped that Mamata would change her mind, it refused to officially react to her outburst in Calcutta today. However, an AICC office-bearer said in private: "She is unpredictable. Some of our leaders in Bengal, too, are working overtime to snap ties. It is all very sad. But we still feel that she will be an asset to the party in the long run."

If Mamata calls off the alliance, the Congress leadership is unlikely to badmouth her. "In politics, there is no full stop. We can meet Mamata at some other crossroad. What is the point in burning bridges completely?" a party leader asked.

Mamata snaps ties with state Congress

Our Kolkata Bureau

KOLKATA 3 JULY



Mamata

MAMATA BANERJEE on Tuesday formally snapped ties with the Congress in West Bengal putting to rest speculations about her future course of action. With the alliance falling through, Mamata most certainly inched closer to the BJP-ruled NDA.

Trinamool Congress' rejoining the Vajpayee Cabinet is now believed to be only a matter of time. Mamata has already stood beside the NDA in the TN fiasco.

The Trinamool supremo told newsmen on Tuesday that her party would do it alone in the state. She blamed it on the state Congress leadership that the alliance did not last.

"We will do it alone in the state. The Congress has said the alliance is over. We did not," she told newsmen here.

Charging the state Congress with not being sincere in fighting the CPM, Mamata, who had in the past branded Congress as the 'B' team of the Marxist party, repeated the allegation that some state Congress leaders wanted to strengthen the Marxists.

Mixed bag awaits Sonia after trip

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 3 JULY

A MIXED baggage of good and bad news awaits Congress president Sonia Gandhi, who returns here on Wednesday after rounding off a satisfactory visit to the United States.

The bad news; Mamata Banerjee, Tuesday evening, finally decided to dump the Congress and walk out of the alliance in West Bengal. The good part was that the AIADMK, which had virtually signalled an end to its tie-up in Tamil Nadu, on Tuesday switched on its friendly charm back by proclaiming that the alliance was very much on.

That the parting of ways between the Congress and the Trinamool in West Bengal, notwithstanding the inevitability, was not a welcome development was clear with the party refusing to officially react to it.

Party spokesperson Jaipal Reddy maintained that an official comment will be made on Wednesday, implying that efforts may still be made to salvage something out of it.

The end of the tie-up, though expected for some time, is certainly a setback for the Congress since

it had earlier projected the Trinamool's exit from the NDA as a major coup. The Congress had proclaimed that by doing so, it had signalled a victory for the secular forces. However, that the pressure on Mamata from within to sever her ties with the Congress had finally prevailed became evident on Tuesday with her formal declaration made this evening.

On the other hand, the Congress suddenly found itself being courted by the AIADMK once again — a clear indication of Tamil Nadu chief minister J. Jayalalitha's efforts to do some damage-control after losing the battle of perceptions following developments over the arrests in her state.

Only a month ago, Ms Jayalalitha, after calling on Ms Sonia Gandhi, had maintained outside 10 Janpath that her alliance with the Congress in Tamil Nadu was only for the Assembly elections.

By affirming that she was holding talks with the People's Front over the possibility of a fresh equation, she had clearly indicated as much that the alliance no longer remained in place.



Sonia

Congress not to back President's Rule in TN

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 1: The Congress party on Sunday clearly indicated that it would thwart the Centre's move to impose President's Rule in Tamil Nadu and described the Union Cabinet's decision to "recall" the state governor, Ms Fatheema Beevi, as "hasty, ill-conceived and motivated."

"We will never support President's Rule in Tamil Nadu. In fact this (arrests of Mr Karunanidhi and others) is no case for President's Rule to be imposed," said Congress spokesperson S. Jaipal Reddy.

The Centre may find it difficult to apply Article 356 of the Constitution in the state because the Left parties and the Telugu Desam Party, whose outside support has been crucial for the NDA government, have been very vocal against the issue.

On the Cabinet's decision to recall Ms Beevi, he said: "We oppose the hasty, ill-conceived and motivated decision." Questioning the decision, Mr Reddy asked if it would be proper to hold the President of India responsible for a wrong committed by Mr Vajpayee. The Congress spokesperson recalled how the DMK has been pressing for the removal of Ms Beevi from the day she had sworn in Ms Jayalalitha as the chief minister of the state.

THE NEW AGE

Reforms only option, says Sonia

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, JUNE 29. The Leader of the Opposition and Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, has said that while compulsion might have triggered economic reforms in India, conviction was sustaining them and there was no alternative but to pursue the reform route while simultaneously strengthening the capacity of the state to spur social and economic change.

Addressing a luncheon meeting organised by the Confederation of Indian Industry here today, Ms. Gandhi said in India "the pace of change has to be commensurate with our ability to manage the risks of the transition," and referred to the pressure to make the rupee fully convertible on the Capital account and what followed thereafter. "The East Asian financial crisis bore out the wisdom of that caution," she said.

With a main architect of economic reforms, Dr. Manmohan Singh, seated nearby, Ms. Gandhi said there was still a crucial role for Government investment in the physical and social infrastructure and development of the backward areas. "Our myriad problems can be addressed only in the framework of a mixed economy with the ingredients of the mix reflecting changing imperatives. There is no one single magic mantra," she said.

Among those who attended the luncheon at the Ronald Reagan Building were senior executives of industry and commerce, senior officials of the Bush administration, including from the State Department and the National Security Council, and Senator Sam Brownback, Republican from Kansas and a leading figure on Capitol Hill who has been trying to get rid of sanctions against India. Mr. Brownback, in his brief introductory remarks, once again called for an end to the punitive measures. "Let us do it now," he said.

Ms. Gandhi talked about her vision and perceptions of economic reforms, problems facing the developing countries in global integration, the concept of free and fair trade and the special interests and commitments of India in the emerging scheme of things. She also commented on the situation in South Asia.

"It worries us that countries (which) claim to be committed to a rule-bound multilateral system of free and fair trade, in practice, still cling to bilateral punitive instruments. It is al-



The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, inaugurating the 19th American Association of Physicians of Indian Origin in Washington on Thursday. — PTI

so of concern to us that non-trade issues are increasingly getting intertwined with trade negotiations.

Child labour is a scourge, but it has to be eliminated through education, through social development, through anti-poverty programmes and not by fiat," Ms. Gandhi said.

"President Bush has already spoken about his commitment to multilateral trade negotiations. Just as America pursues bilateral and regional trade agreements, India looks forward to working with the U.S. to multiply bilateral trade and to ensure that WTO and other international financial institutions fulfill the developmental aspirations of poor nations."

On South Asia, Ms. Gandhi said there was need for India and Pakistan to arrive at a set of "enforceable and verifiable confidence-building measures to minimise the risks of nuclear conflict. Trade and economic contacts between our two countries must expand."

Demanding an end to the cross-border terrorism, Ms. Gandhi said the answer to the complex issue of Jammu and Kashmir would have to be found within the framework of elec-

toral and multi-party democracy. "Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India and is vital for India's secular ethos," she said.

Ms. Gandhi's address had its lighter moments when she talked about the Indo-U.S. relationship; from the vision born out of a shared commitment to representative democracy, preserving and protecting secular values to economic growth and social empowerment and the development of science and technology. "And, of course, a vision born out of the fact that America enjoys the most favoured nation status among our educated youth."

Speaking further on the expansion in the "canvas of commonality," Ms. Gandhi pointed out that during the last U.S. Presidential election in November, many in India thought the country's expertise in electoral technology could be offered.

With California experiencing power cuts, India could offer expertise in managing the same; "and with what is happening in Washington, our expertise in dealing with political defections," she said in a reference to the recent switching of Mr. James Jeffords from Republican to an Independent.

Sonia skirts Indian media

DESIKAN THIRUNARAYANAPURAM
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON, June 29. - On her first trip to Washington as Leader of the Opposition, Mrs Sonia Gandhi met the Vice-President, Mr Dick Cheney, and national security advisor, Ms Condoleezza Rice, to discuss Indian and global issues.

She also addressed a gathering of NRI physicians, the Congressional Caucus of India and Indian Americans to garner support for her party.

But when it was time to meet the Indian media, Mrs Gandhi turned out to be a no-show. Almost.

Journalists, invited to a news conference at 4.30 p.m., found Mrs Gandhi on her way out without having even entered the conference room

rented by the Indian embassy for the event at the expensive Marriott Hotel in downtown Washington.

The news conference venue was hurriedly changed yesterday morning from the Indian embassy building to the Marriott after Mrs Gandhi changed her schedule to fit in an address to a gathering of Indian American physicians at the Marriott. The 40,000-member group is a powerful lobbying machine in the USA, making hefty political contributions to push Indian interests.

Nearly 15 minutes before the scheduled time for the "chat" with the press - for less than five minutes - she answered questions about her meeting with American politicians and about her and her children's political plans, before saying

she had to rush to the airport.

Asked whether her daughter would enter active politics, Mrs Gandhi said her children followed the political goings-on in India but it was up to them to decide if they wanted to take on the political mantle. "My husband made his own decision, I made my own decision, and I expect my daughter to make her decision about entering politics," she said.

Asked if she wanted to become the Prime Minister, Mrs Gandhi replied: "There is no vacancy right now."

On Wednesday, Mrs Gandhi was accompanied by Mr Manmohan Singh and former external affairs minister, Mr Natwar Singh, to the meeting with Mr Cheney. She later described the meeting as positive and cordial.

Sources said the meeting lasted 25 minutes during which Mr Cheney and Mrs Gandhi lauded the progress in US-India relations, and the Vice-President promised to maintain the momentum of the growing ties between the countries.

A meeting with Mrs Hillary Clinton had to be cancelled because Mrs Clinton was tied up in the Senate.

Addressing the congressional caucus on Wednesday, Mrs Gandhi thanked the group for bridging the distance between the two countries. "To all of you, I bring the greetings and appreciation of my countrymen and countrywomen," she said, adding India and the USA "are now more deeply engaged than ever before in fruitful dialogue across a broad spectrum of issues."

Sonia outlines steps for President Pervez

9-P.P. HF-9
CONF 25/6

S Rajagopalan
Washington, June 28

PRESIDENT PERVEZ Musharraf may be landing in New Delhi with some heavy Kashmir baggage, but Congress president Sonia Gandhi has a different plan for his outing with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee: Adopt a set of "enforceable and verifiable" confidence-building measures to minimise the risk of nuclear conflict.

Sonia, who arrived here on Wednesday, told the influential India Caucus legislators: "Peace in South Asia is of paramount concern to all of us. It is of even greater concern, I know, ever since India and Pakistan went overtly nuclear three years ago."

Besides confidence-building measures on the nuclear front, she mooted a shift of focus to trade and economic contacts.

But progress on the Indian bid to give a push to South Asia Free Trade Agreement would really hinge on Pakistan extending the most favoured nation (MFN) status to India, she stressed.

Sonia had a "very friendly and cordial" meeting with Vice-President Dick Cheney. It was marked by "commonality of views on most issues". Describing India as a "very important country" for the U.S. Cheney was decidedly upbeat on Indo-American relations.

The Vajpayee-Musharraf summit figured during the 25-minute meeting. The Leader of Opposition informed Cheney that her party welcomed this development. The Congress, as she put it, has always been in favour of an Indo-Pak dialogue.

At the lunch hosted in her honour by the India Caucus, she set forth the Indian position vis-

avis the Kashmir issue in categorical terms: "Cross-border terrorism has to cease. And the answer to this very complex issue will have to be found in the framework of electoral and multi-party democracy."

Jammu & Kashmir is "an integral part of India and vital for India's secular ethos", she said and emphasised that India had always been sensitive to the sentiments of the people of J&K, which enjoys a special status under the Indian Constitution.

Sonia will have meetings with National Security Adviser Condoleezza Rice and Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage later today.

India Caucus co-chairmen Jim McDermott and Ed Royce, welcoming Gandhi's visit, said it was "a great opportunity for us to further the Indo-American relationship through personal relationships".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Mamata pact still on: Cong

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, June 27: After a war of words with Mamata Banerjee, the Congress today adopted a conciliatory attitude towards the Trinamul Congress, but made it clear that the alliance will be off the moment Mamata returns to the NDA.

West Bengal Congress chief Pranab Mukherjee took the lead in softening the party's stand. Pranab said the alliance has succeeded in checking the rise of the BJP though it failed to isolate the Left in Bengal. He said the Congress had entered into the alliance with the twin objectives of defeating the Left and driving out communal forces from the state. Pranab said his party and Trinamul needed each other in the state Assembly to keep a check on the Left Front government.

AICC spokesman Jaipal Reddy endorsed Pranab's line, discounting yesterday's "liability and burden" slur. He said the verbal duel should be seen in the context of "local politics". "Our alliance with Mamata was forged in the context of her quitting the NDA government. That context still continues.... So long as she is not part of the NDA government, the alliance continues," Reddy said.

Asked to explain his earlier

statement that the alliance with Trinamul was "apparently" on, Reddy said he is withdrawing the word "apparently".

The Congress-Mamata rapprochement began last night after senior party functionaries watched Mamata on a private TV channel. In the absence of Sonia Gandhi and Kamal Nath (both are in the US), AICC functionaries got in touch with Pranab and, after consulting him, decided to play down the crisis. "We will not take the blame of calling off the alliance," an AICC functionary said.

However, party leaders made it clear that Mamata would not be allowed to "interfere" in internal matters of the party such as its tie-up with the Left for the Punjab Assembly polls. "Ours is a national party. In a vast and diverse country like India, the Congress will adopt different yardsticks to keep the communal forces at bay," a Congress MP said.

Congress leaders said they will wait and watch before making any move in Bengal. Pranab may have to continue for some more time as state Congress chief though he is keen to relinquish the post. "The leadership will decide on the successor issue once its relation with Trinamul is sorted out," an AICC functionary said.

THE HINDU

Sonia calls CMs' meeting +159

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 12

SONIA GANDHI has called a meeting of Congress Chief Ministers on June 16 to review of development schemes in States ruled by the party. The focus of the meet however will be on problems faced by farmers because of the NDA Government's policies.

The review session follows the Congress chief's address at the Bangalore AICC where she said Congress-ruled States should be known for good governance and become trendsetters in economic and social policies.

She also laid special stress on administrative reforms to ensure

a responsive and accountable administration.

Since its Bangalore session, the party has added more States to its kitty, with Congress Governments installed in Assam, Kerala and Pondicherry.

The Saturday's meeting is also significant in the context of the coming Uttar Pradesh elections where the party has identified the "miserable state" of farmers as a major poll issue. The party's UP unit has already held two farmers' rallies at Meerut and Aligarh. More such rallies are expected over the next few days.

This is the second meeting of Congress CMs in six months. On November 17 last year, Sonia

Gandhi had undertaken a review of social welfare schemes, especially those meant for OBCs, tribals and Dalits, in various States. She suggested to the Chief Ministers that more money be pumped in fewer schemes rather than spreading the Budget thinly on more schemes.

Recently, Sonia formed a three-member committee comprising Manmohan Singh, Pranab Mukherjee and Arjun Singh to interact with party CMs.

The main issue discussed at the first meeting of this committee was the problem of foodgrain procurement faced by farmers due to Central procurement agencies' apathetic attitude.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

10 JUNE 2001

Cong happy with Pant's progress

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 9

AS PART of the Government's exercise to hold consultations with major political parties on the Kashmir peace process, K C Pant today briefed a two-member Congress delegation on his recent visit to the Valley and the talks he held with various groups and individuals.

Emerging from the hour-long meeting with Congress leaders Pranab Mukherjee and Ghulam Nabi Azad, Pant said he had briefed them about divergent opinions that came up during his meetings in Kashmir.

Mukherjee said, "The overall impact of Pant's interaction is on the positive side." On whether there was any shift in the Congress policy on Kashmir, he said there was only one policy for Kashmir, which was to restore peace.

10/16
Asked whether the absence of the Hurriyat Conference from discussions during Pant's visit would jeopardise the peace process, Mukherjee said the entire issue would have to be seen in totality.

"When you hold talks, there will be some successes and some failures. But if you see the issue in its entirety, the overall impact has been on the positive side."

In the second phase of his interaction with national parties, Pant will hold talks with BJP and Left leaders. On his part, Pant said there was no deadline for him. "But I am of the opinion that peace has to be restored in the Valley as early as possible."

The Congress has consistently voiced support for any initiative to restore peace in the Valley. It had even backed India's unilateral declaration of ceasefire in Kashmir. The party had also



responded positively to the recent cessation of ceasefire and invitation for talks to Gen Musharraf.

Task over, Pranab eager to be back in Delhi

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, May 31

CONGRESS RAJYA Sabha Chief Whip Pranab Mukherjee will give up the post of PCC chief before Parliament session begins in July.

Pranab has no qualms about it and Sonia Gandhi is reportedly eager to have him back in Delhi with Assembly elections due soon in Uttar Pradesh and Punjab. And the man likely to step into Pranab's shoes here is Somen Mitra, who has held the position before.

"Before I took over charge in Bengal, I had an open discussion with Sonia Gandhi. She agreed that I would return to Delhi after the elections in Bengal were over. Now I have other assignments to execute for the party and concentrate in Parliament," Pranab Mukherjee told *Hindustan Times*.

"My brief for this tenure was to ensure that Mamata left the NDA and went to polls with the Congress as an ally. That has been fulfilled. So my task is over."

Sonia has not officially named Pranab's successor, but the signals are very clear. Last week, Somen Mitra met the AICC president at 10 Janpath, where he is believed to have told her that the State unit needs a revamping if it has to do well in the panchayat elections.

Somen also reportedly asked Sonia whether she wanted the Congress to play second fiddle to Mamata Banerjee in Bengal. But he insisted that Pranab should continue for a few more months, till Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and Mamata Banerjee are completely exposed to the people.

"Already, State Congress leaders and central leaders have realised that the alliance with Mamata was harmful for the party. Congress workers have not accepted Mamata and that was reflected in the polls. Otherwise, we could have got at least 30-35 seats. Besides, we performed better than the Trinamool-BJP com-



bine in the 2000 municipal polls. But the way in which we compromised with Mamata this time sealed our fate," Somen Mitra said.

It is Somen Mitra's performance as PCC chief between 1992 and 1998 that has made him the favourite for the top job again. In 1993 panchayat polls, the Congress increased its margin from 13,000 to 22,000. In 1994 municipal polls, the Congress gained control over 44 municipalities, against the 11 it earlier ran.

In the 1995 CMC polls, the city elected 69 Congress councillors, whereas earlier the party had 37 councillors. In the 1996, the State Congress increased its tally in the Lok Sabha from four to nine, and in the Assembly from 82 to 85.

The record is formidable, marred only by the way the official Congress candidate DP Roy in the 2000 Rajya Sabha polls lost to the Trinamool's Jayanta Bhat-tacharya.

Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, also an aspirant for the PCC chief's post, blames Somen Mitra for that fiasco. This is what Somen has to say about that: "This is Priya's trump card against me. But he is a slippery character. First, he was against the alliance with Mamata till his wife's name was cleared as a candidate. And he now wants to get the PCC chief's post, again for the selfish aim of wooing Mamata and with her help get Deepa Das Munshi

elect to the Rajya Sabha next year. But he will not succeed in his dubious game."

Somen is so confident presumably because he has Sonia Gandhi's blessings, and the support of such Congress stalwarts as Pranab Mukherjee, ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury, Kamal Nath, Ahmed Patel, Ghulam Nabi Azad and Oscar Fernandes.

Besides, he knows if there is an election for the PCC chief's post, Das Munshi would get a drubbing as more than 350 of the 440 members are loyal to him.

PCC general secretary and Somen loyalist Manas Bhuniya said: "Priya has already been tested as a minister and PCC president. He was a failure when he led the Congress in the 1987 Assembly polls. Even today because of his slimy and backstabbing politics, he has no cred-

ibility or following among Congress workers. He is a man who said that he would change his religion but never join the Indira Congress. He was one of those who demanded a Nuremberg-like trial for Indira Gandhi after the Emergency. He called Indira the cancer of Congress. How can a man like him be promoted?"

"This time again, for his own personal interest and his wife Deepa, he upset the entire political equation of North Bengal by antagonising Barkat Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Adhir Chowdhury.

"As a result, we lost seats in North Bengal including Malda and Dinajpur, and our chances were spoilt in South Bengal too. And now how can Das Munshi make such ridiculous and anti-party statements like the Congress has no organisation base

and compare it with the Trinamool's?" Bhuniya asked.

"Fortunately we have Pranab Mukherjee as chief. Otherwise, Das Munshi would have sold the party lock, stock and barrel to Mamata to further his own ends."

Philippic
means
a bitter
speech.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

JUN 20

CWC meet focus on U.P.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 28. The Congress is gearing for the battle in Uttar Pradesh. The party today decided to focus single-mindedly on the State, in a desperate bid to turn things around. Though the three-hour meeting of the Congress Working Committee dealt with a range of issues, from the outcome of the recent Assembly elections to India-Pakistan relations, especially in the context of the Government's invitation to Pakistan's Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, and the situation in West Asia, the focus by all accounts is on the impending battle in Uttar Pradesh.

The meeting was held in the background of the recent elections in which the party did very well but the leadership appeared intent on looking ahead. Significantly, it dispensed with the customary resolution, praising the Congress president's efforts, and concentrated instead on evolving its approach for the future.

The accent at the end of the exercise was on putting the house in order rather than indulging in any kind of adventurism. The party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, said that consolidating the secular forces was one of the primary tasks.

Though the party refrained

from criticising the move to invite Gen. Musharraf, Ms. Gandhi did express surprise at the turnaround in the Government's policy. "We are flabbergasted at the total turnaround by the Government... From refusing to talk till a few months ago, they have now come a full circle," she told newsmen after the meeting.

Considerable time was reportedly spent on Uttar Pradesh and the meeting did throw up some ideas, but it has been left to the special committee set up by Ms. Gandhi and the general secretary

in-charge of the State, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, to draw up a strategy. It is clear that the party is keen on drawing on all its resources. The broad contours of the strategy suggest an exhaustive effort by the Congress president in addition to the plans to deploy most of the party Chief Ministers.

The party also plans to expose its State leadership as well as those in charge of planning its strategy to political and social scientists who have extensively studied the reasons for the decline of the Congress in the State.

It is up to my children: Sonia

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 28. The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today broke her silence on the question of her children joining politics, saying the decision would be made by them. "In our family, children are taught to take their own decisions," Ms. Gandhi told presspersons after the CWC meeting at the AICC headquarters.

Fielding queries with aplomb, she spoke on a range of issues — from her children joining politics to the party's strategy in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections and her reaction to the Government's invitation to General Pervez Musharraf for talks. Asked specifically when Ms. Priyanka Gandhi Vadra would take the plunge, Ms. Gandhi, without ruling out the possibility, said "the decision is not in my hands, they (the children) will have to take their own decision just the way I and my husband did." Ms. Gandhi said she had an open mind on the issue. "When my son and daughter want to join politics, I will neither discourage them nor encourage them." The Congress was not in a "terribly good position in Uttar Pradesh" but if everyone worked unitedly, they could overcome the challenges.

THE HINDU

21 MAY 2002

HD-13

Crucial CWC meet today

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, MAY 27. The Congress Working Committee (CWC) will meet tomorrow to take stock of the political situation. This will be the first meeting of the apex decision-making body after the recent Assembly elections and is expected to dwell on the fallout of the results and the situation arising out of it.

WJS
Tomorrow's meeting will also be attended by all the 11 Chief Ministers of the Congress State Governments. Ten of the 11 Chief Ministers will be there in their capacity as special invites, while the Nagaland Chief Minister, Mr. S.C. Jamir, will be there as a permanent invitee.

The Congress leadership also plans to use the meeting to go be-

yond the usual stock-taking exercise. The high command is keen that the occasion must not be a self-congratulatory exercise and that the party must start preparing for the next round of State elections. Uttar Pradesh and Punjab, States which are likely to go to the polls either late this year or early next year, will be the focus of attention.

The political situation has also undergone a change as have the equation among the parties. In West Bengal, the Congress decision to align with Ms. Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamool Congress has upset the Left parties, while Ms. Banerjee herself is reportedly once again considering reviving her relationship with the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance. The party will have to evolve a

strategy where it either manages to keep its alliance with Ms. Banerjee or mend its fences with the Left parties. The Congress has been guarded in its response and has limited itself to saying that it will do nothing to destabilise the Government. However it will have to go beyond the perfunctory statement at the CWC meeting and indicate how it sees things shaping up in the near future.

The CWC will also formulate its response to the Government's decision to invite the Pakistan Chief Executive, General Musharraf. The move is being viewed by some quarters in the party as an attempt by the BJP-led Government to make some diplomatic gains to make up for its "under-performance in the domestic front".

5*

7-111

Sonia calls session on Mamata

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, May 22: Fed up with the ceaseless bickering in the Bengal Congress over ties with Trinamul, party president Sonia Gandhi is calling heads of the state's district units over.

A meeting of district presidents and senior leaders will be held in Delhi soon to decide the future relationship with Trinamul. Sonia, who was extremely keen on having an alliance with Trinamul, has lost heart with Bengal leaders speaking in different voices, even holding the high command responsible for the "mess" that resulted in the crushing defeat of the combine.

Sources close to Sonia said sen-

ior leaders like Pranab Mukherjee, Atish Sinha, Somen Mitra and Pradeep Bhattacharya were very much party to the decision to align with Trinamul.

Leaders like A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Somen Mitra wanted an alliance even when Mamata was part of the BJP-led coalition. "We have now realised that *mahajot* was confined to English Bazar (in Ghani Khan's Malda) alone," a bitter AICC functionary said.

Congress leaders at 24, Akbar Road have washed their hands of Bengal. "Let the wise men in WBPC decide how they wish to proceed," an AICC office-bearer said, claiming that the high command had made a sincere effort to

revive the party in Bengal.

"If the dominant view is to snap all ties with Mamata, let them decide so that at a future date they do not start talking about a *mahajot*," he said.

AICC leaders alleged that a section of the state leadership wanted to push Mamata back into the NDA lap as part of its strategy and go for a tacit understanding with the Left.

"The fact is that many of these characters never wanted a tie-up with Mamata. Throughout the campaign, they tried to puncture it and now they are provoking Mamata to call off the alliance so that they can resume proximity to the Left," a Congress MP said.

The war of words is hotting up

between Trinamul and Congress. Trinamul general secretary Sultan Ahmad accused Somen Mitra, Pradeep Bhattacharya and Pranab Mukherjee of levelling "baseless charges" against Mamata.

"They want us to react to serve their purpose. The Congress leadership should rein in or else...." Ahmad said.

The Sonia camp, however, maintained that all was not over between Mamata and the Congress.

"Let the tempers cool down and then we will try to put things in place. But, if the situation goes out of hand, we will go by local sentiment and wishes of district party units," a Sonia aide said.

THE TELEGRAPH

23 MAY 2001

Karunakaran's son appointed chief of Kerala Congress

HT Correspondent
Thiruvananthapuram, May 17

CONGRESS HIGH COMMAND today appointed K Karunakaran's son K Muralidharan as the new Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee (KPCC) president to put an end to the infighting in the State party unit.

Soon after an eight-member UDF ministry under A K Antony was sworn in, AICC observers Ghulam Nabi Azad and Motilal Vohra, announced K Muralidharan's name as the KPCC chief.

Though the decision is expected to be part of a pre-poll formula, the undue haste in which it was announced shows that the party wants to give no room for dissent. With 29 MLAs (out of 62) in Karunakaran's fold, it dreads to take another chance. "If Antony group gets the Chief Minister, the KPCC president is for my group," has been Karunakaran's chorus for a long time.

TMC-CONG MERGER TALKS LIKELY

TAMIL MANILA Congress leader G K Moopananar may discuss the merger of his party with the Congress during his meeting with Sonia Gandhi next week.

Tamil Nadu Congress committee president E V K S Elangovan, who met Sonia with new party members of the Tamil Nadu Assembly, said this today. **HTC, New Delhi**

For the party, bitter memories of a factional feud are still afresh. Karunakaran has showed the high command that he can go to any extent to keep the balance of power in the State. He came to a point of wrecking the ship by resigning from the Congress Working Committee and blasted the central leaders in public. The party placated him finally

1875
by opening the closed candidates' list and presenting three more seats to his group. When Antony's name was proposed as the CLP leader, he kept mum waiting for his share.

However, the party shot down his demand for a simultaneous announcement of the CM and KPCC chief's post. It reportedly asked the leader to first ensure a smooth selection of Antony and report back to Delhi.

Now with his son at the helm, the party can heave a sigh of relief and the two groups are happy with the turn of events. But the remaining two are cut up with the high command. The party has four groups of which two dominant ones are led by Karunakaran and Antony and the third by AICC secretary Ramesh Chennithala. Vayalar Ravi leads the last group.

The last two groups reportedly faxed messages to Delhi citing their displeasure.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

1875

Cong storms to power in Assam

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

GUWAHATI, May 14. — The Assam Pradesh Congress president and chief minister-designate, Mr Tarun Gogoi, today said his government would evolve a comprehensive plan to resolve the insurgency problem in the state.

Addressing his first press conference after the Congress today stormed to power with 71 seats in the 126-member Assembly, Mr Gogoi said a political and economic approach was required to deal with insurgency. He also appealed to the militants to shun the path of violence.

Meanwhile, the chief minister, Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, resigned this morning but has been asked by the Governor to continue in office till the new government takes over. He said

5/14 15/5
he accepted the defeat but attributed it to some extent to the violence unleashed by the Ulfa in the run up to the election.

He chose not to comment on whether the party's alliance was also one of the reasons for its poor showing.

The four-party alliance of AGP, BJP, All Bodo Students' Union and the ASDC

(U) won 37 seats. Of these, the AGP won 18 while the BJP, Absu and ASDC won eight, nine and two seats respectively. Results of two seats were yet to be declared. Elections were held for 125 seats.

Mr Gogoi said a meeting of the Congress legislature party would be held where the leader will be elected on Wednesday after which the party would stake claim its to form the next

government.

He said the government would hold the long-pending panchayat elections by the end of the year in a bid to decentralize power and his government would lay special emphasis on

■ AGP pushes BJP back by several years: page 8

employment-oriented education. "We shall not forget our manifesto and implement all

the programmes," he said. For the first time in Assam's history, the Assembly would have no members from the Left parties.

The CPI and CPM had three and two members in the House that is to be dissolved. The two parties had contested the 1996 Assembly elections with the AGP as allies.

The results came as a shock for several AGP ministers and senior leaders of the party.

Among them were the agriculture minister, Mr Chandra Mohan Patowary, education minister, Mr Thanesar Boro, co-operation minister, Mr Nurul Hussain, municipal and administration minister, Mr Biraj Kumar Sharma, transport minister, Mr Pradip Hazarika, and sericulture minister, Mr Ramandra Narayan Kalita.

The speaker of the outgoing assembly, Mr Ganesh Kutum, also lost.

On the other hand, one of the Congress stalwarts to lose was the leader of the Opposition, Mr Sylvous Condpan.

Among other prominent losers were NCP candidate and a former home minister in the Mahanta cabinet, Mr Bhriku Kumar Phukan, and Trinamool Gana Parishad candidate and former AGP minister, Mr Atul Bora.

THE STATESMAN

15 MAY 2001

Charges against Sonia to be 'examined'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 11. With the voting in the Assembly elections out of the way, the Janata Party president, Dr. Subramanian Swamy, has been heard again over his allegations against the Leader of Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi.

This time he has released a letter from Mr. Arun Shourie, Minister of State for Public Grievances to Mr. Ananth Kumar, Minister of Tourism and Culture.

Since a copy of the letter, dated April 30, 2001, was marked to Dr. Swamy also, he has now opted to make it public. In the letter, Mr.

Shourie advises the Minister of Tourism and Culture to "get the matter (of Dr. Swamy's complaint) examined". Mr. Shourie also enclosed Dr. Swamy's letter to the Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, alleging "illegal export of our ancient treasures such as temple sculptures, National Museum items and precious gems".

The thrust of the allegations against Ms. Sonia Gandhi in Dr. Swamy's letter to Mr. Advani is of "illegal export of ancient treasures". Dr. Swamy asserts that these allegations, "besides being a personal offence are also a crime

State in charge of personnel, Dr. Swamy in response to his letter. Both Mr. Shourie and Mr. Ananth Kumar have a reputation to pursue partisanship to its bitter end.

The Congress has taken umbrage at Ms. Rajé's letter, accusing the Vajpayee Government of a "witch-hunt". So worked up was the Congress over Ms. Rajé's routine reply that the party kept away from the April 14 all-party meeting convened by the Prime Minister. On the last day of the Budget session, Ms. Sonia Gandhi herself expressed anger at the allegations against her.

In the Shourie letter released to the press by Dr. Swamy, the Vajpayee Government's intent to investigate the matter sounds more pronounced than it did in the letter of March 12, 2001 written by Ms. Vasundara Rajé, Minister of

THE HINDU

Cong dares govt to probe party's links with Ulfa

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

5 ULFA MEN KILLED

GUWAHATI, May 6. — The Congress today demanded that a CBI enquiry or one by a judge of the Supreme Court be instituted within 24 hours into allegations that the party had links with the banned Ulfa.

"If this is not done then the prime minister and home minister should tender an apology to the people for misleading them and for politicizing the recent killings," Congress leader, Mr kamal Nath, told a press conference here this morning. Mr Advani had accused the Congress of having instigated the Ulfa to attack AGP and BJP candidates. It was not good to politicize killings and such acts should be condemned, Mr Nath said.

The Assam Pradesh Congress president, Mr tarun Gogoi, said that it was a lie that his party had not condemned the killing of AGP workers. He said he was the first to visit the BJP candidate, Jayanta Dutta's house after he was gunned down in Dibrugarh. "But the prime minister has not felt it necessary to condemn the killing of Congress workers,"

GUWAHATI, May 6. — Five Ulfa militants, including a district commander, were killed and another injured in separate encounters with security forces.

A group of Ulfa militants, hiding inside a hut at Pathacharkuchi area of Barpeta district, fired upon security forces when challenged by the latter last night. In the ensuing encounter four militans including the outfit's Barpeta district commander, Nageshwar Kalita, were killed.

Another Ulfa militant, Abhijit Sarma, responsible for the recent killings in the state, was shot dead by security forces near Gohpur in Sonitpur district today. Sarma along with a group of ten militants had been sent from Bhutan to disrupt the polls.

— PTI

he said.

The Congress leaders said that AGP ministers had links with the Ulfa and that was the reason why the BJP government at the Centre was not willing to institute an

inquiry.

"The killings were engineered to create panic among the Congress workers," Mr Gogoi said adding that a low turnout would adversely affect the party's chances in the election.

Assam police silent: The Assam Police are yet to ascertain whether the Ulfa was behind the attacks on the AGP and BJP candidates and their supporters, although the Union home minister and the Assam chief minister, Mr Prafulla Kumar Mahanta, have claimed that the militant outfit had carried out the attacks at the instigation of the Congress.

In fact, according to the official website of the Assam Police (www.assampolice.org), the only attack by Ulfa militants on political parties was on the Congress office at Ghagrapari in Nalbari district in which one person was killed. Insofar as the other killings are concerned, the website attributes these to the work of either of "miscreants" or "militants" without naming a group.

Mr Advani had earlier stated that the Assam police had evidence of plans by the Ulfa to target AGP and BJP — two allies — workers.

THE STATESMAN

- 7 MAY 2001

Sonia to skip Tamil Nadu

By T. Ramakrishnan 4/5

CHENNAI, MAY 3. The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, will not be campaigning in Tamil Nadu, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, general secretary, said today. "Ms. Gandhi is coming to Pondicherry where she will address a public meeting on the afternoon of May 8 (the last day of campaigning)," Mr. Azad told presspersons here.

Asked whether this decision was due to the experience of the AIADMK chief, Ms. Jayalalitha, not attending an election rally participated by Ms. Gandhi in Villupuram in August 1999, the Mr. Azad denied it and said, "that was a

mere coincidence". During electioneering, such things did happen and in many cases, leaders were not able to address even scheduled meetings and share the dais with others on all the occasions. "At the time of elections, we do not stand on formalities. For instance, in Kerala, the Leader of Opposition was present only in one out of 10 meetings addressed by Ms. Gandhi," Mr. Azad said.

Ms. Gandhi had to cover different States, from Kerala in the south to Assam in the east. "She has hardly a week to canvass for votes, and travelling from one State to another takes seven to eight hours. She is required more

in the States where the Congress is a major player." Mr. Azad brushed aside questions on whether the absence of joint campaign by Ms. Gandhi and Ms. Jayalalitha would send a signal that the State had become unimportant to the Congress and it was due to the party contesting less number of seats.

As for Tamil Nadu, the party was contesting the elections as part of the "secular front" led by Ms. Jayalalitha. "She is our star campaigner here. When we are more than satisfied that she is strong enough to get us votes and seats, where is the need for pulling out Ms. Gandhi from her election tour," Mr. Azad asked.

THE HINDU

- 4 MAY 2001

Cong criticises Vajpayee for comments on Sonia outburst

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 30 APRIL



Sonia Gandhi

THE WAR of words between the ruling alliance and the Congress intensified on Monday with the Congress alleging that Prime

Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee was trying to browbeat the party when he said Ms Sonia Gandhi was lowering the dignity of the Parliament.

"It is the Prime Minister who has lowered the dignity of Parliament. He cannot browbeat us. We will not be cowed down," Congress general secretary Oscar Fernandes told reporters a day after Mr Vajpayee mounted an offensive against Ms Gandhi for her sudden outburst.

The Congress general secretary said Vajpayee's speech in the Lok Sabha was objectionable. "He should have acted with more dignity and wisdom instead of taunting the Congress and its leadership," Mr Fernandes said. "I do not know whether there is anything in the record of Parliament which showed that the leadership of Congress said anything in the House which lowered its dignity."

Referring to Prime Minister's subtle warning that "several issues" concerning morality of Opposition parties were coming, Mr Fernandes said no one could prevent the government from bringing forward any issue. "But, they (government) cannot hide their sins. First let them answer what they have done and then throw stones at others," he said.

The war of words between the government and Congress which began on the concluding day of Budget session hotted up on Sunday when the Prime Minister attacked Ms Sonia Gandhi and Congress.

Congress, which joined the slanging match said the Prime Minister should have set the tone for reconciliation. "He has not done that. Our party will not take it lightly, we will take it to People's Court," Mr Fernandes said.

The Economic Times

1 MAY 2001

Sonia has lowered House dignity: PM

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 29

THE PRIME Minister today expressed pain over Sonia Gandhi's emotional outburst on the last day of the Budget session, saying such episodes lowered the prestige of Parliament.

Appealing to all political parties to put the "unfortunate incident behind us", Atal Bihari Vajpayee said in a statement: "I personally look forward to constructive dialogue and cooperation with Sonia Gandhi, both in and outside Parliament."

He asserted that he had said nothing objectionable in the Lok Sabha on the last day of the Budget session. "I fail to understand how my speech provoked such an angry and personalised outburst from the leader of the Opposition," he said.

"I am pained by the emotional outburst of the Leader of the Opposition at Advani," the statement said. "As the Leader of the Opposition, and even when I was an ordinary MP, I always stood up to stop the use of derogatory and unbecoming remarks in Parliament."

'NO MOVE TO REPLACE PM'

THE BJP president, Jana Krishnamurthy, said on Sunday that there was no move to replace Prime Minister AB Vajpayee with his Home Minister, LK Advani. The two men, he said, were like inseparable twins.

PTI, Nagercoil

In a scathing counter-attack, the Congress later tonight accused the Prime Minister of doublespeak. AICC general secretary Ambika Soni said Sonia had gone out of her way to end the Budget session on a positive note, but Vajpayee had "issued threats to the Opposition and also gave sermons". "We had to call his bluff as he was saying one thing and doing another," Soni said.

At a Press meet in Thiruvananthapuram, BJP president Jana Krishnamurthy defended the Prime Minister. "Never in his long political career has Atalji personally abused anybody and no leader in the country would level such a charge against him," PTI quoted him as

having said.

LK Advani had walked up to the Congress president to greet her after the House was adjourned on Friday, when an angry Sonia told him: "My husband was crucified in the House by all of you. My mother-in-law was insulted by your people day in and day out... Even now they are calling me and my children thieves. We will not take all this lying down. This will not go without a fight."

Vajpayee's statement said: "Such episodes lower the prestige of the Indian Parliament. Advani had gone to greet her and other members of the Opposition, as is customary at the end of the session. It was not an occasion to express anger."

He said it was the duty of both the Treasury and the Opposition benches to make a new beginning towards "re-establishing" high standards of debate in Parliament in "the true spirit of democracy and mutual respect".

"This is what people expect from us irrespective of party that we belong to," he said.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 APR 2001

Congress has no links with Uffa: Ambika

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 29: The Congress party made it on Sunday that it has no direct or indirect understanding with the Uffa. "The question of protecting the Uffa activities does not arise," the party said, while strongly disapproving of a statement by Union home minister J. K. Advani in this regard. The Congress also announced that Mr Tarun Gogoi would be its chief ministerial candidate.

Mr Advani, who was in Guwahati on Sunday, asked Congress president Sonia Gandhi to make her party's stand clear on the Uffa. Reacting to Mr Advani's statement, AICC general secretary and in-charge of the Congress president's office Ambika Soni said: "The question of protecting the Uffa

activities does not arise. Our stand on such organisations has been consistent and clear but chief minister Pratulla Kumar Mahanta has been raising it."

The Congress president will go to Assam on Monday to address election meetings and will explain her party's stand on this issue, Ms Soni said.

While describing the AGP-BJP pact as an unholy alliance, Ms Soni said she cannot understand why they were raising the issue, knowing well that Mr Gogoi had clarified the Congress stand several times.

Meanwhile, a report from Guwahati says that AICC general secretary in-charge of Assam, Mr Kamal Nath, on Sunday said that Assam Congress president Tarun Gogoi is the party's chief ministerial candidate.

The categorical assertion at a news conference put to rest all speculation over the Congress chief ministerial candidate in Assam. Mr Nath ruled out possibility of post-poll alliance with any political party in the state.

According to him, "The fight is not between political parties, but between corruption and communalism represented by the AGP, ABD, BJP and development of Assam and its future represented by the Congress."

The BJP tied up with the AGP to consolidate itself while the ACP had joined the BJP to secure itself against exposure and indictment. But both the parties had been exposed, he added.

When his attention was drawn to the race for Assam Pradesh Congress Commit-

tee amid infighting in the over selection of Congress nominees, he clarified that Mr Gogoi would continue to lead the party. He termed infighting in the party and vandalism resorted to by a section of Congress workers at the state party headquarters recently as "unfortunate." He also demanded more security to Congress leaders in the run up to the polls in view of the situation in the state.

Meanwhile, Mrs Gandhi is slated to hit the campaign trail in Assam in two phases to boost the party's electioneering. Mr Nath said she will go for a day's visit to Assam on Monday and will again visit the state on May 7.

She is scheduled to address election meetings at Tinsukia, Jorhat, Diphu and Tezpur on Monday.

THE ASIAN AGE

30 APR 2001

Cong manifesto justifies Trinamul tie-up

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 18. - The West Bengal Congress, unlike the Trinamul, has offered a detailed explanation in its 32-page multi-lingual manifesto as to why it entered into an alliance with Trinamul Congress in West Bengal.

The PCC chief, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, will release the manifesto at the West Bengal PCC's new office on CIT Road tomorrow.

The Trinamul Congress manifesto is surprisingly silent on this aspect and contains no word on the party's stand in regard to the BJP. However, the Congress leadership, PCC sources said, felt the issue needed to be dealt with at length to clear the confusion prevalent in the party rank and file.

The manifesto, drafted by Mr Omprakash Mishra, PCC secretary and Jadavpur University professor, recently got the AICC's approval.

The common minimum programme of the Congress and Trinamul Congress would be released on 21 April.

Besides English and Bengali, the Congress manifesto will, reportedly, have Hindi and Urdu versions.

Seven disgruntled Congress MLAs have already joined Mr Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party after being denied tickets. Many party leaders are not ready to accept the alliance on grounds that the tie-up had led to the dumping of Congress



Actor Tapas Pal, the Trinamul candidate from Alipore, waves to the crowd in front of the Alipore Survey Building after filing his nomination papers on Wednesday. - The Statesman

leaders in many districts.

In Murshidabad, the Congress MP, Mr Adhir Choudhury, has reportedly told his aides the Congress would have won 16 seats, of the 19, without an alliance with Trinamul Congress.

All this prompted the PCC leaders and the AICC to focus primarily on the reasons

for the alliance. PCC sources said the manifesto has a separate section on the alliance, its context and rationale.

The manifesto says the anti-Left forces had weakened considerably after Miss Mamata Banerjee's exit in 1998. It also says the Trinamul couldn't do much without the Congress in the 1998 and 1999 Lok Sabha polls as the Congress had a significant support base in north Bengal and Muslim-dominated areas.

The manifesto points out that the Congress had always favoured an alliance with Trinamul, particularly after the 1999 Lok Sabha polls, but couldn't give shape to it because of Trinamul's association with the BJP. It was only after Miss Banerjee quit the NDA that the Congress seriously thought of a tie-up with Trinamul.

Interestingly, Trinamul MP, Mr Ajit Panja's diatribes against Miss Banerjee at yesterday's press conference began with the point that the Trinamul manifesto had no explanation on why the party dumped the BJP and joined hands with the Congress.

The Congress manifesto also deals with the national scenario and the party's reaction to NDA's policies.

Apart from this, the usual CPI-M bashing is there, the Marxists being described as those who ushered in a "saga of misgovernance and stagnation in Bengal". Corruption, lawlessness, unemployment, deterioration in the health and education sectors in West Bengal have also been dealt with

THE STATESMAN

19 APR 2001

Left and right attack on Cong

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 17

WHILE THE Congress and the RJD today stalled the first business day, after a three-week recess, in demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe into the tehelka exposé, the Congress came under attack from both the BJP and the CPI(M) for disrupting the Parliament.

Led by Madhavrao Scindia in the Lok Sabha and Manmohan Singh in the Rajya Sabha, the Congress demanded criminal cases against all those accused in the tehelka tapes before any discussion in the Parliament.

The Government turned down the demand, saying it would not accept any condition set by the Congress for normal functioning of the Parliament. The Government stuck to the argument it had instituted a judicial inquiry, an army inquiry and a defence ministry probe.

As Congress and RJD members stormed the Well of the Lok Sabha, other Opposition parties, particularly the Left, struck a different chord, saying they wanted both Houses to resume and debate the scandal. Sharp division in the Opposition on floor strategy came to the fore with the CPI(M) accusing the Congress of not consulting the Left on its demand for a JPC probe. "Though we are not opposed to JPC, we want that the guilty should be prosecuted first," CPI(M) leader Somnath Chatterjee said.

Pointing out that the CPI(M) was not withdrawing its demand for the Prime Minister's resignation, he said the Congress was now demanding a JPC and action against the guilty, not the Prime Minister's resignation.

The Prime Minister also blamed the Congress for disrupting the proceedings, saying it was improper and against the tenets of democracy.

THE STATESMAN

18 APR 2001

Seven Cong MLAs join NCP

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 16. - Seven Congress MLAs, who formed the Save Congress Committee, joined Mr Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party today. They will fight assembly polls with the NCP symbol, time piece.

Welcoming them, Mr Tariq Anwar, NCP all-India general secretary, said the development was in keeping with his party's national mission - to keep alive the Congress ideology and dignity. The NCP's state election committee will meet tomorrow to decide the number of seats the party will contest. Mr Daulat Ali, the Diamond Harbour MLA who joined the NCP, said they might contest 60 seats.

The other MLAs who joined the NCP are Mr Anil Mudi (Tamluk), Mr Tapas Banerjee (Asansol), Mr Gulshan Mallik (Panchla, Howrah), Mr Abul Bashir Laskar (Mograhat West), Mr Sudhir Bhattacharya (Falta) and Mr Sasanaka Biswas (Hanskhali).

There was confusion over the exact nature of the seven legislators' move. Speaking on behalf of the seven, Mr Abul Bashir Laskar said they were keeping alive the Save Congress Committee even after joining tawas said they were ceasing to be members of the committee starting today. Mr Tapas Banerjee said he was following in the footsteps of

Ms Mamata Banerjee who had left the Congress when the party was gagging her. He said the people had given her the mandate to take the step. "If we do not get the people's approval, we will go quietly back to our party," he said.

Mr Anwar said the people of West Bengal were terrified with the Left Front and wanted a change. They were looking to Miss Banerjee and the Trinamul for a change, but her "unholy alliance" with Mrs Sonia Gandhi had shown that she, too, was playing the politics of self-interest.

When pointed out that the NCP was a partner of the Congress in the Maharashtra government, Mr Anwar said there had been no pre-poll alliance. "The people of Maharashtra had voted against the communal forces represented by the Shiv Sena and the BJP, and we joined hands with the Congress to keep them out of power," he said.

Seven MLAs resign: Seven MLAs, who won on Congress tickets in 1996 but later switched over to Trinamul, today resigned from the Assembly. They are Mr Pankaj Banerjee, Mr Sougata Roy, Mr Rabin Mukherjee, Mr Nirmal Ghosh, Mr Ambika Banerjee, Mr Jatu Lahiri and Mr Tarak Banerjee. Mr Roy said they were resigning on moral grounds.

■ More reports on pages 3 and 4

THE STATESMAN

17 APR 1997

Cong for action on Tehelka first, debate later

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 16. - The Congress today aborted all efforts by the government to overcome the impasse over the Tehelka expose and allow Parliament to function smoothly in the second half of the budget session.

Though at the all-party meeting convened by Speaker Mr GMC Balayogi, the Congress had agreed to allow normal parliamentary business from tomorrow, it demanded at the Business Advisory Committee meeting in the evening that action be taken on the expose before a debate. It demanded that legal action be set in motion against those named in Tehelka tapes.

The Prime Minister's repeated clarification on the reported CBI inquiry against Mrs Sonia Gandhi on allegations by Mr Subramaniam Swamy failed to satisfy Congress leaders.

In the morning the Left and other Opposition parties, excluding the Congress, attended a meeting convened by Mr Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M) to discuss floor strategy.

They had agreed to allow normal parliamentary business to be taken up and try to nail the government on Tehelka, the BP Verma case and the stock market scam.

The Congress spokesman, Mr Jaipal Reddy, dismissed suggestions that his party had rolled back its demand for resignation of the Vajpayee government on Tehelka. The issue has remained unresolved, he said, alleging the government was indulging in a whitewash through the judicial inquiry with absolutely irrelevant terms of reference.

Mr Reddy said a JPC could probe Tehelka charges without having any conflict with the judicial inquiry.

The party took a tough stand after a three-hour meeting of the political affairs committee of the CPP, presided over by Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

On Mr Swamy's letter, Mr Reddy said the Prime Minister had chosen to operate at the same level of responsibility as the Janata Party president by passing the letter to the CBI for appropriate ac-

tion.

The RJD decided to table an adjournment motion tomorrow on Tehelka. The party's leader in the House, Mr Raghuvans Prasad Singh, said there was no point in having discussion unless action was taken.

Parliamentary affairs minister Mr Pramod Mahajan said the government was willing to discuss any issue under any rule that the Opposition would like to take up.

The Congress shot down a demand, especially from Left parties, for a 10-day break in the session from 1 May in view of assembly polls.

The Congress supported the suggestion that the session could be extended for 10 days beyond 11 May. The government was favourable to the demand for reducing session's duration but was not willing to extend it beyond 11 May.

Earlier, both Houses of Parliament were adjourned after paying tribute to Devi Lal.

No attempt was made either by the Prime Minister or any of his emissary today to contact Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

THE STATESMAN

11 APR 1999

Functioning of Parliament Cong keeps govt on ^① tenterhooks

MOHAN SAHAY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 15. - While there is unlikely to be any obstruction in Parliament's functioning tomorrow which would be dominated by obituary references to and resolutions on the death of Devi Lal, the air of suspense could end on Tuesday when both Houses take up normal business.

The Congress stands isolated in the Opposition camp on the issue of allowing Parliament to function smoothly following its decision to stand by Mrs Sonia Gandhi against any move to investigate Mr Subramaniam Swamy's charges against her by the CBI.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi has deputed Dr Manmohan Singh, the Congress leader in the Rajya Sabha, and Mr Madhhav Rao Scindia, the deputy leader in the Lok Sabha, to hold talks with the Prime Minister or his representative.

After Dr Singh spoke yesterday to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee over the phone, there was no talks between the Congress leaders and the Prime Minister or his representative today. Mr Vajpayee was in Lucknow during the day to address an NDA rally.

Asked if any party leader had resumed talks with the government, a senior Congress MP said: "Not to my knowledge." The Prime Minister's residence staff too confirmed that Mr Vajpayee had no meeting with any Congress leader today.

The Prime Minister may keep the CBI case against Mrs Sonia Gandhi under the wraps for the time being to buy peace with the Congress so that the immediate threat to Parliament's functioning is over, sources said.

Till this evening, there was no perceptible change in the Congress's attitude on cooperating

with the NDA in Parliament. It wanted the government to give a firm assurance that there would be no CBI probe against Mrs Sonia Gandhi, the sources said.

The political affairs committee of the Congress is scheduled to meet tomorrow morning to let its views known to the Lok Sabha Speaker at the meeting of the floor leaders.

Non-Congress Opposition leaders will hold a separate meeting with the CPI-M leader, Mr Somnath Chatterjee, to decide the floor strategy in the Lok Sabha tomorrow before joining the Speaker at the all-party meeting. By and large the consensus in the Opposition camp is against obstructing the Parliament's proceedings during the remaining working days of the budget session.

The Congress has linked the Tehelka episode with that of Mrs Sonia Gandhi facing the possibility of coming in the CBI net which has created a division within the Congress Parliamentary Party.

Despite the Prime Minister's statement that the CBI is yet to initiate a probe against Mrs Sonia Gandhi, some Congress leaders close to her would like a categorical statement from Mr Vajpayee in Lok Sabha that the government won't use the CBI to persecute and defame Opposition leaders. The emphasis would be on a general approach rather than on the specific case of Mrs Sonia Gandhi, sources said.

Many Congress MPs expressed dismay over dilution of the Tehelka charge by the party. The Congress leadership has begun bargaining with the Centre to dump the charges against Mrs Sonia Gandhi in lieu of the party extending its cooperation to the government in debating the Tehelka issue in Parliament.

Karunakaran gains edge with three more seats

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, April 15: The Congress high command broke the logjam in Kerala by offering three more seats to veteran leader K. Karunakaran in exchange for withdrawal of his resignation from the working committee.

However, Karunakaran's daughter Padmaja has not been given a ticket for the Assembly polls. The warhorse is disinclined to make that a prestige issue as he is eyeing the post of chief in case the United Democratic Front (UDF) wins the polls.

In the faction-ridden state Congress, the Karunakaran camp now has an edge over arch rival A.K. Antony, who was considered to be a front-runner for chief ministership.

AICC general secretary in charge of Kerala Ghulam Nabi Azad on Sunday announced changes for three constituencies — Peravoor, Vadakkekare and Aaranmula — where A.D. Mustafa, M.A. Chandrasekhar and Sarala Devi will now contest in place of Nuruddin, K.P. Dhanapalan and K. Shivadasan. Azad said Antony had accepted the changes on the party list.

Antony had made it clear that in principle he was not in favour of "opening" the list of candidates, but at the same time he said he would abide by the decision of the high command. Azad said. He added that Karunakaran would attend Parliament from Monday and has withdrawn his resignation from the CWC, where he is a permanent invitee.

The truce comes two days after Azad and party treasurer Moti Lal Vora visited Thiruvananthapuram to mollify

Karunakaran, who resigned from the CWC expressing dissatisfaction over the denial of tickets to his supporters and Padmaja. An angry Karunakaran had made personal remarks against Sonia Gandhi, but had later withdrawn them.

Peace in Kerala was important for Sonia as the Congress is being seen as the frontrunner in the state and Assam. If the Congress romps home in the two states, she is expected to project the victory as a mandate against the Vajpayee regime.

In a related development, the UDF's ally in Kerala, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) thanked Sonia and Azad for resolving the crisis, saying it would strengthen the front and help defeat the Left Democratic Front (LDF).

League MP E. Ahmed said it would help consolidate the UDF and capture power in the state. Ahmed, who was actively involved in bringing about rapprochement among different factions of the Congress in the state, said the IUML had always tried to strengthen secular and democratic forces.

Karunakaran's son, K. Muraliedharan, termed the AICC decision as "a welcome step". "We certainly welcome the AICC decision. The UDF is going to win," he told reporters.

Karunakaran was expected to call all sections in the Congress to work for the victory of the UDF, he said.

Vayalar Ravi, another state leader, said: "We accept the decision since it has come from the AICC. We are going to regain the lost ground in a big way in the coming days. We will win. I think nobody is going to create any more problems."



Karunakaran

THE TELEGRAPH

16 APR 2001

Cong boycott shadow over all party meeting

■ Question looms over smooth passage of budget in House

AGENCIES

NEW DELHI, APRIL 14

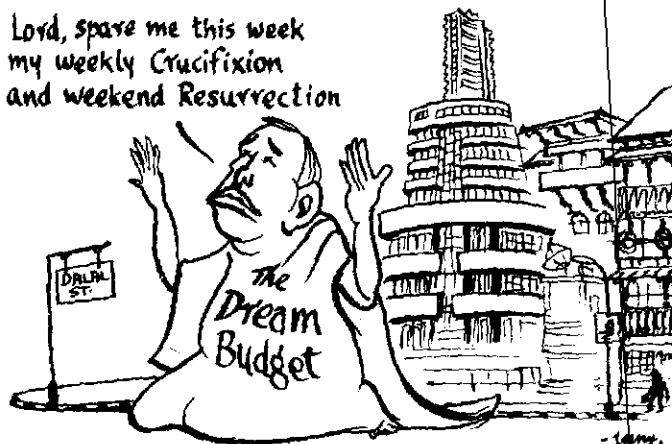
INDIAN Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's decision to hold a meeting with opposition leaders on Saturday to ask them to let Parliament function without disruption and to debate the budget, will be boycotted by the Congress.

Last month, angry opposition had paralysed Parliament for eight straight working days demanding Vajpayee's resignation after a sting operation by journalists on the defence establishment rocked the coalition government.

"The government wants to get its agenda passed and discuss the budget," said J P Mathur, a spokesman for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

"We are also ready to discuss

98-1 15/4
Lord, spare me this week
my weekly Crucifixion
and weekend Resurrection



the Tehelka (scandal) but the opposition should not create hurdles for Parliament. That is what the all-party meeting is about," he told Reuters.

India's session of Parliament to

debate the 2001/02 (April-March) budget starts on Monday after a three-week recess.

Reporters from the Internet Web site, www.tehelka.com.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

INDIAN EXPRESS

15 APR 2001

Cong drops 15 MLAs, Trinamul names 221

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, April 13. — The Congress today announced the names of 52 of its 57 candidates, denying renomination to 15 sitting MLAs, and the Trinamul issued its revised list of 221 nominees.

The names of Trinamul's nominees for English Bazar, Harishchandrapur and Itahar seats will be announced later. The Congress too hasn't announced its candidates for the seats.

Of the 294 seats in the Assembly, the Trinamul and Congress candidates will contest 224 and 57. The JMM and GNLF have been given eight and three seats. Candidacy for two seats, including Itahar, is yet to be announced.

The Congress held back the names of five candidates from the list issued in New Delhi today. The seats are English Bazar, Kushmandi, Harishchandrapur, Kaliaganj and Durgapur-I.

The AICC renominated 26 MLAs, including Mr Somen Mitra (Sealdah), Mr Atish Sinha and Mr Abdul Mannan. Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi's wife,

Mrs Deepa Das Munshi, will contest from Goalpokhar.

Surprisingly, the Congress list has 58 seats, though Trinamul has conceded only 57. The Congress central election committee has left the five seats for Mr ABA Ghan Khan Chowdhury and Mr Das Munshi to decide.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi has nominated Mr Khan Chowdhury's brother and sister, Mr AH Khan Chowdhury and Mrs Rubi Noor from Kaliachak and Sujapur, Assembly segments of Malda Lok Sabha constituency. His friend, Mrs Sabitri Mitra, has got the Araidanga seat.

Mr Asit Mazumdar, brother-in-law of Congress MP Mr Adhir Choudhury, has got the Nabagram seat.

The PCC chief, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, has been marginalised, or the party dropped many names recommended by him. One reason for this may be his opposition to the deal struck with Miss Mamata Banerjee on her terms. Mr Kamal Nath played a key role in getting the names dropped.

Mr Mukherjee had protested to

Mrs Sonia Gandhi against Mr Kamal Nath for ignoring him at all the meetings he had had with Miss Banerjee in Kolkata. The Congress chief reportedly sought an explanation from Mr Kamal Nath, who reacted by asking her to relieve him of the charge of West Bengal.

The Trinamul spokesman, Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay, told journalists in Kolkata that Kaliaganj had been allotted to the Congress and the Trinamul would contest Kushmandi and Durgapur-I. Mr Dilip Das, sitting Trinamul MLA from Raiganj, will contest from Kushmandi.

The Trinamul shifted Mr Das from Raiganj according to the wishes of Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi. The Congress will contest the Raiganj seat.

Mr Bandopadhyay said the party was negotiating with Mr Khan Chowdhury and the names of the candidates for the three remaining Trinamul seats would be announced soon. Mr Khan Chowdhury had threatened to field Congress candidates for all the seven seats in Malda district unless the

Trinamul conceded the English Bazar and Harishchandrapur seats to him.

The Trinamul had earlier nominated Mr Krishnendu Chowdhury from English Bazar. The Itahar seat, which the Trinamul had conceded to Mr Jainal Abedin of the Congress, has been kept in abeyance.

Mr Khan Chowdhury today shot down Mr Kamal Nath's proposal of talk to Miss Mamata Banerjee to break the deadlock over seat sharing in Malda district, especially the English Bazar constituency.

"Let Trinamul insist on a dialogue with Miss Banerjee. She's not my leader. Mrs Sonia Gandhi is. Why should I talk to Miss Banerjee?" Mr Khan Chowdhury told reporters in Malda today. He had already submitted a list of Congress candidates for Malda district and informed Mrs Gandhi about it.

"I wonder why the high command is delaying the Malda list," he said. Upset over the decision of the senior Congress leaders, Mr Khan Chowdhury

■ See CONG: page 8

(Continued from page 1)

said: "I'm trying to keep 11 seats for the Congress in the district."

"Let Trinamul field 11 candidates in Malda district if it wants to. I can't prevent it from doing so, though that'll amount to political suicide for the party." Mr Chowdhury denied having offered two seats to Trinamul in Malda. He had turned down a party proposal to let Trinamul's Mr Krishnendu Choudhury, contest from English Bazar and shift the sitting Congress MLA, Mr Gautam Chakraborty, to Harishchandrapur.

Malda Congress leaders, however, said Mr Khan Chowdhury is under pressure from Delhi to concede English Bazar to Trinamul in the "better interests of the alliance".

The Trinamul has shifted Mr Tapas Roy from Sealdah, form where the Congress's Mr Somen Mitra will contest. Mr Roy will contest the Burrabazar seat. Mr Ashok Deb, who joined the Trinamul recently, will contest from Budge Budge and Mr Chitta Bag, earlier nominated for the seat, will fight from Kamarhati in North 24-Parganas.

The Trinamul general secretary, Mr Mukul Roy, will contest the Jagaddal seat in North 24-Parganas. Dr Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar will contest from Ballygunge and Mr Arunabha Ghosh and Partha Chatterjee from Dum Dum and Behala West. There was resentment in the party when Mr Ghosh was not renominated from

Belgachia East.

The Cooch Behar unit of the Congress will not campaign with Trinamul, for it has nominated "three turn-coats" from the Forward Bloc. This has undermined the Congress-Trinamul alliance, Cooch Behar Congress leaders said.

Save Cong: The Save Congress Committee is exploring the possibility of sharing seats with the NDA and PDS. Mr Daulat Ali, SCC chief adviser and Congress MLA from Diamond Harbour, today said the committee has got a seat-sharing proposal from the NDA.

"Mr LK Advani's regret during his deposition before the Liberhan Commission shows there has been some change in the BJP's rabid communal

posturings. Moreover, one needn't cry foul about the BJP's communal politics, since the Trinamul had joined hands with it and then tied up with the Congress," Mr Ali said.

The SCC thinks it needs to ally with both the NDA and the PDS to cut to size the Trinamul and the Left Front. Though the PDS is allergic towards the NDA, there's scope for the SCC striking a deal with it, Mr Ali said.

Plea to EC: The Trinamul's general secretary has written to the chief election commissioner, seeking intervention after three party workers were killed allegedly by CPI-M cadres at Jagannathpur village in the Jangipur area of Hooghly. The victims were identified as Dayalsingha Roy Harasingha Roy and Jainul.

THE STATESMAN

14 APR 2001

Cong, Trinamool lists leave out touchy three

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, April 13

THE CONGRESS and the Trinamool today released their candidates' list for the coming Assembly polls. The Trinamool will contest in 224 seats, of which it named 221 candidates today. While the Congress will contest from 57 seats, the Trinamool will back three GNLF and eight JMM candidates.

The three seats for which the Trinamool did not announce its candidates today are English Bazar, Harishchandrapur and Itahar.

The Trinamool list, which came a few hours after the Congress announced its in Delhi, reflected that Mamata Banerjee had papered over the seats deal with Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and Adhir Chowdhury in the hours between. But the row over English Bazar, which comes under Ghani Khan Chowdhury's Malda constituency, remained unresolved.

"Ghani Khan Chowdhury is an experienced politician and has been at the forefront of the alliance. I am sure the English Bazar problem will be resolved," Trinamool MP Sudip Bandopadhyay said.

The Trinamool had fielded Krishnendu Chowdhury from the seat and wants sitting MLA Gautam Chakraborty, a Ghani loyalist, to be shifted to Harishchandrapur, which falls under Das Munshi's Lok Sabha constituency.

"The candidates for English Bazar and Harishchandrapur will be decided soon. But we have given Raiganj to Priya," Sudip said.

The Trinamool has evidently



Trinamool MP Sudip Bandopadhyay releases the poll list on Friday.

struck a deal with Adhir Chowdhury too.

Like Das Munshi, he has retained five of the seven seats that come under his parliamentary constituency. If Das Munshi sacrificed Itahar and Harishchandrapur, Adhir gave away Naoda and Bharatpur to the Trinamool.

Though the Trinamool gave away Durgapur I, the Congress is unable to field a candidate there as Tapash Banerjee — sitting MLA from Asansol, where the Trinamool has fielded a candidate — is unwilling to shift to Durgapur I. PCC vice-president Pradip Bhattacharya is keen to contest from here, but Das Munshi wants it to go to one his followers.

The Congress has fielded 24 sitting MLAs for its 57 seats. Atish Sinha from Kandi, Abdul Mannan from Champdani, Somen Mitra from Sealdah, Manas Bhuniya from Sabong, Ghani Khan Chowd-

hury's sister Ruby Noor from Suzapur and brother AH Khan Chowdhury from Kaliachak, and Das Munshi's wife Deepa from Goalpokhar are some of its prominent candidates.

Madhavi Mukerjee from Jadavpur, Subrata Mukherjee from Chowringhee, Saugata Roy from Dhakuria, Pankaj Banerjee from Tollygunge, Sultan Ahmed from Entally and Tapash Pal from Alipur are among the Trinamool nominees.

Of the two prominent general secretaries and Mamata aides, Mukul Roy and Gautam Basu, the Trinamool has fielded the former from Jagaddal while Gautam is not contesting. As Mamata put it: "He is in my team and has to conduct the polls with me."

Gautam's name was being considered for Ballygunge, which finally went to Rakoli Ghosh Dastidar.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

14 APR 2001

Kerala: ball in high command's court

By Our Special Correspondent

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 13.

There appears to be no end in sight to the crisis in the Congress in Kerala as yet with the ball having been thrown into the party high command's court.

The AICC emissaries, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad and Mr. Motilal Vora, who arrived here via Chennai on a whistlestop tour that lasted just about three hours, held separate discussions with the senior leaders, Mr. K. Karunakaran and Mr. A.K. Antony. The emissaries kept the outcome of their discussions under wraps, stating that a final decision would be announced by the high command within 24 hours. Both Mr. Karunakaran and Mr. Antony expressed their views on the current dispute, but were willing to go along with whatever decision the high command takes.

Mr. Azad, shortly before leaving for Delhi, told presspersons that Mr. Karunakaran had been requested to withdraw his resignation as permanent invitee to the Congress Working Committee. He termed the mission a success as the issues had been sorted out.

Mr. Karunakaran appeared to be dissatisfied with the outcome of the talks. Uncharacteristically enough, he even refused to open up to presspersons. The only comment he made was that he would respond only after having a word with the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi.

Mr. Antony said that he had expressed his considered views on



The AICC representative, Mr. Motilal Vora (right), embracing the senior party leader, Mr. K. Karunakaran, in Thiruvananthapuram on Friday. The party general secretary, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, looks on.

the current issues, and that he was optimistic about a positive outcome. The IUMI leaders, Mr. E. Ahamed and Mr. P.K. Kunhalikutty, who had taken the initiative to bring back the warring Congress factions to the negotiating table, also joined the discussions to register their concern at the debilitating effect the ongoing feud would have on the prospects of the UDF.

The KPCC vice-president, Mr. K. Muralaeddharan, who spoke to presspersons expressed optimism about an amicable settlement.

"We are sure that the decision would not go against our interests," he said.

Mr. Karunakaran is said to have demanded the reopening of the list of candidates already announced by the high command a week ago by giving his supporters three more seats — Aranmula, Vadakkekara and Peravoor as part of the deal to buy peace. Mr. Antony has opposed any such reopening as that would lead to a chain of problems spread over several districts. However, he said he would not be a stumbling

block to any formula and any decision the party high command might take.

The emissaries' visit has at best served to save the situation from heading towards a deadlock. Factional tensions have been subdued down for the time being, with Mr. Karunakaran and Mr. Antony reiterating that their agenda was to defeat the LDF.

'We will sort it out'

Our New Delhi Special Correspondent reports:

Mr. Azad and Mr. Vora returned here a satisfied lot. Mr. Azad, who expressed the hope that the "crisis would blow over," made it clear that Mr. Karunakaran had neither brought up the issue of his daughter's ticket nor for that matter did he insist on his son Mr. Muralaeddharan's name being announced as the KPCC president. "He has asked for some adjustment of seats and we have decided to sit together and sort it out," Mr. Azad said.

Though Mr. Azad did not give a time-frame on when a decision would be taken, he is likely to brief Ms. Sonia Gandhi tomorrow. He said he had held discussions not just with the Karunakaran group but also with Mr. Antony and he was hopeful that the UDF would emerge stronger.

Mr. Karunakaran, he said, was likely to take back his resignation from the CWC and would actively campaign for the party not just in Kerala but also in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry.

THE HINDU

14 APR 2001

Cong gets list in Delhi, faces split in state

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, April 10. — Senior Congress leaders argued heatedly today before the Congress steering committee could finalise the 57 candidates for the West Bengal Assembly polls as rebels in several districts sounded keen on contesting under the Save Congress Committee's banner.

Mr Pranab Mukherjee had a heated argument with Mr Kamal Nath and Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi in Delhi over the selection. He objected to Mr Das Munshi presenting a new list of eight candidates after the PCC chief had tabled the official list to be considered for nomination.

Matters reached a flashpoint when Mr Mukherjee angrily walked out of the meeting at the AICC office and drove down home to Talkatora Road. Only after Mr Kamal Nath and Mr Oscar Fernandes persuaded him over the phone to return, did he rejoin the deliberations.

Mr Mukherjee said most of sitting MLAs should be renominated. But Mr Kamal Nath disagreed. Some other senior leaders like Mrs Ambika Soni, Mr Das Munshi and Mr Pradeep Bhattacharya, PCC vice-president, didn't agree with Mr Kamal Nath but didn't oppose him either for virtually dictating terms to the members.

Back in the state, Mr Abul Basar Laskar, Congress MLA and Save Congress Committee convener, said influential

NO COMPROMISE ON MALDA SEATS: GHANI

MALDA, April 10. — Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury today rejected the Trinamul's seat-adjustment plea in Malda district, saying: "No compromise and adjustment with the Trinamul will take place in Malda, at least." There won't be any compromise with the Trinamul in Malda, English Bazar or Old Malda Assembly.

The message has been conveyed to the Congress chief, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, he said. He described the Congress-Trinamul alliance as "spiritless because of the individualistic attitude of (some of) our Congress leaders". Local Congress leaders have threatened to stay away from election work if the state leadership forges an alliance with Trinamul in Malda. Mr Chowdhury said: "Eleven Congress candidates will contest in Malda district and the general secretary of the AICC, Mr Kamal Nath, okayed my decision this morning." — SNS

leaders of Midnapore, Cooch Behar, South Dinajpur, North 24-Parganas and even several city areas contacted him today. They wanted to be included in the SCC's list of candidates.

Mr Ajit Khanra, Midnapore MLA, will form a similar front in his district and contest the poll jointly with the SCC, Mr Laskar said. He hadn't rebelled against the Congress for being denied nomination, he said.

"The party is the sole arbiter for deciding who will contest and from where. Our contention is that our party should field its candidates instead of meekly surrendering to Miss Mamata Banerjee's demands," Mr Laskar said.

The aggrieved MLA, who led the revolt against the Congress and floated the SCC yesterday, said the resentment among Con-

gressmen against the alliance with the Trinamul was justified.

It's not just a question of personal ambition being thwarted, Mr Laskar said. For, the Congress high command has sold out the party to the Trinamul.

The party should have got at least 102 seats and the Trinamul could have contested the rest if they "really wanted" to overthrow the Left Front government. "Instead, the high command agreed to contest only 57 seats. And it hopes to win just 25, for in most of the other seats the Congress has always trailed the Left Front by at least 40,000 votes," he said.

The SCC will chalk out its strategy and prepare a list of its probable candidates at a meeting tomorrow. It will try to convince Mrs Sonia Gandhi to "see reason" and honour the

sentiments of the party's rank and file who "have for the past two years turned down offers from the Trinamul to join it."

In Delhi, choosing 57 candidates created serious divisions among state Congress leaders, vying to push their nominees. Mr Mukherjee said Mr Kamal Nath was trying to hijack the entire PCC by bulldozing state leaders to please Miss Mamata Banerjee.

The other major difference was over the choice of 11 candidates for the seats the Trinamul spared the Congress at the last moment. Mr Das Munshi's wife reportedly figures in the list.

Of the 57 nominees chosen today, four are women, seven are from Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, 16 are from the minorities and the rest from general category, Mr Mukherjee told reporters at the end of the meeting tonight.

The final list will be announced after the central election committee of the party meets tomorrow. There are two names for five constituencies: Durgapur 1, Kashmandi, Bally, Rajiganj and Tarakeswar.

Trinamul candidate: The Trinamul candidate for Diamond Harbour, Mr Amjad Ali, faced hostile party workers this evening while campaigning near Rabindra Bhavan. They demanded that he withdraw his candidacy in favour of Sheikh Daulat Ali, Congress MLA from Diamond Harbour. They shouted slogans in favour of Sheikh Ali

THE STATESMAN

11 APR 2001

Karunakaran snubs Sonia

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, April 9. — Mr K Karunakaran who resigned from the Congress Working Committee as a special invitee over seat division in Kerala is defiant and unrelenting.

He has rejected a high command bid to send Ms Ambika Soni as an emissary to sort out the Kerala issue. He is giving no clues on his next move either.

His loyalists have announced rebel candidates and are making matters worse - one of the popular candidates who was denied a ticket, Mr Cherian Philip, announced his candidature from Puthuppally against senior Congress leader,

Mr Oommen Chandy, that too with the support of the Left.

The AICC general secretary, Mr Gulam Nabi Azad's statement yesterday that the list of 88 candidates announced in Delhi would not be reviewed has made the Karunakaran camp more adamant. They are unwilling to meet leaders of Antony group and are busy listing out their options.

A few loyalists led a procession against Mr Azad and burnt his effigy. "Let them learn it the hard way," Mr Karunakaran said dismissing reports that his anger was merely because of denial of ticket to his daughter. "My loyalists who far outnumber the other groups have been insulted and this has to be

rectified".

Mr Karunakaran has sent a message to Delhi to make it clear that Ms Ambika Soni's mission would serve no purpose.

It is learnt that he would rather have Mr Oscar Fernandes coming down to settle the dust. There were arrangements to protest against Ms Soni's arrival today even at the Thiruvananthapuram airport.

The Karunakaran loyalists are in a real bad mood. Some of them are making statements against the Antony nominees. No selected Congress nominee from either side is in a position to start his campaign whereas the Left candidates have taken a big lead in most of the

constituencies as far as campaigning is concerned.

The Congress allies are in touch with both groups, seeking an early end to the crisis. They are impressing upon these leaders that this impasse might cost the party dear.

Not that Mr Karunakaran and Mr Antony are not aware of it. But they have taken extreme stands.

Mr Karunakaran feels he has not been given his due and the Antony group feels that he has been appeased beyond limits.

The Left camp, however, is jubilant. This is what they were looking for after pre-poll surveys gave a comfortable lead to the Congress-led UDF.



Mr K Karunakaran

Sonia's woes increase in Kerala, Assam

CL MANOJ & MOHAN SAHAY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 9. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi is facing an unfamiliar situation in her durbar while dealing with the Kerala front, where the rebellious Karunakaran camp has virtually told the central leaders to keep off from campaigning on their home turf.

The Congress president reportedly now finds none of her trouble-shooters keen, or brave enough, to visit the state where the effigy of Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad was burnt last evening.

After the humiliating experience of Mr Karunakaran refusing to entertain many telephone calls made from the 10 Janpath camp yesterday, the Congress president has now opted for track-II diplomacy, through some of the UDF allies.

Sources said Mrs Gandhi is seeking the services of the Indian Union Muslim League leaders and Kerala Congress (Mani) group to open a back-door line of communication with the

regional satrap.

Incidentally many of the UDF allies have conveyed their concern about the "deteriorating situation in the state Congress and its consequences on the electoral fortunes of the UDF". They have reportedly conveyed their "impatience" in the delay of the Congress leadership to declare a ceasefire in the war between the Karunakaran and the Antony groups.

An AICC general secretary, who tried to sound tough yesterday, today kept away from the press. Meanwhile, Mrs Ambika Soni, who was to visit Kerala on a peace-mission failed to take off today for the 'danger zone'.

When contacted by The Statesman, Mrs Soni said: "I had no plan to visit, nor have I been asked to visit, Kerala. I don't know what is happening." All that she said about Kerala is that "Karunakaranji is a senior leader and I hope things will be sorted out".

Many say that 'the lack of interest' of many Sonia trouble shooters to fly down to Kerala is 'justifiable' given

the 'volatile track-record' there. Only a couple of years ago a Congress central observer, Mr Kishore Chandra Deo, then a Rajya Sabha member, who was sent to pacify Mr Karunakaran was allegedly roughed up by his supporters.

When asked whether the leadership finds the party general secretaries not brave enough to venture out to Kerala, an evasive spokesman, Mr Anand Sharama, said: "It's not true to say so. We are hoping to find an amicable solution. After all Karunakaranji is a senior Congress leader and we are sure he will not do anything to harm the interest of the party. We are in contact with Kerala." He, however, did not say that the 'contact' so far, is through 'channel-2' and the high command coming up front depends on the 'feedback'. Mr Sharma also remained evasive on the possibility of a 'relook' at Kerala candidates list.

In the past it was heavyweights like Mr G K Moopanar, who had succeeded in taming the Kerala lead-

er whenever he was on war-path. Mrs Gandhi is reportedly on the lookout for some heavyweights, like Mr Vijay Bhaskara Reddy and Mr M L Fotedar, even while trying to inject some 'courage' to her coterie members to make a trip to Kerala.

Meanwhile, the Congress, which was billed to wrest power from the AGP in Assam may not find the going easy in the state, according to some senior party leaders. The party's problem in Assam is not from its rank or leaders, as in Kerala, but from the third front which is emerging as the rallying force of some smaller parties and groups in the state.

The emerging scene in Assam promises a triangular contest even if the BJP and the AGP join hands.

Mr S Jaipal Reddy, the AICC office bearer, said that an alliance between the BJP and the AGP would benefit the Congress by default. The party's assessment is based on serious opposition to the alliance by the active party workers of the BJP and the AGP.

THE STATESMAN

10 APR 2001

State Congress faces revolt

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 9. - Resentment and revolt over denial of nomination for the Assembly polls are spreading in the Congress.

Two MLAs from Suti and Jangipur today quit the party and said they would contest as Independents. Several of the two MLAs' colleagues too have resolved to follow in their footsteps.

Three other Congress MLAs - Mr Abdul Basar Laskar, Mr Daulat Ali and Mr Sudhir Bhattacharya - several leaders and workers of South 24-Parganas today floated the Save Congress Committee, which will field 25 candidates in the district. The committee was formed at a meeting at the MLAs' Hostel in the city. Mr Anil Biswas, CPI-M state secretary, said: "Who will save the Congress now after Mrs Sonia Gandhi herself has tolled its death knell?"

Wrangling in the Congress over nomina-

tions is nothing new. But this time things are far more complicated, for many aspiring candidates believe the Congress-Trinamul alliance is nothing but an "abject surrender by a national party to a regional party".

It's a disgrace that the PCC chief, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, and leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Mr Atish Sinha, are in Delhi to get just 57 candidates nominated after Congress central selection committee had cleared 294 seats.

The SCC's main complaint is that the party's central leadership has punished the most loyal of partymen, who never thought of joining the Trinamul. The disgruntled Congressmen have been encouraged by the tough stand taken by stalwarts, Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and Mr Adhir Choudhury.

Mr Khan Chowdhury still says he won't concede English Bazar and Old Malda to the Trinamul. The CMC mayor, Mr Subrata Mu-

kherjee, and Trinamul candidate from English Bazar, Mr Krishnendu Choudhury, couldn't make him change his stand.

Mr Das Munshi is angry, for none of his nominees in North Dinajpur figures on the candidates' list. Mr Adhir Choudhury is piqued because the party high command didn't agree to his suggestion of not allotting a single seat to Trinamul in Murshidabad.

Mr Choudhury has played a key role in turning Murshidabad into a Congress stronghold. Any attempt to frustrate his design will prove counter-productive for the party and the alliance.

Some Trinamul supporters demonstrated outside Miss Mamata Banerjee's house today demanding that the Ranaghat East candidate be replaced by a local leader.

Mr Habibur Rahman, Congress MLA from Jangipur for the past 25 years, and Mohammed Sohrab, Suti MLA, today decided to contest the poll as Independents, SNS adds from Behrampore.

THE STATESMAN

10 APR 2001

Cong. firm but hopes Karunakaran will relent

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, APRIL 8. The Congress leadership today indicated it was unlikely to accept Mr. K. Karunakaran's resignation from the Congress Working Committee. "He is one of the seniormost leaders of the party and for some reason he is unhappy at the moment, but there is no question of accepting his resignation," said the party general in-charge of Kerala, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad.

This view was also echoed by other senior leaders, including Mr. Oscar Fernandes and Mr. Motilal Vora. Despite Mr. Karunakaran's shotgun reaction the leadership should allow things to settle down before it made its move, was the feeling.

The party is also taking an indulgent view of Mr. Karunakaran's utterances and would like to ensure that nothing is said or done to provoke him further. "We understand that he is angry, but he is a Congressman of great standing and will never do anything that will harm the party's interests," said Mr. Azad.

The leadership is also clear that while it will do nothing to provoke him it will also not go beyond a point in trying to please him. It appears highly unlikely that the list of candidates will be altered to accommodate Ms. Padmaja Venugopal, Mr. Karunakaran's daughter. Senior party leaders here said the list had been prepared in consultation with all members of the CEC and could not be changed arbitrarily.

The Central leadership feels it has already bent over backwards, on numerous occasions to accommodate Mr. Karunakaran's demands, and it must draw a line somewhere. It may encourage others also to make unreasonable demands, was the reasoning. Ac-

ording to party sources, though Mr. Karunakaran lost the Lok Sabha elections in 1996, he demanded and was given a Rajya Sabha seat the next year. During the 1998 Lok Sabha polls, with over five years of his Rajya Sabha term left, he forced the party to give him a ticket. The party tried to convince him against it as it would mean giving up the Rajya Sabha seat to the Leftists, but Mr. Karunakaran refused to see reason.

In 1999 too the party went out of its way to accommodate him

Patch-up bid

NEW DELHI, APRIL 8. The Congress high command tonight deputed, Ms. Ambika Soni, a confidante of the party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, to pacify Mr. K. Karunakaran who quit the CWC on Saturday.

Ms. Soni, AICC general secretary, is likely to leave for Thiruvananthapuram tomorrow for talks with Mr. Karunakaran to sort out differences with him, party sources here said. — PTI

and gave him and his son, Mr. Muralcedharan, a Lok Sabha ticket, though it meant shifting two sitting MPs from their seats. Mr. Karunakaran forced the leadership to dissolve the Kerala Youth Congress unit headed by a person belonging to a rival group. The Congress not only appointed his son the lone vice-president of the party, it also promised to make him the KPCC chief after the polls. The decision not to project Mr. A. K. Antony as the chief ministerial candidate was also taken to satisfy Mr. Karunakaran, say party leaders.

The upshot of all this is that the leadership is no longer inclined to give in to his unreasonable demands. Senior leaders here believe good sense will eventually prevail and Mr. Karunakaran will live up to his promise of not doing anything that will harm the interests of the UDF and pave the way for the return of the LDF.

Muraleedharan defiant

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 8. The Karunakaran faction in the group-ridden Kerala Congress today said it would not seek the high command's intervention to resolve the crisis in the State unit following the resignation of the senior leader, Mr. K. Karunakaran, as a permanent invitee to the Congress Working Committee over the selection of candidates for the May 10 Assembly polls.

"We are not going to beg the Central leadership's intervention to solve the problems. So far, no Central leader has contacted us," the KPCC vice-president and Mr. Karunakaran's son, Mr. K. Muralcedharan, MP, said. "We are going to wait and watch. We have entrusted Mr. Karunakaran to take suitable decisions in the prevailing scenario."

"What shall we do if we are stabbed in the back? We are not responsible for the present situation," Mr. Muralcedharan said to a question whether precipitating issues on the eve of the elections would harm the prospects of the United Democratic Front.

He said no decision had been taken on supporting the rebel leader, Mr. Cheriyan Philip, in the Puthupally seat where he had jumped into the fray as an independent against the senior party leader, Mr. Oomen Chandy. — PTI

THE HINDU

9 APR 2001

Koujalgi episode, a blow to Karnataka Cong.

By S.K. Ramoo
BANGALORE, APRIL 7. The resignation of the KPCC president, Mr. V.S. Koujalgi, appeared inevitable following a Tehelka-like revelation in which a video camera had allegedly caught him accepting a wad of notes by way of bribe, in Belgaum.

The Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, told *The Hindu* that Mr. Koujalgi had submitted his resignation so as not to cause embarrassment to the party.

The case pertained to favouring of a contractor for getting work from the Belgaum Zilla Panchayat in 1999. The State Lokayukta had registered the case against him. The so-called "clinchng evidence" of Mr. Koujalgi reportedly accepting the bribe on two separate occasions, which was video-graphed, was said to be in possession of the Lokayukta.

However, it is surprising that the Lokayukta has not completed the investigation even after two years. This has led to public perception that the Lokayukta was "pressured" or "dragging its feet" on the investigation. The Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, has stoutly defended Mr. Koujalgi, probably based on the latter's assertion that he was innocent and was not involved in any scandal. Mr. Koujalgi, from the beginning, has been vehemently denying the allegation. He has accused the State BJP of trying to defame him in an orchestrated campaign. He

rushed to Delhi, summoned by the party leadership, to personally offer his explanation to Ms. Ambika Sont, the AICC general secretary in-charge of Karnataka, and to the party high command. The central leadership initially accepted his assertion, but latter changed its mind.

The lid was actually blown off,

when two newspapers on Saturday published photographs of the allegedly accepting a bundle of currency notes.

Both papers reproduced excerpts of the conversation Mr. Koujalgi had with an associate of the contractor. It was difficult for Mr. Koujalgi to wriggle out of the

so-called "corroborative evidence".

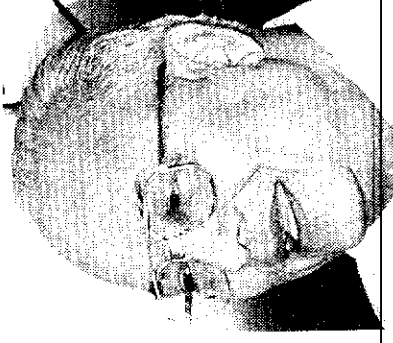
The Chief Minister, who had a decisive say in the appointment of Mr. Koujalgi as the KPCC chief, and the State party leadership were shouting from the roof tops, demanding the resignation of the Vajpayee Government and registration of cases against those

'I will abide by party decision'

By Our Special Correspondent
BANGALORE, APRIL 7. The president of the Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee, Mr. V.S. Koujalgi today said neither had he offered to resign nor had the party sought his resignation from his post following the bribery charges against him.

He told presspersons here that he had given "details" to the party high command as well as the Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, and would abide by whatever decision they took as he was a "disciplined soldier of the party". The party, he said, was free to take any action it deemed fit, but his "conscience is clear."

He had sent a letter today to the Lokayukta clarifying his position, since there were daily reports in newspapers about his involvement. In the letter, he said, "Since one week, my political opponents are making con-



sistent wild claims of having more tapes and evidence on alleged charges of corruption on me with the sole intention of tarnishing my image in public." He has asked the Lokayukta to expedite the case which has been pending before it since October 1998.

Asked about the photographs

found "guilty" in the Tehelka tapes. Both the State and Central party leadership appeared to have experienced utter mortification over the incident. Although the incident is related to the Congress State unit, this was the first major scandal that has come to the open during the 18-month regime of Mr. S.M. Krishna. Incidentally, Mr. George Fernandes, the former Defence Minister, who is the coordinator of the NDA, at a public meeting addressed by the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, on Thursday in Bangalore, ridiculed the Congress leadership over the involvement of Mr. Koujalgi in the scandal.

The central leadership has attempted belatedly the damage-control exercise. But the incident has severely dented the image of the State Congress. It was a definite setback to its rising popularity on the eve of the municipal and local body elections to be held next month. For Mr. Koujalgi, a former Speaker of the Assembly and a former Minister, elected for the sixth time to the Assembly from Arabhatti in Belgaum in the last Assembly elections, the scandal appears to be the end of his political ascendancy. It will be difficult for him to salvage his "tarnished" image.

Mr. Krishna is said to have played a vital role in the selection of Mr. Koujalgi as the KPCC president. This was mainly because he was totally loyal to him.

Karnataka Congress chief forced to quit

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BANGALORE, April 7. — The Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president, Mr V Koujalgi, was forced to resign today on charges of corruption following pressure from the high command.

His resignation, or sacrifice as his supporters claim, came after a paper today published photographs from a video showing Mr Koujalgi accepting what appeared to be cash. His detractors say he was clearly seen taking a bribe though the newspaper photographs are quite hazy.

The charge against Mr Koujalgi is that he had taken Rs 20,000 as bribe from one Anil Kadam to help him get contracts in the Belgaum zilla parishad during 1998-99. His action was allegedly filmed by Mr Kadam.

Later, a complaint was also filed with the lokayukta.

The KPCC chief's resignation came minutes after he staunchly defended himself before reporters this afternoon. He had said he was not guilty and would abide by the party high command's decision.

"If I find that the party has been embarrassed by me, I'll not hesitate to resign. However, my party leader has not asked me to do so," he had said.

Immediately after the controversy erupted on 5 April, he airdashed to New Delhi to explain his position to Mrs Sonia Gandhi. The chief minister, Mr SM Krishna, had himself gone out of his way to defend Mr Koujalgi.

This approach of the Congress was exploited to the hilt by the BJP and its allies during the Prime Minister's rally on the same day here. They hit back at the Congress for accusing the NDA government of being corrupt while ignoring the developments in its own backyard.



SM Krishna: Tehelka in his backyard

The ex-KPCC chief had been appointed with Mr Krishna's help. While no Congress leader here is willing to go on record, they are only too willing to express their dislike for Mr Koujalgi in private. They already had an inkling

that he would be shown the door, notwithstanding his bravado at the press meet today.

Their argument was that he has embarrassed the party, high command and his benefactor, Mr Krishna.

Only last month, he was on the dais with Mrs Gandhi during the party's plenary session here when she was attacking the Centre on the Tehelka issue.

The sources added that party leaders had been pressuring him to quit after the charges came to light.

But he had managed to stall the issue by pleading innocence and saying that he was being framed. What settled the issue was the photographs in today's paper.

The ex-KPCC chief, however, continued to repeat that there was a conspiracy against him, not only by the BJP but also his detractors in the Congress. He added that his case was already before the lokayukta whose verdict should be awaited.

He even addressed a letter to the lokayukta this morning, referring to the newspaper reports. "As you are aware, the complaint with the lokayukta against me is pending with you since October 1998. After witnessing the alleged evidence in the tape in your custody, I have given my written answer on the charges."

He further claimed that following the Tehelka controversy and the ensuing national crisis, certain forces in the state and country were trying to tarnish his image.

"In view of these unsubstantiated allegations which have been used to politically embarrass me, my party and government, I request you to expedite the inquiry so that unnecessary speculations and propaganda to defame me is stopped."

THE STATESMAN

Karnataka Cong. chief steps down

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 7. The Karnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president, Mr. V. S. Koujalgi, accused of accepting bribe from a youth for a contract and allegedly videographed during the act, today put in his papers from the post. Mr. Koujalgi's resignation was announced by the AICC general secretary, Ms. Ambika Soni, here this evening, a day after the KPCC chief had called on the AICC leaders here.

Mr. Koujalgi, in his resignation letter to the party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, claimed that the charges were "false and baseless" and vowed to fight to clear his name in the case, now with the Lok Ayukta. He said he took the decision keeping in view the sentiments expressed by Ms. Gandhi during her address at the Bangalore plenary last month.

Expressing confidence that he would be cleared of the charges levelled against him, he said the Lok Ayukta would submit its re-

port soon. The timing of the 1998 incident coming to light now, made the Congress raise doubts about the manner in which it had been highlighted around the time the NDA held a rally at Bangalore in the wake of the Tehelka expose. In addition, it questioned the timing of the CBI case against the Congress president's secretary, Mr. Vincent George, and the 1991 petrol pump allotment to his wife, wondering whether these were the NDA Government's "counter" to the Tehelka expose.

Ms. Ambika Soni sought to hit back at the BJP wanting to know why it had not yet filed a case against its former president, Mr. Bangaru Laxman, had been "caught red-handed" accepting money.

She said the attitude of the BJP-led Government in filing cases against ordinary people and instituting a commission of inquiry when its senior leaders were involved was improper.

To abide by party decision: Page 8

THE HINDU

10 APR 2001

Karunakaran upset, quits CWC

By Our Special Correspondent

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, APRIL 7. The senior Congress(I) leader, Mr. K. Karunakaran, today announced his resignation as permanent invitee to the party working committee expressing disgust at the way he and his supporters were given the short shrift in distribution of ticket for the Assembly elections.

At a press conference at his Thiruvananthapuram residence, he sought to give a new turn to his tussle with the Congress Working Committee (CWC) member and Opposition Leader in the Assembly, Mr. A.K. Antony, by declaring that the latter becoming the Chief Minister was not a closed matter.

Mr. Karunakaran did not conceal his resentment at the leadership's decision to deny ticket to his daughter, Ms. Padmaja, and other supporters and termed it an insult to him.

The Congress leader said he thought it futile to continue in the CWC, more so because he felt the leadership had lost confidence in him. His ire was mainly directed at Mr. Antony, who was 'responsible' for Ms. Padmaja losing out in the race. He alleged that the denial of ticket to his supporters was planned and there were times when he even felt that Mr. Antony cut out names he proposed.

Mr. Karunakaran did not reveal his strategy, which would be finalised after discussions with his colleagues, but he indicated his supporters would not 'remain silent'.

"We would do whatever we can to ensure that the UDF does not lose the election. We can't think of permitting the LDF to come to

power again. But the perception that Mr. Antony would become Chief Minister, if the UDF were to win, is wrong and it is for the new MLAs to elect a new leader. We don't intend to unseat the LDF just to install a Chief Minister who would perform worse than the incumbent, Mr. E.K. Nayanar. Mr. Antony is behaving in a high-handed manner because he knows that the party is my weakness and he is capitalising on it. In any case, I cannot be held responsible if my supporters were to react in a retributive manner," he said.

When pointed out that his

'An internal matter': Page 8

daughter's name did not figure during candidate selection, Mr. Karunakaran said, "the onus was on Mr. Antony to sponsor her name. Being the future leader of the party, it was for him to act in an impartial way. Besides, he had no qualms in promoting his close aides like Mr. M.M. Hassan."

Mr. Karunakaran took exception to the enforcement of AICC norms for selecting his nominees, while giving the benefit of factional considerations to Mr. Antony's supporters. The party had decided to give preference to women, but one of his nominees for the Aranmula seat was denied a ticket. It had promised to give a break to youth, but in Kottayam, it had nominated a "young lady" who was a grandmother. Four of his DCC presidents were denied tickets.

The Congress leader listed the number of seats he had been not allotted and said he had even been denied the privilege of nominating candidates in his own constituen-

cy according to AICC norms. In reply to a question, he said: "You will not get Karunakaran do a Mamata in Kerala".

Throughout the press conference, Mr. Karunakaran took care not to launch an attack on the high command or the Congress(I) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi. At one point, he was willing to explain how the media misquoted his statements. On a few occasions, he trained his guns on party leader, Mr. Vayalar Ravi, who had opposed Ms. Padmaja's candidature but had no qualms in promoting his wife's nomination. Mr. Karunakaran denied he had tried to influence Ms. Gandhi's office to advance Ms. Padmaja's name. She had staked a claim in her own right, on the strength of the support of the people of Chalakudy.

THE HINDU

8 APR 2001

Accommodating 18 MLAs big hurdle for Congress

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, April 6. — The issue of how to accommodate 18 sitting MLAs continues to dog the Congress in its efforts to give a final shape to the alliance with the Trinamul.

Mr Kamal Nath is scheduled to hold a fresh round of discussions with Pradesh Congress Committee leaders, especially Mr ABA Ghani Khan Choudhury, after his arrival in the city tonight.

Mr ABA Ghani Khan Choudhury, who was once spearheading the move for the "mahajot", comprising the Congress, Trinamul and BJP, now seems to have turned hostile to the alli-



Mr Ghani Khan Choudhury



Mr Kamal Nath

ance issue.

He is hurt by the way he was kept away from the talks be-

tween Trinamul Congress/Chief Miss Mamata Banerjee and Mr Nath.

He is also in no mood to "sacrifice" his loyalists from Malda, his own Lok Sabha constituency for many years.

"The hurdle (accommodating the MLAs) has to be crossed to make the alliance really work. But time is running out, as a solution is eluding us," PCC sources said. PCC leaders want Miss Mamata Banerjee to be "a little bit more flexible".

"It's only natural that Mr Khan Choudhury will insist on fielding his candidates in the Englishbazar and Old Malda seats," they said.

In such a situation, a friendly contest in most of the 18 seats may be the only way out of the impasse.

THE STATESMAN

Sonia lets George go on leave

NEERJA CHOWDHURY
NEW DELHI, APRIL 5

SONIA Gandhi's powerful private secretary Vincent George, who has been charged with amassing wealth disproportionate to his income by the CBI, has gone on leave. He has not attended office at 10 Janpath for the past two days.

George, who has been Personal Secretary to Sonia for the past 10 years and earlier to her husband, Rajiv Gandhi, is learnt to have himself asked for leave. He reportedly told the Congress

president that he needed time to settle his affairs. Sonia agreed "reluctantly", sources said.

Ever since the case was registered in court against George, a group in the Congress has been gunning for him. The thrust of their argument is the Congress would have no ground for demanding the resignation of Brajesh Mishra, who was named in the Tehelka tapes, if Sonia retained George as her private secretary.

Initially, the party had risen to George's

defence and described the case as nothing but "political vendetta", coming as it did in the wake of the Congress offensive against the Vajpayee Government on Tehelka.

In his absence, George's two assistants — P Parmeshwaran Madhavan and Vijayan Pillai — are likely to look after his work. But the main burden of the political work may fall on AICC general secretary Ambika Soni, who is, among other things, in charge of the Congress president's office.

Besides looking after Sonia's appointments and tour itinerary, George also supervised the political work of the Congress president. He coordinated with the Congress Chief Ministers and PCC chiefs and gave her feedback on what was going on in the party and in political circles. Having been

close to the Gandhi family for over two decades, he was familiar with all the people with whom Sonia had a good equation and the others whom she merely tolerated.

He was a familiar sight at 10 Janpath, often working till late into the night. Many in the party felt Sonia did not get all the feedback she should have received because George controlled access to her. Senior party leaders paid court to him. He sat in the room adjacent to the one where she received visitors. Resentment against him had been growing in the party for sometime now and the CBI action only increased the pressure for his removal. The CBI had initiated a probe into his assets on the basis of disclosures by Enforcement Directorate official Ashok Aggarwal two years ago.



Karunakaran fires veiled missile at Sonia

CL MANOJ

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 5. — Mr K Karunakaran today lashed out at the Congress's central leadership for favouring his rival, Mr AK Antony's faction in the seat-sharing formula.

The senior Congress leader said the party, for all practical purposes, had been reduced to "just a word" and the party's traditional values and principles "have begun vanishing".

The three-time Kerala chief minister and an invitee to the CWC walked out from the Central election committee meeting at Mrs Sonia Gandhi's house in protest against the denial of tickets to many of his supporters, including his daughter.

He told The Statesman: "I am very hurt at the manner in which the seats have been distributed. I'm now convinced that only the word Congress is left. All the traditional values and principle it stood for are gradually vanishing".

But why a leader like him, who took pride in "being loyal to the Gandhi family", been treated like this? Mr Karunakaran said: "It's because of the generation gap. The new and inexperienced people in the leadership fail to respect traditional Congressmen like us who stood by the party always and upheld its values and Gandhian principles. The new and inexperienced leaders don't understand or respect them".

Does Mrs Sonia Gandhi, who too is new to politics, also falls in the same category? He responded: "I said the problem is inexperienced people. I said the problem is inexperienced people. I said the problem is inexperienced people."



Mrs Sonia Gandhi

enced leaders. There are people in the leadership who have no experience of the Congress tradition or the leadership". But he refused to name Mrs Gandhi.

Though the so-called denial of ticket to his daughter, Mrs Padmaja, has been cited as the reason for the stand-off, Mr Karunakaran may be also positioning for a post-poll leadership tussle in Kerala, where the Congress front is being projected as the winning side. While neither Mr Karunakaran nor his camp proposed the name of Mrs Padmaja while finalising the list, they reportedly "expected" the Antony faction to do it as a goodwill gesture. But the Antony faction refused to bite the bait.

Though the Karunakaran camp got only 32 seats, four less than the Antony faction's so far, many of these are considered relatively better in terms of winnability. Many feel Mr Karunakaran's "revolt" is more of an attempt to target Mr Antony, seen as the chief ministerial candidate, who is also under attack from some of his old loyalists like Mr Cheriyan Philip.

The 83-year-old Mr Karunakaran also sounded a subtle threat to the high command. Will his unhappiness affect the poll prospect of the Congress? He said: "Naturally every true Congressman wants to ensure the defeat of the LDF in the elections. But the manner in which the high command has neglected the claim of many party workers for the tickets could affect their enthusiasm and this could affect the poll outcome".

Asked about his next move, he said, "Well, one can not keep taking bath in the same banks of the river". But he refused to comment whether it implied the possibility of him looking for "new political options". Would he would actively campaign for the Congress-led UDF? Mr Karunakaran said: "That depends on my health".

AICC general secretary, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad visited Mr Karunakaran this morning on behalf of Mrs Gandhi. Since in Kerala, electoral battles are always won and lost by narrow margins efforts are on to pacify him. There are hints of a "re-look" at Mrs Padmaja's case. But whether Mr Karunakaran will settle for peace or prefer stoking the fire will give a clue to his game-plan.

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, April 5. — The open defiance of Mr K Karunakaran against the Congress high command and his refusal to accept the party candidates' list has totally changed the pre-election scenario in Kerala.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi's efforts to appease Mr Karunakaran have turned counter-productive and Mr Karunakaran is returning to Kerala after declaring in Delhi his loss of faith in the Sonia Gandhi leadership. There are still efforts going on in Delhi to placate Mr Karunakaran but the leader and his loyalists are busy working out their strategy in the changed circumstances. They would press hard for major compromises which Mr AK Antony would not find easy to accept. In effect, this impasse reverses whatever advantages Congress and its allies had enjoyed so far, as was reflected in some pre-poll surveys in favour of United Democratic Front. It was not merely the refusal of candidature to Mr Karunakaran's daughter Mrs Padmaja, who had no political credentials to claim excepting her parentage, which upset the veteran leader and his lieutenants. The same happened thing with Mr K Muralidharan, son of Mr Karunakaran, now a senior office bearer in Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee. The seat Chalakkudi from which Mrs Padmaja



Mr K Karunakaran

en less safer seats. The Antony group and the other factions led by Mr G Karthikeyan, Mr Ramesh Chennithala and Mr Vayalar Ravi vehemently refute this with their own statistics. The Antony group leaders returned from Delhi and stated in private that "they have had enough with the old man. Mr Karunakaran too used some popular Malayalam proverbs to run down Mrs Sonia Gandhi's dispensations. The Delhi developments have rejuvenated the Left leaders. Some of the candidates who were unsure of their victory chances have suddenly turned active.

The Congress infighting has also made BJP put their candidates' list on hold looking for more allies amid the confusion.

DEFIANCE UPSETS PRE-POLL SCENE IN KERALA

was to be fielded was surrendered by the sitting MLA. Yet the Opposition against Padmaja candidature was too severe for Mrs Gandhi to intervene. There were counter-demands as a compromise which, according to Mr Karunakaran, were not met. The Karunakaran group believes it has been outnumbered and outclassed in two ways.

They have been given lesser number of seats. The third and fourth groups have got more than their due. And Karunakaran nominees have been given less safer seats.

The Antony group and the other factions led by Mr G Karthikeyan, Mr Ramesh Chennithala and Mr Vayalar Ravi vehemently refute this with their own statistics. The Antony group leaders returned from Delhi and stated in private that "they have had enough with the old man. Mr Karunakaran too used some popular Malayalam proverbs to run down Mrs Sonia Gandhi's dispensations. The Delhi developments have rejuvenated the Left leaders. Some of the candidates who were unsure of their victory chances have suddenly turned active.

The Congress infighting has also made BJP put their candidates' list on hold looking for more allies amid the confusion.

STATESMAN
16 APR 2001

Seat distribution upsets Karunakaran

HT Correspondent
Thiruvananthapuram, April 4

THIS TIME, it's advantage Antony. Of the 81 candidates finalised by the Congress election committee last night, the Antony group has managed to pocket 36 candidates as compared to the Karunakaran group's 32. The Reformist was given nine and Vayalar Ravi's group had to contend with four seats.

Though the AICC is yet to officially announce the list of candidates, only minor changes, if necessary, will be made in the election panel's list.

According to party sources, disgrusted Karunakaran walked out of a meeting last night in Delhi and it took more than an hour for general secretary Ghulam Nabi Azad to pacify the leader.

There are enough reasons for the 'leader' (as he is known in Kerala) to be upset. Despite trying his best to push his daughter Padmaja's candidature, the election panel ignored her.

Karunakaran then rushed a fax message from the sitting Chalakudy MLA Savithri Lashkmanan to Sonia Gandhi, in which the M.L.A had expressed her desire to pull out of the race

in favour of Padmaja.

When this fax was also ignored, Karunakaran approached Muslim League MP E. Ahmed to put in a word for Padmaja. Ahmed is known to be close to I0 Janpath. But even that failed.

Another reason for the Karunakaran group's ire is that its biggest opponent, the Reformists led by AICC secretary Ramesh Chennithala, has managed to get nine seats. Karunakaran was never ready to acknowledge the very existence of this group. Nine seats to the group came as a snub for Karunakaran.

"We are just waiting for our 'Leader' to return. This is the second time he is being humiliated by the high command. We are even thinking in terms of giving back all the seats allotted to us. But a final decision will be taken once Karunakaran is back," said an angry leader of the group.

According to party sources, senior leaders are in touch with Karunakaran to mollify the angry leader. "The party cannot antagonise Karunakaran and a formula is on to keep him happy," a senior leader said.

The Vayalar Ravi group is also upset over getting only four seats.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 APR 2001

No power sharing with PMK: Cong.

By Our Special Correspondent
NEW DELHI, APRIL 3. The Congress today reiterated that it would not be part of any power-sharing arrangement with the PMK in Pondicherry.

"Our political reservations about the PMK continue, we will not be part of any power-sharing arrangement with them in Pondicherry," said the spokesperson, Mr. S. Jaipal Reddy.

The assertion on the PMK issue is a indication that the party has decided to put a stop to the flip-flops which marked its approach so far. All indications are that the party, despite pressure from certain quarters, is likely to stick to its stand of delinking the issue of the alliance in Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry.

"The situation in the two areas is qualitatively different," said Mr. Reddy. The Congress appears confident its relations

with the AIADMK would remain unaffected.

"The AIADMK chief has also said that the arrangements in the two places will be different," said the Congress spokesman. Today's clarification is also a belated attempt to clear the confusion on the issue created by different statements emanating from within the Congress.

In fact, the discordant voices emanating from both Chennai and Pondicherry and Ms. Jayalalitha's assertion that she would like to contest most of the seats in Pondicherry has forced the Congress to summon a meeting of its leaders in the capital.

The Pondicherry PCC chief, Mr. V. Narayanswamy, arrived earlier in the day, while the Chief Minister, Mr. P. Shanmugham, and the lone Lok Sabha member, Mr. M. O. H. Farooq, are expected later

tonight. The trio along with the AICC general secretary in-charge, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, are likely to go into a huddle with the Congress president to formulate a cogent strategy for the party specially in light of Ms. Jayalalitha's statement, and clear some of the confusion about the party's stand.

The central leadership appears concerned over the considerable damage to its image on the PMK issue.

It is particularly concerned about the impression gaining ground because of the statements of some of its functionaries indicating a willingness to do business with the PMK, and wants its position made abundantly clear. "We are willing to accommodate the AIADMK as much as possible but there cannot be any truck with the PMK, that much is clear," say sources close to the leadership.

THE HINDU
- 4 APR 2001

SOMEN MEETS PRANAB

9.4.11
C-20 H-3

State Congress smarts under poll deal blow

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, April 3

1/1

PRADESH CONGRESS leaders, upset with the central leadership's compromise with Mamata Banerjee, fear that yesterday's agreement marks the beginning of the end for their party in the State.

Somen Mitra, who has been allowed to retain his Sealdah seat after all, said: "Mamata Banerjee has already poached on our MLAs and now she is going to dictate our party's modus operandi in the elections. The decision has completely demoralised our organisation, shocked our workers. It is now to be seen whether the party will be able to maintain its independent identity or fall in line with Mamata over everything."

An angry Mitra is believed to have told PCC president Pranab Mukherjee that he did not want to be involved in the elections. At one point, he had threatened not to contest unless all Congress MLAs were given tickets.

The PCC chief himself has apologised to party workers for not being able to get more seats for the party. The decision, he said, was Sonia Gandhi's, but he was ready to resign if they thought it was his fault.

PCC vice-president Pradip Bhattacharya said, "We still don't know exactly how many seats we've been given, and which ones. Some say 56, some 57. Mamata is still undecided about 18 of our MLAs, and we don't know how many of them will be allowed to contest."

Mamata Banerjee is believed to be finalising the list with Sudip Bandopadhyay's help; she will announce it after April 6.

In Kolkata, she is learnt to have spared Sealdah (where Somen is MLA) and Kabitirtha (where Ram Pyare Ram is MLA) for the Congress.

She has granted the Congress only one seat in North 24-Parganas, two seats in South 24-Parganas.

The Congress seems to have got a better deal in North Bengal: 12 out of 19 seats in Murshidabad, nine out of 11 seats in Malda.

In Nadia, Hooghly, Birbhum and Burdwan, it gets two each, and three in Midnapore. In Bankura, Purulia and Howrah, Mamata has given the Congress one seat each.



Of the 18 seats Mamata is undecided about, six may go to the Congress. This would mean 32 to 35 "winning seats" for the Congress at the most.

AICC general secretary Kamal Nath, however, said: "She is giving us 38 winning seats. Can we complain after that?"

State Congress leaders seemed skeptical. Pranab Mukherjee avoided the subject, saying "I don't know anything as I am not involved in the talks."

Congress leaders complain that ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury, Adhir Chowdhury and Priya Ranjan Das Munshi have wangled seats for MLAs loyal to them in North Bengal, through a clandestine arrangement with the Trinamool. "But the Congress organisation in North 24 Parganas, South 24 Parganas and in the city proper will be completely wiped out. Having no representation from the party in those Assembly seats, the workers are bound to leave the Congress and join either the Trinamool or the BJP," Somen said.

Trinamool insiders were also unhappy with the agreement with the Congress. "We have lost our unique selling point. All along we campaigned that we are the original Congress because we fight uncompromisingly against the CPI(M), and that the PCC is CPI(M)'s B-team. Now the A team and B team have merged. Only the Muslims are happy because Mamata has left the BJP," an aide of the Trinamool chief said.

Mamata is aware of this, but believes there was no other option. A four cornered contest would just not do. It is because of this that she shot down Kamal Nath's proposal of "friendly contest" in some seats. The Left, she thinks, should be given a unite fight.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

APR 3 2011

Separated Cong family comes together amid claps

BY OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, April 2: Trinamul supporters clapped and cheered as Mamata Banerjee and Kamal Nath sealed a seat-share deal this evening after days of hard bargaining by both sides.

The AICC general secretary in charge of Bengal reached the city this morning and went into a huddle with state unit chief Pranab Mukherjee, legislative party leader Afish Sinha and MP Priya Ranjan Das Munshi at his 2, Robinson Street residence.

Around 1.45 pm, Mamata's

emissary and Trinamul MP Sudip Bandopadhyay arrived. He left half-an-hour later. "We are gradually coming towards an arrangement," Nath told reporters crowding the spacious portico.

Mukherjee left around 3 pm, but made it clear that he was not present at the meeting between Nath and Mamata's emissary. "I don't know what transpired but an alliance is what we want," he said.

Bandopadhyay returned around 3.45 pm and accompanied Nath in the Congress leader's silver-grey Lancer to Nizam

Palace for a fresh round of talks with Mamata. Before the talks started, Bandopadhyay told reporters that Trinamul was ready to concede 56 seats.

Insiders in both parties said Congress leaders, who wanted renomination of all sitting MLAs, had urged Nath to bargain hard with the Trinamul boss for 17 more seats. But Mamata was against renominating at least 24 sitting MLAs as her party candidates were "better placed" to win the concerned seats this time, going by the results of the last Lok Sabha polls.

The Congress insisted that

candidate selection should be based on the 1996 Assembly poll results. The PCC leadership also played the "loyalty card", saying the legislators had stuck by the Congress and did not respond to Mamata's call "despite every kind of allurements".

Congress chief Sonia Gandhi decided to send Nath to Calcutta after Mamata rejected the PCC's proposal to have "friendly contests" in 24 seats.

Yesterday, Nath had a taste of Mamata's belligerence when she told him point-blank that instead of having "friendly" contests in 24 seats, the Congress

was free to field candidates in "all the 294 constituencies".

The one-to-one between the two began around 4.15 pm. As word of the meeting spread, several hundred Trinamul workers, who once were in the Congress fold, gathered at the ground floor lobby of Nizam Palace. "We want the alliance to take place at any cost. It is only natural that the Trinamul should ally with the Congress," said one.

The meeting ended a little after six. As soon as the formal announcement was made, Trinamul workers broke into applause.

The PCC office, which till 12 noon wore a deserted look, suddenly seemed busy as ever after the announcement. "A large number of office bearers from the districts started pouring in after the seat-share deal was clinched," said PCC leader Kumud Bhattacharya.

After the pact was announced, Mukherjee said: "We are very happy that at last we have been able to forge an alliance with Mamata. This will send a message to the electorate in the right perspective. Now we are confident of ousting the ruling communists from Bengal."

THE TELEGRAPH

200
2001

Cong, Trinamool arrive at consensus on 276 seats

Our Kolkata Bureau

KOLKATA 2 APRIL

IN A major breakthrough in the Congress-Trinamool dialogues over seat sharing, the two parties, on Monday, arrived at a consensus on 276 of the 294 seats. In another significant development, the state Congress, at the party high command's bidding, agreed to contest the polls under Ms Mamata Banerjee's leadership and project her as the chief minister in the eventuality of the Congress-Trinamool combine coming to power.

As the third round of talks between Congress and Trinamool, over seat sharing, began on Monday, the state Congress leaders have started to realise that "sacrifice" is the order of the day — read diktat of the high command — forget stray instances of revolt



ON SEATS OF POWER: Mamata Banerjee and Congress general secy Kamal Nath in the city on Monday. — AFP

by party rank and file in some places.

As a result of this realisation, the Trinamool and Congress could arrive at a consensus on as many as 276 seats of the 294-seat state legislative Assembly.

Mr Kamal Nath, AICC general secretary in charge of West Bengal, flew in again on Monday to give final shape to the proposed alliance between the Congress and Trinamool, for the May 10 Assembly polls in the state.

Before meeting the Trinamool leaders, Mr Nath met the state Congress leaders and tried to impress on them that "Madam" wanted the alliance to come through at any cost.

Mr Nath could also convince the state party leaders that it would be wise on their behalf to contest the polls under Ms

Mamata Banerjee's leadership.

Reading Sonia's mind, even rebel number one Somen Mitra is learnt to have said in his close circles, "although it's an unjustified move, what can I do if the party president wants it that way?"

An optimistic Mr Nath later told reporters that it would take a day or two to arrive at the final point.

He hinted that if need be, Congress president Sonia Gandhi would directly speak to the Trinamool chairperson and rebel state Congress leaders, to sort out differences.

There is absolutely no dispute over 276 of the 294 seats. The state Congress is also quite satisfied with the 55 seats already conceded to them by the Trinamool.

The party now demands that the remaining sitting MLAs be also

given tickets.

Some Congress leaders have also come up with the formula of "friendly contest" for some of the seats. However, Trinamool leader and Kolkata mayor Subrata Mukherjee has discarded the idea as "absurd".

Mr Nath, in his turn, said: "It is not only the idea of friendly contest, I have come with a number of proposals, which we will have to thrash out with the Trinamool leadership. We will let you know that once we arrive at a consensus."

The Congress strategy is clear — take time so that the rebel leaders give up after some point.

Mr Nath has also urged party workers to start working jointly with the Trinamool activists in 220 seats, where there is no dispute.

The Economic Times

3 APR 2001

Congress shifts focus from Centre to states

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 2. — The Congress is likely to return to power in Kerala and it's close to capturing power in Assam. In West Bengal, it's prospects are poor if it fights the polls alone, while a worse situation awaits it in Tamil Nadu. In Pondicherry, where the party is power, the chances of winning the polls are fifty-fifty.

These are the assessments of the Congress about its prospects in the Assembly polls in the four states and the Union Territory.

After having failed to win over the third front and some of the BJP allies in its bid to replace the Vajpayee government, the Congress has now shifted focus from the Centre to these states and Pondicherry.

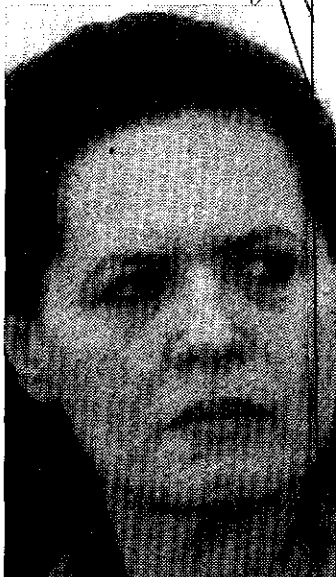
The party is working on a new strategy to increase the number of states under its control. At present, it is in power in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Karnataka, Maharashtra (in coalition with the NCP), Delhi and Pondicherry.

At a recent meeting, senior leaders had reportedly prevailed upon Mrs Sonia Gandhi not to be soft towards the Marxists in the hope that they would help the Congress form government at the Centre.

Sources close to 10 Janpath confirmed that the CPI-M had sent feelers to Mrs Gandhi to spare West Bengal.

The CPI-M general secretary, Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet, has in fact issued a veiled warning to the Congress for its decision to forge an alliance with Miss Mamata Banerjee.

He reminded Mrs Gandhi that a mahatma against the Left



Mrs Sonia Gandhi

Front in West Bengal might jeopardise the CPI-M's support to the Congress at the Centre. An AICC member, however, said: "That situation is still a distant dream."

The Congress is ready to share power with Miss Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal even if that means incurring the CPI-M's wrath.

A CWC member said Mrs Gandhi has not forgiven Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav for his jibes against her.

The day the CPI-M joined the Samajwadi Party camp, Mrs Gandhi decided to go soft on Miss Banerjee.

In Assam, there are some anti-Congress forces who are out to sabotage the party's electoral prospects.

For instance, Mr PA Sangma of the NCP has decided to field a large number of candidates in Assam to eat into the Congress' votes

THE STATESMAN

3 APR 2001

Dejected Cong still in pursuit of 'best bargain'

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, April 1: News of Trinamul conceding 55 seats greatly disappointed the Congress high command, but it tried to put up a brave face, claiming that it would succeed in persuading Mamata Banerjee to grant another dozen.

Kamal Nath, Congress general secretary in charge of Bengal, said: "Nothing is final. We will continue our efforts to get the best bargain. I am going to Calcutta tomorrow. The talks on seat share are on and will go on. Nothing is final till the filing of nominations."

Three party MPs, Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury and Adhir Chowdhury, want Sonia Gandhi to take up the question of raising the Congress share with Mamata.

The Congress high command sent a fax to an exasperated Mamata to allow it to field some of its sitting MLAs in "friendly contests" against Trinamul. But Mamata replied without losing much time, rejecting the concept.

"We have received the fax. But we have rejected the proposal," said Trinamul MP Sudip Bandopadhyay.

Despite the snub, the Congress leadership is making it clear that there is no question of

going back on seat adjustments with Trinamul. Sonia's brief for Nath and Bengal party chief Pranab Mukherjee is: reach an alliance by any means. If Nath's Calcutta mission fails, the AICC chief will directly intervene.

Mukherjee, who reached Calcutta tonight, said he expected the deal to be finalised tomorrow. Trinamul leaders said Mamata, too, was keen to "clinch the issue" by Monday.

But Trinamul is not enthusiastic about "friendly contests" on the grounds that it will reduce the "big fight" against the Left to a joke. Brainchild of Das Munshi and Mukherjee, the friendly contest idea was put forth by Congress leaders who cited two precedents -- one in Midnapore where Trinamul and the BJP had followed a similar course in the 1998 general election and in Salt Lake during the municipal polls.

Trinamul is also adamant about contesting the Sealadah seat held by Somen Mitra, adding to Sonia's problems.

Nath is leaving for Calcutta tomorrow after talks with Sonia today. He said efforts were being made by both sides to find an amicable solution to vexed issues.

Nath, Mukherjee and Das Munshi sat till 4 am to prepare the draft that was sent to Mama-

ta, suggesting friendly contests.

Party leaders are tightlipped about their next move, now that Mamata has dismissed the possibility. Nath appears to be upset with a section of the state leadership for putting up roadblocks.

Nath's detractors, however, reacted sharply, mocking his claim of having extracted "quality seats", arguing that half of the 55 seats identified for the Congress were not winnable.

Congress sources said the leadership was finding it "awkward" to dump more than a dozen sitting MLAs in view of their loyalty. At the same time, the leadership recognises Trinamul's problem in disturbing too many of the seats for which candidates had been announced before talks with the Congress began. Besides, in many Assembly segments held by the Congress, the party received less than 6 per cent votes in the 1999 election.

Mukherjee ruled out any threat to seat adjustment and said Mamata would be projected as the chief ministerial candidate. He said a common minimum programme would be prepared and a front floated to defeat the Left.

Mukherjee said various formulations were being discussed to break the impasse on seats for sitting MLAs.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

2 APR 2001

SEAT ADJUSTMENT THE BIGGEST HURDLE TO OPPOSITION UNITY IN BENGAL

Somen adamant on his picks for poll

Our Kolkata Bureau
KOLKATA 1 APRIL

WHAT MAMATA Banerjee did four years ago, her one-time bete noire Somen Mitra is doing it now — mounting pressures on the party high command over nominations to some particular candidates. There are however some differences in the two situations. On earlier occasion, the party high command stood beside Somen. But this time the Congress leadership is more keen on having an alliance with Mamata's party, no matter even if it comes at the cost of party's former state president.

Last time Mamata eventually had to leave the party. And this time round, Somen is only threatening that he would not contest the polls if his demands are not met. However, as a result of this tug-of-war the Congress-Trinamool Congress talks over seat sharing for the Assembly polls could not arrive at its logical conclusion even on Sunday.

The Somen Mitra-camp is still hell-bent on the issue of renomi-



Somen: Spoilsport

nations to all the sitting Congress MLAs. Some of the Congress MLAs have already switched over to Trinamool and have been rewarded with Trinamool ticket.

Mr Kamal Nath, AICC general secretary in-charge of West Bengal is having to shuttle between Kolkata and Delhi to find a practical solution to end the impasse. And as Mr Nath has rightly said, "this is a complex situation and

one should not expect a simple, fast and smooth way-out. The more we talk before finalisation of the pact, the better."

According to Trinamool sources, the two meetings between the Congress emissary and Trinamool supremo went off 'extremely well' and the two parties could arrive at some kind of an adjustment after Trinamool had conceded 55 seats to Congress. However, a formal announcement to this effect had to be stalled in the wake of the opposition from the Somen-faction.

Congress MLAs who have recently switched over to Mamata's party, have been rewarded with Trinamool tickets. And now Mr Mitra wants that the remaining 16 sitting Congress MLAs should also be given tickets. "How can you deny ticket to some one who stood beside the party leadership in hour of crisis?" Mr Mitra quipped.

Mr Mitra may have a point but that doesn't seem to be appealing to the Congress president. Sonia's eagerness to join hands with

Mamata's party at any cost was reflected in her spin doctor Kamal Nath's remark. "These leaders are now talking about their commitment and dedication to the party. But where had these feelings gone when the party leadership fielded a candidate for the Rajya Sabha polls and they voted for the Trinamool candidate?" Kamal Nath quipped. Sonia has also reportedly spelt out similar sentiment in her close circles.

Meanwhile, Trinamool's policy making cell's chairman, Mr Pankaj Banerjee said that they were not snapping all ties with the BJP. "...for instance, in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation, we are together". Interestingly, senior BJP leader, Kailashpati Mishra had said on Friday, "We now have no option but to snap all ties with the Trinamool."

Interestingly, the poll date has already been announced and while TMC, Congress and BJP are fighting it out among themselves to give shape to an anti-Left front, the Left Front campaign is already in full swing.

The Economic Times

- 2 APR 2001

Kamal Nath in Kolkata to strike deal with Mamata

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 30. The Congress today expressed the hope that it would be able to clinch a seat-sharing arrangement with the Trinamool Congress by tomorrow. "We should be able to reach a settlement by tomorrow," said Mr. Kamal Nath, AICC general secretary in charge of West Bengal.

Mr. Kamal Nath left for Kolkata this evening along with the West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee chief, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, Mr. Priyaranjan Das-munshi and other State leaders. Mr. Kamal Nath and Mr. Mukherjee have been asked by the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, to conclude the negotiations expeditiously, with the Trinamool chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee.

Last evening, Ms. Gandhi held extensive discussions with the leaders from the West Bengal unit. Her intervention helped break the logjam and paved the way for the resumption of negotiations with the Trinamool. She also met Mr. Kamal Nath separately this morning and asked him to begin the negotiations with Ms. Banerjee.

Though most of the State leaders were in favour of an alliance with the Trinamool, there were some differences of opinion over the number of seats the party should contest. The State unit is demanding 72 seats while the Trinamool reportedly is willing to part with only 51 seats. Ms. Gandhi urged the State unit leaders to scale down their demands for the "sake of the bigger goal of keeping the BJP out".

At the same time, the Congress is keen on ensuring

that some loyalists, especially MLAs who did not cross over to Ms. Banerjee's party, are not denied tickets. "We want to ensure that people are not penalised for being loyal to the party," Mr. Kamal Nath said before leaving for Kolkata. He appeared confident about the prospects of concluding an alliance with Ms. Banerjee. "Everybody realises that after 24 years this is the first real chance to defeat the CPI(M); nobody wants to let go of that chance."

'Ball in Cong. court'

KOLKATA, MARCH 30. The Trinamool Congress chief, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, today said she was waiting for the Congress response for the possible electoral tie-up. She told reporters, "The ball is now in their court." The Trinamool chief whip in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Sudip Bandopadhyay, said his party had offered 55 seats to the Congress.

BJP blasts Trinamool

The BJP mounted a vitriolic attack on the Trinamool asking how the party could enter into electoral adjustments with the Congress which was "synonymous with corruption". The BJP leader and Union Minister of State for Communication, Mr. Tapan Sikdar, said Ms. Banerjee had always preached value-based politics. "If she forged an alliance with the Congress the mask of value-based politics will be ripped apart."

He said Ms. Banerjee had "betrayed" an honest person like the Prime Minister and claimed that even Trinamool workers were unhappy over it.

THE HINDU

31 MAR 2001

Soften stand, AICC urges Bengal bosses

HT Correspondents
New Delhi/Kolkata, March 29

SONIA GANDHI now seems to hold the key to the Congress-Trinamool seat-sharing deadlock as key Congress interlocutors are finding it increasingly difficult to convince Bengal leaders to soften their stand.

Till late tonight, Congress's central leaders and its Bengal bosses seemed to speak in different tones as the team led by PCC chief Pranab Mukherjee continued to play tough while AICC general secretary in charge of Bengal, Kamal Nath, said: "The Congress is prepared to make any sacrifice to defeat the ruling Left Front."

Top PCC leaders explained their demand for 70-odd seats to Sonia in Delhi this evening. Among those present at the meeting were Somen Mitra and P R Das Munshi. ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury left for Kolkata before the meeting, with the demand that the Congress should get all the 11 seats in his segment. The other two MPs, Das Munshi and Adhir Chowdhury, also demanded that all Assembly segments in their constituencies should go to the Congress.

After giving Bengal leaders a patient hearing, Sonia asked them why they were making such a steep demand and even told them to step up the pace of negotiations.

Meanwhile, Mamata Baner-

jee is fast running out of patience and said she would not wait any more. She will decide by tomorrow her party's stand. "Look, I have been waiting for 15 days. That's a long time."

Those close to Mamata made it clear that she would not agree to anything over 60.

The Congress high command's keenness for a tie-up with Mamata is guided more by the party's national goal of presenting an alternative to the NDA. An AICC office-bearer pleaded the visiting Bengal leaders to be more accommodative as an alliance with the Trinamool would help in realising the party's objective of influencing national politics by ensuring that the Congress ends up on the winning side in each of the five States going to polls.

Kamal Nath said the Congress wanted at least 40 winnable seats. While the 21 seats perceived safe by the Congress are covered by the 52 where it stood first or second in the Lok Sabha polls, the remaining 22 have to be from Mamata's known strongholds.

"The talks have now reached a conclusive stage. We will hold negotiations with Mamataji in Kolkata tomorrow," said Nath.

But Pranab sounded less upbeat. "If Sonia Gandhi issues a whip, grudgingly or ungrudgingly everybody would fall in line and accept whatever Mamata offers. But I think Mamata's stand is very confusing."

BJP blows hot and cold on Mamata

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 29

A DAY after charging Mamata Banerjee with stabbing the NDA in the back, the BJP today blew hot and cold over a possible alliance with the Trinamool.

Saying that the Congress-Trinamool talks would run aground, the BJP iterated that its principal aim in West Bengal was to defeat the Left Front and Mamata. "Once Mamataji announces her tie-up with the Congress, we will take it as a signal that our alliance with her is over. Till then, we are prepared to wait," said new BJP chief K Jana Krishnamurthi today.

He said the BJP was willing to show patience and extend "political courtesies even if others do not show the same... We are not unprepared to go it alone. In fact our party is ready to put up candidates in most of the 294 Assembly constituencies".

Krishnamurthi defended the BJP's demand that Mamata clarify her support to the NDA as a minimum condition for the BJP to stay with her. "If she is not prepared to resume support to the NDA, we are ready to fight the polls alone. Though we wanted some changes in the 39 seats allotted by her, the real issue is her stand on the NDA."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

30 MAR 2001

Mamata tie-up: AICC summons state leaders

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & PTI

KOLKATA, March 27. — The Congress central leadership has summoned five Pradesh Congress Committee leaders to Delhi to sort out the "thorny issue" of seat sharing with the Trinamul Congress for the West Bengal Assembly elections.

Mr Pradip Bhattacharya, Pradesh Congress Committee vice-president, today left for Delhi, while Mr Atish Sinha (Opposition leader) and Mr Somen Mitra will leave for Delhi tomorrow.

Other members of the team are Mr Manas Bhuniya and Mr Kumud Bhattacharya.

They are scheduled to meet Mr Kamal Nath, All-India Congress Committee general secretary in-charge of West Bengal, tomorrow.

Party sources said the meeting would try to find out a solution to the "thorny issue" of seat sharing in West Bengal that would be acceptable to

both sides.

Mr Sinha said he was leaving for Delhi with an "open mind" and was hopeful of an alliance with the Trinamul.

"It's time the Congress and the Trinamul Congress joined hands to oust the CPI(M)," he said.

■ **Asim climbs down on Mamata support: page 3**

■ **BJP doors still open to Trinamul: page 8**

■ **Cong sees 'forward movement' towards Trinamul tie-up: page 8**

The state Congress today said if the proposed alliance with the Trinamul Congress became a reality, it must be allowed to contest all the 42 seats it represents.

The party has already demanded 80 seats from the Trinamul. Trinamul Congress leaders, however, said the demand for

the 42 seats was unjustified. They argue that since the last Assembly polls, the Trinamul Congress has gained ground in several of these constituencies.

To drive home the point, they cited Mr Somen Mitra's constituency, Sealdah, where the Congress drew a blank in the Calcutta Municipal Corporation elections.

The leaders said nothing concrete had come out of Miss Banerjee's talk with Mr Kamal Nath.

"The whole matter is now in a fluid state. A clear picture would emerge within a day or two," one of the leaders said.

Meanwhile, some Congress workers have planned to stage a demonstration outside the party office on Hazi Mohammad Mohsin Square to protest against the seat sharing move. On the other hand, some Trinamul workers believe the Congress would backstab their candidates and help the CPI-M win the polls.

THE STATESMAN

26 MAR 2007

Cong demands 'quality' seats from Mamata

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, March 26

ALLIANCE TALKS between Trinamool and the Congress in Bengal remained inconclusive last night, with Mamata Banerjee and Kamal Nath still groping for a mutually acceptable seat-sharing formula.

The meeting last night ended with both leaders agreeing to disagree on a number of points.

Kamal Nath told the *Hindustan Times* later that he had explained to the Trinamool chief why the moot point was not "how many seats the Congress would contest, but how many of them would be winnable".

"As the party's negotiator in Bengal, my concern is to ensure that Congress candidates get winnable seats. We won't settle for anything less than 65, of which—I have told Mamata—45 will have to be winnable. Discussions are now under way with State leaders of our party, and we are evaluating our strength."

One of the stumbling blocks was that Mamata refused to concede more than 35 seats to the Congress. Kamal Nath later spoke to State Congress leaders, some of whom suggested that they were not keen anymore on a poll alliance with the Trinamool. The PCC leadership, it was learnt, would send a faxed letter this evening to AICC chief Sonia Gandhi, PCC president Pranab Mukherjee, and Kamal Nath, saying there need be no poll truck with the Trinamool.

Also, Mamata had wanted Somen Mitra, Atish Sinha, San-

jeev Das and Sailaja Das dropped from the Congress list. But Kamal Nath was firm that this would be untenable, sources said. Mamata had argued that it should be difficult for her to give so many seats to the Congress since she had already named her candidates for 228 seats. Kamal Nath described the impasse like this: "There are several imponderables at both her as well as our end. So I don't see anything emerging in clear-cut terms within the next three or four days. Our objective is to get the Left defeated in Bengal. But to make that happen, Congress and Trinamool leaderships should take a collective decision".

"Mamata's argument is that in the 1999 Lok Sabha polls, Congress candidates forfeited their deposits in as many as 226 seats. The party, therefore, cannot be given more than 35 seats. I disputed this point, saying this had happened because the votes got split. But if the Congress and the Trinamool come together, it should be a different scenario, I told her," Kamal Nath added.

PCC president Pranab Mukherjee said: "Talks are on, but there is nothing yet to be euphoric about." Somen Mitra said he was completely in the dark, but would follow whatever was the party's line.

Complicating matters, P R Das Munshi, ABA Khan Chowdhury and Adhir Chowdhury, have said all Assembly segments in their parliamentary constituencies should be given for Congress candidates to contest.

Related report on Page 9

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 MAR 2001

Cong prepares to put govt on the mat

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BANGALORE, March 16. - The Congress, which is holding its plenary session here tomorrow, is preparing its strategy to put the Vajpayee government on the mat following the Tehelka expose.

A party source said: "We need to prepare a blueprint so that we can exploit the present situation. The CWC will discuss the role that the party has to play in the present circumstances."

Mr Jaipal Reddy, party spokesman, said: "The NDA government is coming unstuck. We do not have to do anything."

He said the role of the PMO had come under scrutiny following the expose.

The CWC meet, held under tight security with the SPG preventing journalists from

getting into the KPCC building, will discuss, among other things, the resolutions to be taken up at the plenary session, including political and economic ones.

Besides the tehelka expose, the Balco disinvestment would be the focus of attention.

This is because a large number of Congressmen are pressuring Mrs Sonia Gandhi to come out clearly against disinvestment policies formulated after the reforms process began.

Mr Reddy said the AICC would have an exclusive resolution on the agricultural situation, highlighting the plight of the farmers following the steep fall in prices of foodgrain.

A source said: "We expect Mrs Sonia

Gandhi to give the needed fillip so that we can take advantage of the present situation.

"We have to mount a frontal attack on the BJP-led government at the Centre ... More so, as five states are going for polls providing us the right opportunity."

Asked about the party stand towards the third front led by Mr Jyoti Basu, he said the Congress would have "friendly relations" with the front in view of its secular character.

The Congress won't have an alliance with the front, he said.

The AICC general secretary, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, said he won't be surprised if the NDA government collapsed before the end of the party plenary here on 18 March.

THE STATESMAN

Cong raises wall in George's defence

■ Sonia's private secy's influence in party makes him 'indispensable'

SANJIV SINHA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

CONGRESS president Sonia Gandhi has decided to stick with her private secretary Vincent George against whom the CBI on Wednesday registered an FIR for amassing assets disproportionate to income. And in her effort to defend him, she has roped in her party to defend George from its official platform.

For the Congress, which till yesterday was going hammer and tongs against the NDA government on the Tehelka expose, the CBI's FIR against George has suddenly caught it on the wrong foot.

While the timing of the FIR may have raised eyebrows, the NDA government has succeeded in temporarily deflecting attention to the Congress.

For a change, it was the Congress' turn to be at receiving end when party spokesman Jaipal Reddy was grilled for over half-an-hour by mediapersons on the party's stand on George.

George's importance in the Congress and the fact that the party is hard put to defend him was evident when Reddy told reporters: "We are not going to be guided by the version of the CBI...the CBI is as autonomous



as the Prasar Bharti."

Reddy said George is not a Congress member but "a party employee". He put up a spirited defence for him by questioning the CBI's fairness and charging the NDA government with "vendetta".

"George is not a government employee but is working for Sonia Gandhi in her capacity as Congress chief, not as Leader of Opposition," he said, adding the charges were allegations whereas Bangaru Laxman had been caught accepting bribe.

The Congress' resolve to back George is attributed to his clout as one of the Gandhi family's most trusted lieutenants. Not only has the low-profile secretary been with the Congress' first family through thick and thin but

Sonia right-hand man 'occupying' bungalow

DALIP SINGH
NEW DELHI, MARCH 23

THE latest about V. George, private secretary to Congress President Sonia Gandhi, is that he's allegedly overstaying in an official bungalow in Chanakya-puri.

According to the CBI which has filed a disproportionate assets case against George, he allegedly has at least five pieces of real estate in Delhi, including a Rs 85-lakh house.

George was allotted a bungalow (D-1/109, Satya Marg) in Chanakya-puri after he became PS to Rajiv Gandhi in 1984.

He was allotted a D-1 type flat, since PS to the PM enjoys government facilities available to a joint secretary.

He retained the flat when Rajiv became Leader of the Opposition. George continued to retain the bungalow though he was served notice to vacate it during Narasimha Rao's stint.

The Cabinet Committee on Accommodation (CCA) later allotted this house to an All India Congress Committee general secretary. However, George stayed put.

Sources said had George been PS of Sonia Gandhi as Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, he would have been entitled to retain the house.

The Leader of Opposition enjoys all privileges available to a Cabinet minister. But George is only PS to the Congress chief; PS to Sonia as Opposition leader is Pulok Chatterji. George was not available for comment. Director Estates Achala Sinha refused to comment.

has, over the years, become indispensable. "You cannot wish George away just as you cannot R.K. Dhawan (Indira Gandhi's PS)... Both are privy to the Gandhi family's most well-kept

secrets," said a party leader. Especially after Sonia became party chief, he has been the link between her and the party, and plays an active role in key appointments.

Cong leaders gun for Vincent

MOHAN SAHAY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, March 22.
Congress leaders are reportedly putting pressure on Mrs Sonia Gandhi to "sacrifice" Mr Vincent George, charged in a disproportionate assets case by the CBI yesterday.

The reason for the pressure, it appears, is not morality but political strategy. If the Congress president sacks Mr George, these leaders argue, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee will face renewed pressure to sack his PMO officials, who the Prime Minister has vigorously defended so far.

However, Congress leaders have a problem. "No one is prepared, or is daring enough, to tell madam that she should sack a secretary who has served the Family loyally", said a senior Congress leader.

Congressmen are dismayed over Mrs Sonia Gandhi's decision to direct the media cell of the AICC, headed by Mrs Ambika Soni, to defend her private secretary to the hilt. A whispering campaign was heard in Parliament House today against the leader's defence of her private secretary. This, it is felt, is bound to weaken the Opposition campaign against the Vajpayee government over the Tehelka tapes.

"How can the party ask for the heads of Advani, Joshi and Uma chargesheeted by the CBI in the Babari Masjid demolition case and yet say the agency has no credibility and that it is a political tool to browbeat the opponents of the govern-

ment when it comes to a case against your own private secretary?" an MP was heard saying in Parliament lobby.

Mr S Jaipal Reddy, the party spokesman said: "We are not going to be guided by the CBI version for the agency is as autonomous as Prasar Bharati. The timing of the CBI case is enough to prove that Mr George was chargesheeted by the government to divert public attention from the Tehelka expose." Majority of Congress leaders, including some CWC members, have launched an "oust George campaign", albeit secretly. "In many ways Mr George has become a super power centre at 10, Janpath, perhaps more than RK Dhawan when the latter was private secretary to Indira Gandhi," said a party leader.

BJP seeks explanation: The BJP today demanded an explanation from the Congress president for allowing Mr George to continue as her private secretary. The party, however, refused to demand her resignation on moral ground saying that "if she continues as Congress president, it suits us."

The BJP spokesman, Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, said serious charges had been levelled by the CBI against Mr George who was also associated with Rajiv Gandhi from 1984-90.

Mrs Gandhi should explain how a corrupt person was working for her for the past 10 years, he said. He denied there was political motive behind the CBI charges.

More reports on page 6

THE STATESMAN

23 MAR 2001

George ducks work amid Cong sniper fire

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, March 22: One day after the CBI slapped a disproportionate assets case against him, Vincent George did not report for work today.

Congress spokesman Jaipal Reddy struggled to defend Sonia Gandhi's private secretary even as a whisper campaign for his removal on moral grounds began in the party.

But Sonia seemed to be in no mood to oblige a handful of leaders gunning for George. Her argument is based on three factors:

- Why has the government failed to act against those who figure in the Tehelka tapes? Charges against George are mere allegations while there is "evidence" against the Tehelka accused.

- There is no precedent of a public servant being booked under the Prevention of Corruption Act 12 years after demitting office.

- The timing of the FIR makes it clear that it is politically motivated.

Sources said Sonia was in the process of "sidelining" her all-powerful private secretary before the CBI filed the case. In 10 Janpath, George was about to be shifted out of the ante room adjacent to Sonia's drawing room. It now remains to be seen how the Congress chief will proceed.

There is strong view in the party that the attack on George should not be taken lightly as it indicates the shape of things to come. "The BJP-NDA are desperate to create a crisis of confidence

and paint us as equally corrupt. The Tehelka tape mud is not washing," a party functionary said, hinting that Sonia might become the next target.

"It is a no-holds-barred war and the government will employ every trick in the trade," he said.

Jaipal Reddy described George as an "employee of the party" while disagreeing with the CBI's version of the charges. In a dig at Doordarshan's failure to telecast the Tehelka tapes, he said: "The CBI is as autonomous as Prasar Bharati."

Party leaders Mani Shankar Aiyar and Ambika Soni also defended George. Ambika said the Congress would stand by him while it was for the law to take its course.

Mani asked Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to clarify his remarks made on June 11, 1996 in the Lok Sabha, as the leader of the Opposition, that the government had "many ways of influencing" the CBI. "Has he revised his views about the CBI?" the Congress leader asked.

Facing a hostile media, Reddy said: "George is an employee of the party and not of the government...The FIR filed against him is aimed to divert attention from the Tehelka expose."

Making it clear that he was not questioning the merit of the case, Reddy said: "The timing of the filing of FIR speaks volumes about the designs, motives and intentions behind the move."

Describing the FIR against George as political vendetta, he added: "NDA leaders are not only the merchants of venality but also vendetta".

10 Janpath, Mamata in touch

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Calcutta, March 22: Mamata Banerjee and Sonia Gandhi have spoken to each other on seat adjustments for the coming Assembly elections.

Congress and Trinamul Congress leaders today indicated that talks were progressing well and the picture would be clearer by tomorrow.

"It's (progress of talks) okay. By tomorrow I should be able to tell you something," said Kamal Nath, AICC general secretary in charge of Bengal.

Sources said Sonia has been in touch with the Trinamul chief ever since she formally withdrew from the National Democratic Alliance after the Tehelka expose.

The Congress president has spoken with her on the phone a couple of times in the past 48 hours. Kamal Nath confirmed that the party leadership was in "constant touch" with Mamata.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 ►

THE TIMES OF INDIA

23 MAR 2001

Jan Morcha move to keep Sonia out of PM's office forces rethink

Congress gives up hope of toppling Vajpayee

MOHAN SAHAY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CJ UNABLE TO SPARE SITTING JUDGE

NEW DELHI, March 19. — The war cry of the Congress in Bangalore died down in Delhi with the party admitting today that it had "no plans to topple the Vajpayee government".

At the hurriedly held confabulations this morning on their return from the AICC session, the party finally dropped the idea of "joining a coalition with other parties to share power at the Centre", as announced in Bangalore at the weekend.

Three reasons compelled the Congress to do so. The party reportedly "scented power" on Saturday. The Jan Morcha (People's Front) demand to keep Mrs Sonia Gandhi out of any power-sharing arrangement which meant she was not to be considered for the Prime Minister's office was rejected by the party leadership.

Second, the Congress was not prepared to prop up any third front leader as the future Prime Minister as it did in

NEW DELHI, March 19. — The Chief Justice of India, Mr AS Anand, today expressed his inability to spare a sitting judge of the Supreme Court to conduct the probe into the Tehelka tapes. The inquiry would now be done by a retired judge of the court. The Chief Justice consulted his colleagues in the court and they were of the "unanimous view" that it would be difficult to spare a sitting judge, reliable sources said. A letter to this effect was today sent by the C.J.'s office to the law ministry. — PTI

1996 by supporting the United Front leader, Mr HD Deve Gowda.

The most damning fact before the Congress was its inability and the failure of the People's Front to break the TDP which has 26 MPs in Lok Sabha. The Opposition could have managed the number (22 MPs) to pull down the government had it worked out its strategy well by weaning away the smaller parties and groups like the National Conference (4), Chautala's INLD (4), the JDU (6) and the MDMK (4) that would have reduced the government to minority.

Some senior Congress and RJD leaders blamed Mr

Mulayam Singh Yadav for jumping the gun by announcing the formation of the People's Front with Mr Jyoti Basu as its head. Mr Basu was projected as the prime ministerial candidate in too much of a hurry, lamented a Congress MP.

Mr Raghuvans Prasad Singh said: "Where was the hurry for Mr Mulayam Singh to have criticised the Congress in the very beginning of the exercise to unite the Opposition and to form an alternative to the NDA?"

The Congress now says Mrs Sonia Gandhi never said anything about toppling the Vajpayee government. Mr S Jaipal Reddy said his party at this juncture had no plans to

move a no-trust motion against the NDA government in the Lok Sabha. "We never questioned the numerical strength of the government in the Lok Sabha," Mr Reddy said, adding, "Though, we did expect the government to resign on its own following the startling revelations".

Feelers were sent to Mrs Sonia Gandhi through senior party leaders like Mr Madhavarao Scindia and Mr Kamal Nath from the third front leaders on the eve of the Bangalore session that she could nominate anyone on her behalf to head the non-BJP government while continuing to hold the strings as the Congress president.

The idea was shot down at the preliminary stage since neither Mr Scindia nor Mr Kamal Nath had the guts to tell Mrs Gandhi what the third front had in mind to topple the government.

As of now the threat to the Vajpayee government over the Tehelka tapes appears to have receded.

■ More reports on page 8

THE STATESMAN

20 MAR 2001

Mammohan Singh dumps Mammohanics for politics

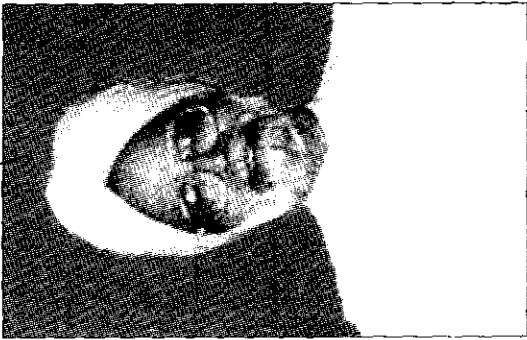
HT Correspondent
Bangalore, March 18

THE MAN who set the reforms ball-rolling in India has evidently reconciled himself to political expediency.

Dr Mammohan Singh said today that the Congress was against reckless privatisation and that disinvestments were necessary only to revive sick public sector units.

A paper by PV Narasimha Rao addressed to the Congress leadership makes a similar point.

Dr Singh has gone to the extent of asserting that the Congress, if in power, would press for modifications to World Trade Organisation agreements if it felt that they were hurting the interests of the farmers, workers



and other economically weaker sections.

The Congress, he said, had always favoured reforms, but with a "human face". "We never proposed reforms at the cost of the poor."

The Karnataka Chief Minister, a strident proponent of liberalisation and globalisation, did not appear too happy with the Congress' softened stance on reforms.

Like all resolutions, he said, the party's economic resolution was confusing.

He said, however, that in the light of the party's modified policy on reforms, States including his own would have to re-examine and if necessary change their policies.

Mr Krishna, a front-runner

among Congress chief ministers in terms of performance, had expected the party to firm up its policy on reforms and in fact strengthen it. But his tone was subdued today, perhaps in view of impending elections in five States.

A restructuring commission was looking into disinvestment of state-owned enterprises in Karnataka, he said, and his Government would go by its recommendations.

Mr Krishna cautioned against a reforms roll-back, saving development projects and the social sector needed huge investments. Foreign partnerships are crucial and a balance must be struck between reforms, the state's financial health and its social responsibilities.

Sonia declares war on NDA

By Anita Katyal
The Times of India News Service

BANGALORE: Clearly encouraged by the corruption scandal which has rocked the Vajpayee government and working on the premise that a snap poll may become inevitable, Congress president Sonia Gandhi on Sunday exhorted her party cadres to launch a country-wide assault on the NDA with the intention of removing it from power.

Speaking at the 81st plenary session of the AICC here, Ms Gandhi again demanded the exit of the Vajpayee government on moral grounds. She said that the Congress would be unveiling a plan of action to "expose the corrupt and venal BJP and its allies".

"Let the message go from Bangalore that we will fight every battle, wage every war, make every sacrifice to ensure that the country is liberated from the shackles of this corrupt, shameful and communal government. Let the states, districts and villages of India reverberate the cry of the Congress that the BJP-led coalition has betrayed the nation," she declared, during her 45-minute speech in Hindi and English.

Ms Gandhi said she had also told all state units that they must go to the people with a single-point agenda of exposing the corrupt BJP government. To begin with, party leaders said, this issue will be the centrepiece of their campaign in next month's assembly elections.

Ms Gandhi did not speak openly of a mid-term poll, nor did she suggest that the Congress was willing to topple the government and form an alternate government. The party's assessment is that given the precarious condition of the Vajpayee government, a mid-term poll may be inevitable and though the Congress does not favour an early election, it should not be complacent.

1913
LET US WORK HAND IN HAND FOR A NEW DAWN



Congress president Sonia Gandhi gives security personnel around her anxious moments as she reaches out to greet Congress workers and supporters in Bangalore on Sunday

Ms Gandhi's rhetorical outburst contained an unconcealed message: the Congress must put up a stiff fight and prepare for all possible challenges. This was evident when she urged party cadres to revitalise and rebuild the party, work unitedly and restore the Congress to its "primacy in our national firmament". She warned party members to put aside their differences, adding firmly, "Unity is

the need of the hour. We must learn to subjugate personal agendas for the greater good of the causes we espouse and champion".

She did make a passing reference to polls, but this comment was couched in generalities. "Elections are the lifeline of a political party. We must gear ourselves for elections whether they be for panchayats, assemblies or the Lok Sabha," she commented.

Ms Gandhi's aggressive speech, which had the delegates cheering her lustily, was essentially a continuation of her introductory remarks and an amplification of the political and economic resolutions adopted at the plenary. She again slammed the BJP-led government for what she described as its "insatiable appetite for gratification" which had jeopardised national security.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

19 MAR 2001

Cong dilutes Panchmarhi stand, ready for coalition for coalition

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BANGALORE, March 17. - Going beyond the Panchmarhi stand, the Congress said today that it was open to entering into an electoral or coalition arrangement with secular parties on the basis of a mutual understanding.

The political resolution, moved by Mr Arjun Singh at the AICC plenary session here, said that at Panchmarhi the Congress had pledged to work towards restoring its primacy in national affairs. It said taking into account the present political scenario, the party would be prepared for coalition arrangements on the basis of agreed programmes but without compromising with its basic ideology.

The resolution said there was no question of the party arriving at any understanding with communal forces like the BJP or parties consorting with such forces.

The political priority was to forestall the BJP from pursuing its motive of pushing forward its communal agenda. The resolution said: "The Congress will play a pro-active role in restoring secular governance to the country."

With Miss Mamata Banerjee quitting the BJP-led NDA, the Congress appears to be open to an alliance with the Trinamul.

The Congress said it was prepared to work with non-Left secular forces to end the sway of the Left Front in West Bengal, something that would be music to Miss Banerjee.

The resolution said the struggle in West Bengal "is against the venality and violence characterising two decades of the Left Front rule. The Congress refuses to be the B-team of either communism or communalism" and welcomed the distancing of the Trinamul from the BJP.

Referring to the Tehelka expose, the resolution said the BJP's championship of honesty in government and patriotism stood exposed.

Instead of accepting its moral responsibility and accountability to the people the NDA government has been attempting to appease Parliament and people with token gestures.

Demanding the Vajpayee government's resignation, the party exhorted its activists to take the matter to the people.

■ More reports on page 10

THE STATESMAN

'NATIONAL SECURITY REDUCED TO COMMERCE'

Sonia asks Vajpayee to quit

By Javed M. Ansari

RAJIV GANDHI NAGAR (Bangalore), MARCH 17. The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today set the tone for the AICC session, which got under way this morning, with a focussed and hard-hitting attack on the BJP-led Government at the Centre.

Accusing it of reducing issues of national security to commerce, she said her party owed it to the nation, the jawans and the martyrs to demand the departure of the NDA Government on moral grounds.

Aware of the fast-changing political situation and conscious of not being overtaken by events, the Congress president chose not to make an elaborate speech, limiting herself to a short and pointed attack on the Government. Promising to make a detailed speech at the plenary session tomorrow, she gave ample indication of what was in store for the ruling combine.

Ms. Gandhi's speech, and the political resolution that was moved subsequently, virtually amounted to a declaration of war against the BJP-led Government, urging the rank and file to take the 'Defencegate' issue to the people and expose the corrupt Government. Speaking extempore and constantly switching between English and Hindi, Ms. Gandhi accused the BJP-led Government of having not only put the nation in an embarrassing position but also betraying it. "Yeh desh ke saath dhokha aur gaddari hai (This is a fraud against people and a betrayal of the country)," she said.

Reiterating her party's stand on the Prime Minister's offer of a judicial inquiry, she said she saw little point in it as Mr. Vajpayee and his Government had already given the culprits a clean chit. The expose had only confirmed what the Congress knew all along — that the Government was made of corrupt and opportunistic power seekers.

That the Congress would use the opportunity to make the Government squirm was evident once again in Ms. Gandhi's speech, when she said that those who tried to indulge in character assassination of Congress leaders had been caught neck-deep in corruption. She referred to the problems faced by her mother-in-law and "the manner in which they first character-assassinated my husband and your leader, Rajivji, and then created the situation for his assassination".



The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, addressing the AICC meeting in Bangalore on Saturday. — Photo: K. Gopinathan

The tone set by Ms. Gandhi in her speech was reflected in the day's proceedings, specially the political resolution which was moved by Mr. Arjun Singh. A whole section of the voluminous 31-page resolution was devoted to the current crisis.

It accused the Central Government of betraying the trust of the nation and undermining its security, called on the Prime Minister to own up his and his Government's moral responsibility and in the best traditions of democracy to tender his resignation.

The resolution gave ample indication of the party's strategy to pin down the BJP on the issue of national security, and thereby knock the bottom off its monopoly on the security plank. Describing the scandal as the worst-ever involving matters of national security, the party said it shared the anguish of the people at the rampant venality with which the establishment was riddled, extending to the echelons of the Defence Ministry and penetrating even the Prime Minister's Office.

Significantly, the party also chose to clarify its position on the question of alliances and coalition governments. It maintained that even at Pachmarhi it had spoken of the possibilities of entering into coalitions, but that position was misunderstood. Today it sought to clear the picture by stating that the party, in the changed circumstances, was prepared to enter into appropriate electoral or coalition arrangements with secular parties without compromising on its basic ideology.

The resolution was, however, categorical that there was no question of the party having any kind of understanding with communal forces or any party consorting with them. The party would play a pro-active role in restoring secular governance to the country.

Electoral strategy

Indicating its strategy for the coming Assembly elections, the resolution said in Tamil Nadu the priority was to dislodge the unholy BJP-DMK combine. There was

nothing in the history of the two parties to justify the unholy and unprincipled alliance.

Describing the DMK as both corrupt and nepotistic, it said the Jain Commission had confirmed the sins of its Government, and called on the voters to do the same. On Pondicherry, the resolution said the Government stood out for its record of good governance. It pointed out that with the TMC and Congress back together, the combine would again triumph.

In West Bengal, the struggle was against the venality and violence of the Left Front. The party welcomed the Trinamool Congress distancing itself from the NDA and showed its willingness to work with non-Left secular forces to end the sway of the Left Front. On Kerala, the resolution expressed the confidence that the UDF would defeat the Left Front and bring the State back to prosperity.

On the Ayodhya issue, the resolution made it clear that while the party was not opposed to building a Ram temple, it was against any such attempt by demolishing the Babri Masjid. It accused the Prime Minister for trying to explain the demolition as an expression of national sentiment.

It also attacked the Government for trying to saffronise education and culture in a bid to impose its agenda. "The cardinal principle of our policies was that education programs would be carried out in conformity with secular values."

On Jammu and Kashmir, the resolution noted that the Government's policy was marked by confusion and contradictions.

'BJP anti-poor'

It drew a distinction between the BJP and itself on economic issues, saying the latter's policies were anti-poor and anti-farmer. Debunking the claims that the BJP was following the policies of the Congress, the resolution pointed out that while the BJP's path was that of abject surrender, it stood for independence in economic policy and self-reliance. "Their policies make the rich richer at the expense of the poor. Their path mocks at our achievements, ours builds on the future."

The resolution was accepted by the AICC and will be endorsed by the plenary tomorrow.

Cong. targets disinvestment policy. Page 8

Probe pointless, Govt. should go: Cong.

By Javed M. Ansari

BANGALORE, MARCH 16. The Congress today rejected the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee's announcement of a judicial probe into the defence scam. "We do not consider the offer of a judicial probe an adequate response to the crisis," the party's chief spokesperson, Mr. Jaipal Reddy, said.

The extended Congress Working Committee (CWC), which met for over three hours this evening, was of the view that the probe was "pointless and a calculated exercise" to divert attention.

After the meeting, Mr. Reddy told presspersons that his party felt that the nation could not expect a proper inquiry, as the Prime Minister had already given the culprits a clean chit.

Expressing surprise at Mr. Vajpayee's announcement, he asked, "What is there to inquire. The president of his party has made a clear confession and the Samata Party chief has made a dilatory confession. What's left to inquire."

"How can the judge who is to conduct the inquiry expect cooperation from a Government that has already made up its mind on the subject." The judge would be helpless in getting out facts from the BJP-led Central Government.

Mr. Reddy said allegations against officials such as "Mr. N.K. Singh and Mr. Brajesh Mishra had been made by the Samata Party" and they would "continue to remain in office and doctor facts".

Significantly, the spokesperson reiterated that his party was not in

the toppling game but was seeking the Government's exit on ethical grounds as it had lost its moral authority. "We have never questioned the numerical majority of the Government, what we have questioned is its moral authority to continue in office."

Frontal attack planned

The Congress is all set to launch a frontal attack on the Central Government at its plenary session beginning here tomorrow. The party president's speech and the political resolution will focus heavily on the acts of omission and commission of the Vajpayee Government, "as well as analyse threadbare the unseemly spectacle unfolding in Delhi".

Cautious reaction

Though the crisis at the Centre has brought new life into the Congress workers, with many of them already having convinced themselves that their time is near, senior leaders are more cautious in their reactions. These leaders, including some party Chief Ministers and CWC members, believe the party should not involve itself in the toppling game, and must allow the Government to fall under the weight of its own contradictions. "We are not getting involved in the numbers, we believe the Government should go on grounds of morality," said the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Digvijay Singh.

However speaking to reporters earlier, the CWC member, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, said, "I will not be surprised if the NDA Government falls before the completion of the AICC plenary on Sunday. There is no other option before the Government but to resign."

Expressing happiness over the Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, from the Central Government, he, however, said Mr. George Fernandes had to

quit as Defence Minister because of the "pressure from the public, media and politicians".

The Congress would ideally like the BJP-led Government to limp along for some more time, at least till after the Assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam, West Bengal and Pondicherry, discredit itself totally and then bow out. Senior Congressmen feel the "expose" is a God-sent opportunity, and they should use it to finish off the BJP permanently.

The party strategy, at the moment, seems to be to give the Government a long rope to hang itself. They want the crisis to drag

on for as long as possible, so that the government wallows in its misery, allowing the Congress time to take the issue to the people, much in the manner the Opposition did in the case of the Bofors issue. The Congress leaders feel the way the various NDA constituents have begun going for each other's jugular, the Alliance will soon fall because of its own contradictions.

Some leaders believe that the crisis will engulf Mr. Vajpayee, once his Principal Secretary, Mr. Brajesh Mishra, and his son-in-law, Mr. Ranjan Bhattacharya, order the scanner.



The Congress President, Ms. Sonia Gandhi having a word with Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, at the CWC meet in Bangalore on Friday. — Photo: K. Gopinathan

THE HINDU

Cong waits & watches, focused on Bangalore plenary session

16/3
Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 15 MARCH

THE RELUCTANCE of the Congress to get into a proactive mode and raise the discomfort level of the NDA government has raised eyebrows in political circles about the strategy of the party in the wake of the Tehelka revelations and its after-shocks.

Despite convulsions in the NDA on Thursday evening — with Mamata Banerjee walking out of the NDA and defence minister George Fernandes tendering his resignation — the party seemed set to retire to Bangalore for its plenary session this weekend. Apart from reiterating the stand that nothing short of the exit of government was acceptable, Congress strategists did not seem to be cued with the fast-paced political developments.

The second disintegration in the NDA did come as heartening news for the party, which sat

back and watched contentedly as Mamata announced her exit from the NDA. However, even as Congress managers got into the act of warming its relations with the Trinamul, it knows of the complications involved.

AICC general secretary Kamal Nath spoke to Mamata Banerjee, obviously with the intention of keeping channels of communication open. However, the party may have to tread carefully on this route still as any attempt to cosy up to the Trinamul is certain to close doors to Left parties, especially the CPI(M). While the arithmetic is still in favour of the NDA for now, a further crack in its ranks is bound to have larger ramifications. In such a scenario, the political realignment would demand that the Congress join hands with Left parties.

The happiness in the Congress, in fact, was short-lived as Trinamul spokesman Sudip Bandhopadhyay told a news chan-

nel that Atal Behari Vajpayee "is the best Prime Minister this country has seen". He maintained that the Trinamul was not going to "join hands with the Congress in Bengal". On the other hand, Trinamul leader Pankaj Banerjee asserted in Kolkata that their tie-up with the BJP was "terminated".

Perhaps, due to these complications, the Congress seemed to stick to the option of waiting and watching for developments to unfold. The party on Thursday continued with its stand that the government would have to go, but refused to make any moves that could appear to facilitate their demand.

It said any JPC inquiry into the Tehelka revelations was unacceptable before the government put in its papers. Yet, neither did the party press for a no confidence motion nor was there any move to seek an appointment from the President to seek the ouster of the government.

The Economic Times

16 MAR 2001

Cong ready to sing Jaya Jaya with TMC

■ TMC to get 32 seats; Cong 15 ■ Both downplay PMK issue

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHENNAI, MARCH 10

AFTER days of dithering, the Congress has decided to ride piggyback on the Tamil Maanila Congress bandwagon and have an alliance with J. Jayalalitha's All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK).

Both the Congress and TMC, ironically a product of anti-Jaya sentiments in the Congress, tried to justify the deal saying that communalism was more dangerous than corruption.

Authorised by the Congress high command to negotiate the sharing of seats for the assembly elections in Tamil Nadu, TMC president G.K. Moopanar announced in Chennai that

he had signed an agreement with the AIADMK for allotment of 47 seats to the TMC-TNCC combine.

The Congress, however, conveniently skirted the Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) question, which was apparently causing concern for the party. Senior leader Ghulam Nabi Azad tried to evade questions on the issue and said there was no alliance in Pondicherry, the state where Jayalalitha has already offered chief ministership for half-term to the PMK. He, however, could not explain what the party will do about the presence of PMK, a vocal sup-

porter of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), in the alliance in Tamil Nadu.

Out of the 47 seats allotted to the Congress-TMC combine, the Congress will get 15. "If the Congress wants 15 seats, we will give them," Moopanar said. The Tiruchi Lok Sabha constituency was not allotted to the combine, he

gerous. "But we never said corruption was not an issue," he said.

Asked if the TMC stand was not opportunistic, Moopanar pointed out that the parties that vociferously advocated secularism in 1996 had joined the BJP combine. "I can list out the statements made by the DMK against the BJP."

POLL-TIME BONDING



added. Declining to comment on questions regarding Pondicherry, Moopanar said he was authorised to negotiate only for Tamil Nadu. "Ask Pondicherry Congress president Narayanasamy," he said. Pondicherry was a different state and would be dealt with later on, he said. When asked about former Union Minister P. Chidambaram's stand on this alliance, Moopanar retorted: "Ask Chidambaram." Chidambaram has been opposed to such an alliance. When asked how the TMC could join hands with the AIADMK, Moopanar said communalism was more dan-

ministerial candidate, Moopanar said he saw no such possibility. He said the chief ministerial candidate would be decided by the major party in an alliance. Asked how would he justify the presence of Congress in an alliance where PMK was a constituent, he said, "The Congress was going with me". When asked if he saw the merger of TMC-TNCC, he said it was too early to comment. When asked if TMC was not attempting to usher in 'corrupt' rule in the state, Moopanar shot back: "Did we not bring those who were corrupt to power earlier?"

He hoped Jayalalitha would not repeat the mistakes if elected to power again and pointed out instances where people had re-elected erring leaders. When media persons said no "convicted" leader had been re-elected, Moopanar kept quiet.

On the question of Jayalalitha contesting the elections, he said it would be decided by the court of law. Asked if he would be chosen to be the chief

INDIAN EXPRESS
INDIAN EXPRESS
11 MAR 2001

Seats on offer insufficient, says Cong.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 8. Intense three-way negotiations between the Congress, the TMC and the AIADMK are on to break the log-jam in Tamil Nadu. The informal group on Tamil Nadu affairs set up by the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, met this afternoon to take stock of the situation.

Though the leaders remained tight-lipped, the stumbling block appeared to be the issue of sharing power with the PMK and the insufficient number of seats on offer.

Briefing newsmen this afternoon, the party spokesperson, Mr. Jaipal Reddy, said, "Both the Congress and the TMC view the offer of 45 seats as insufficient," but hastened to add that talks were on between the principal al-

lies. He said, "Our reservations about the PMK remain."

The spokesperson appeared

hesitant to name a figure that would satisfy the Congress and parried questions on the issue. "What we consider a sufficient

number will be known when we agree to it." The Congress has been pressing its claim to have the first chance to form a government in Pondicherry, arguing that it was the dominant force there. However, what appeared to impede an agreement on the issue was the AIADMK chief, Ms. Jayalalitha's inability to concede the demand.

One of the solutions being considered is that the issue who should head government be kept open, and which ever party performs better in the election should get the first shot at government-formation.

In a related development, the senior TNCC leader, Mr. R. Anbarasu, met the Congress president this evening and urged her to clinch the issue and go ahead with the alliance with the AIADMK.

45, no more: Jayalalitha

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, MARCH 8. The AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, today clarified that there was no change in the offer of seats to the TMC-Congress combine.

The total number of seats stood at 45, she told *The Hindu* this morning. Denying any modification of her proposals to accommodate the TMC and the Congress in the AIADMK-led alliance, she said whatever she had stated on March 6 held good.

Under the March 6 package, the Congress and the TMC were free to float a separate front in Pondicherry while continuing in alliance with the AIADMK in Tamil Nadu. Alternatively, the Congress could wait for the second turn in office as part of an AIADMK-PMK alliance in Pondicherry. Ms. Jayalalitha had already ruled out any change in the agreement concluded with the PMK according to which the PMK would have the first turn in office in Pondicherry.

THE HINDU

9 MAR 2001

Three AICC members switch loyalty

Eight Cong MLAs join Trinamul

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 4. — Eight Congress MLAs and three AICC members today joined the Trinamul, accusing some central and state party leaders of entering into a secret understanding with the CPI-M to frustrate their move to ally with Miss Mamata Banerjee's party in the Assembly polls.

Those who left the Congress were: Mr Saugata Roy, Mr Tapas Roy, Mr Paresh Pal, Mr Anupam Sen, Mr Sibdas Mukherjee, Mr Debi Sankar Panda, Mr Tarak Banerjee, Mr Sital Sardar (all MLAs), Mr Sukhendu Sekhar Roy, Mr Pranab Basu and Mr Samir Kumar Roy (AICC members). They faxed their resignation letters to the Congress president, Mrs Sonia Gandhi earlier in the day.

Mr Makhantal Bangal, the lone MLA of Biplabi Bangla Congress, a Left Front partner, too joined the Trinamul today.

Welcoming the Congressmen to her party, Miss Banerjee said at a unity meeting that seven of the eight MLAs would contest as Trinamul candidates. The Trinamul already has a poll understanding with the JMM-S and the Kamtapur People's Party. The Trinamul candidates' list will be released in a few days, she said.

Pledging to give "a last fight" against the Left Front with the help of all anti-Left forces, she alleged that the Congress leadership had sold out the party to the CPI-M because it had refused to put up a common opposition candidate against the front.

With today's exodus, the effective strength of the Congress in the Assembly came down from 52 to 44. Earlier, 22 party MLAs had switched loyalty to the Trinamul despite

maintaining their old identity in the House.

Mr Saugata Roy said at a press conference that the decision to join the Trinamul was taken because the people had accepted Miss Banerjee as the only credible Opposition leader. The massive shift of the Congress votebank to the Trinamul reflects the people's demand and aspirations. "The polls are a great opportunity to throw the Left Front out, we must fight it together."

Mr Roy said they could not have fought against the LF as Congressmen because party leaders had been helping the CPI-M rule to continue. The Congress has been making false excuses on the pretext of a national compulsion that a tie-up with Trinamul is not possible because of its alliance with the BJP, he alleged.

Pranab reaction: The exodus from the party was not unexpected and it won't have a great impact on the Congress's performance in the polls, the PCC chief said. The Congress, unlike Trinamul, is national party and it isn't possible for it to forge an alliance with Miss Banerjee, Mr Pranab Mukherjee said.

'Nothing new': Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya described the Congress exodus as "a regular affair... It's happening every day. It's nothing new. It'll not hurt our poll prospects because the Left Front has faith in political morality."

The chief minister said in Siliguri today that the CPI-M had begun the process of regrouping in the Darjeeling hills. The CPI-M had split the hills when its rank and file broke away to form the Communist Party of Revolutionary Marxists on 9 September 1996.

■ More reports,
photograph on page 3

THE STATESMAN

2001

The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, waving to the gathering at a Kisan rally in New Delhi on Sunday — Photo: S. Arneja

NDA neglecting farmers: Sonia

By Our Special Correspondent HD 1

NEW DELHI, FEB. 25. The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today accused the BJP-led coalition at the Centre of being clueless about running the Government. "*Inko to sarkar chalane ki tameez hi nahi hai* (They don't have a clue about running a government)," she told a large farmers' rally here.

At the rally, attended by most of Congress Chief Ministers and senior leaders, speaker after speaker went hammer and tongs at the Government accusing it of pursuing anti-farmer policies. The big guns who spoke, including the Chief Ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan, Mr. Digvijay Singh and Mr. Ashok Gehlot, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, Mr. Balram Jhakar and Mr. Bhajan Lal, contrasted the farmers' relative prosperity during Congress rule and the "pitiable" conditions now, exemplified by the mass suicides. "This has never happened before," said Mr. Singh.

The Congress president lambasted the National Democratic Alliance Government of driving farmers to suicide through neglect and ill-advised policies. Her party would carry on the fight both inside and outside Parliament. "It is the duty of every Congressman to oppose the anti-farmer policies of this government."

267
Alleging that the Government had turned a blind eye to imports in this vital sector, Ms. Gandhi demanded heavy import duty on agricultural products. "Everything else can wait but not the farmers," she said and promised to wage a relentless battle to bring back the smile of farmers' faces.

Accusing the Government of misleading the farmers and the country, she recalled how the BJP, during the elections, had promised high remunerative prices for farm produce. "The situation is absolutely the opposite and the farmers' debts have increased."

Turning to the controversial sale of Government equity in the Bharat Aluminium Company (BALCO), she wanted to know why the profit-making company was being sold for a pittance. "What is the need to disinvest government equity in companies making a profit?"

Mr. Scindia said, "the BJP's slogan out of power was *BJP ka kehna saaf kisano kar karza maaf*, but in Government it had changed to *BJP ka kehna saaf kisan ka patta saaf* (They talk of writing off farmers' debts, but farmers themselves have been written off)". Mr. Singh said Congress workers would go from village to village and fight the battle for the farmers. Mr. Jhakar, referring to the spate of suicides, said, "*(Khaliyan ab samshan ghat bangya hai)* farmlands have been turned into burial grounds."

THE HINDU

26 FEB 2001

No decision yet on tie-up with AIADMK: Azad

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 24. The Congress today said it was not happy with the number of seats offered to it by the AIADMK but made it clear the party and the Tamil Maanila Congress would fight the coming elections in Tamil Nadu together.

The AICC general secretary, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, told reporters here that, "the only decision regarding Tamil Nadu is that the Congress and the TMC will fight the election together. Other things are yet to be decided." "The Congress was not happy with the number of seats offered by the AIADMK and also has a problem as far as the entry of the Pattali Makkal Katchi into the AIADMK-led front was concerned," Mr. Azad, in-charge of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, said. He was reacting to a question on the chances of the formation of a third front in Tamil Nadu outside the two led by the DMK and the AIADMK.

On the leadership issue in Kerala, Mr. Azad said the party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, would decide who should be the Congress Legislature Party leader and KPCC president after the elections. — PTI

BJP, LDF twin evil: Sonia

By Our Special Correspondent

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, FEB. 24. The Congress president, Ms. Sonia



The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, waves to the gathering at a UDF rally in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday. To her left are the Leader of the Opposition in the Kerala Assembly, Mr. A.K. Anthony, and the party general secretary, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad and to her right is the former Chief Minister, Mr. K. Karunakaran. — Photo: K.G. Santhosh

Gandhi, today said her party and the UDF would take on the LDF and the BJP in the coming Assembly elections in the State.

Addressing a rally here to mark the conclusion of the 22-day "Kerala Mochana Yatra" led by the Kerala Opposition Leader, Mr. A. K. Antony, the AICC president said the LDF had reduced the

State to a shambles, leaving it bankrupt at the end of its tenure, besides creating social and political turmoil. Her party would fight the BJP and the organisations which sustained it because they represented forces which distorted and destroyed the culture and traditions of the people, rejecting the notion of diversity which had

kept India united. She described the BJP and the LDF as the "twin evil", in contrast to the UDF leaders, including Mr. Antony, who trained their guns on the LDF, in particular the CPI(M). The farmers in the State, she said, were suffering from the crash in prices owing to the insensitive and anti-farmer policies of the NDA Government. She linked the attack on the NDA Government's anti-farmer policies with the Congress' imperative of fighting the BJP.

"We will confront the LDF and the BJP and give the people of Kerala what they deserve most: peace, stability, security, investment and growth. Freedom is near, liberation is near, and 'mukthi' is at hand. We are confident that the people will choose their future well. The UDF is strong, ready and united to take up the responsibility of the regeneration of Kerala," Ms. Gandhi said.

Mr. Antony said the rally was the apt occasion for taking a "pledge of Bheeshma" to oust the LDF Government from power through the ballot. But, the work would not be over unless concrete steps were taken to revive the development sectors through a clear agenda. The senior Congress leader, Mr. K. Karunakaran, urged the UDF workers to ensure that their votes made their way into the ballot boxes. All senior UDF leaders were on the dais with Ms. Gandhi, in a show of unity.

THE HINDU

25 FEB 2001

Cong., BJP in war of words 23/1

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 22. Hours after the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, formally announced in Parliament the Government's intention to extend the ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir by three more months, the BJP and the Congress were engaged in a war of words.

The BJP spokesperson, Mr. Vijay Kumar Malhotra, sought to use the protests of Congress MPs from Punjab to embarrass the main Opposition party. Led by Mr. Jagmeet Singh Barar, Congress MPs, Mr. Avtar Singh Bhandana, Ms. Santokh Chaudhry, and Ms. Praneet Kaur, raised a ruckus during the Prime Minister's statement in the Lok Sabha contesting his claims that the ceasefire had paid rich dividends as far as the ground situation in the State was concerned. The MPs pointedly referred to the killing of the Sikhs and Gujjars and demanded greater security for them.

However, Mr. Malhotra in his briefing sought to put the Congress in the dock by claiming that the main Opposition party was adopting a posture in the House and different from the one it had taken at yesterday's all-party meeting. "I cannot understand why the Congress MPs were opposing the ceasefire in the House," he wondered.

Lauding the Prime Minister for his initiative, Mr. Malhotra pointed out that Mr. Vajpayee had warned both Pakistan and the militants not to test the Government's patience. He also said the decision to extend the ceasefire was taken in response to the desire of the people of Jammu and Kashmir and not under pressure from anybody.

The Congress, on the other hand, made it clear that it had decided to support the extension because it believed in giving the "Government a fair opportunity". The deputy leader of the party, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, demanded a discussion in the House on the issue while the party spokesperson, Mr. Jaipal Reddy, qualified the party's decision to extend support to the move. "The ceasefire was a considered assessment of the Government" and his party had gone along. He pointed out that the "Government had all the facts available with it" and yesterday's briefing "was in favour of extending ceasefire".

THE HINDU

DEHIHINDU

23 FEB 2001

Cong.-AIADMK talks deadlocked

By Suresh Nambath

CHENNAI, FEB. 19. After an intense, hour-long meeting today, the talks between the AIADMK general secretary, Ms. Jayalalitha, and the two Congress emissaries, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee and Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, appeared heading for a stalemate.

According to sources, the AIADMK is adopting a tough stand. Only about 35 seats are on offer for the Tamil Maanila Congress and the Congress together. Apart from this, the Tiruchirappalli Lok Sabha constituency, where a bye-election is due, could go to the Congress. Ms. Jayalalitha appears to have taken into account the possibility of a split in the TMC in the event of an alliance with the AIADMK. Also, in her eyes, the TMC, which negotiated with the

DMK simultaneously, became less "dependable" as an ally.

Just as Mr. Mukherjee declined to say he was "happy" or "unhappy" with the discussions, Mr. Azad refused to describe the talks as "fruitful" or "fruitless". At the end of the meeting, Mr. Mukherjee would only say that he would report to the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, the details of the negotiations with Ms. Jayalalitha. And the Congress Working Committee would take a final decision. "We had discussions with Ms. Jayalalitha. We shared our perceptions of an alliance. She shared her perceptions of an alliance in all its aspects," Mr. Mukherjee told reporters. Asked if there was any progress in the talks, the Congress leader said: "I am not sitting on any value judgment. It is a hard,

factual position." On the crucial question of leading the front in Pondicherry, Mr. Mukherjee said the discussions covered the possibility of an alliance in both Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry.

Mr. Azad said he and Mr. Mukherjee had apprised Ms. Jayalalitha of the Congress "compulsions". "We discussed the PMK. She stated her position." "The emissaries wanted to know of the nature of the alliance that the AIADMK had entered into with the PMK and the electoral arrangement between the two parties in Pondicherry.

Mr. Mukherjee and Mr. Azad, who arrived in the city Sunday night, had two rounds of discussions with the TMC president, Mr. G.K. Moopanar — one before and the other after the meeting with Ms. Jayalalitha.

THE HINDU

20 FEB 2001

Pranab, Azad to meet Jayalalitha

By Javed M Ansari

NEW DELHI FEB 16. The Congress president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, today said she would send the CWC members, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee and Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad as her emissaries to confer with the AIADMK chief, Ms. Jayalalitha. Speaking to newsmen over dinner, Mrs. Gandhi said though the AIADMK continued to be an ally as of now "the party had certain concerns" which had to be taken care of.

Mrs. Gandhi mingled freely with the media, confidently dealing with a volley of questions on issues ranging from the future of the alliance with Ms. Jayalalitha, the grand alliance against the CPI(M) in West Bengal, parliamentary tactics, the quake in Gujarat to Priyanka's baby.

No truck with BJP in Bengal

Predictably, most of the questions related to the position her party would adopt in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, and the Congress president was concise in her articulation. On West Bengal, she was categorical that the party "would have absolutely nothing to do with the BJP directly or indirectly." She was also keen on

dispelling the impression that a majority of her MLAs in the State favored the idea of a 'mahajot' or a grand alliance. "There are different views in the party, we have been talking to them and trying to get their impressions of the issue and also a feel of ground realities, but those things, be as they may, one thing is clear: the Congress party will not have anything to do with the BJP," she said. Having returned just a few days back from an extensive tour of quake hit Gujarat, the Congress president said some of things that she had seen there and was told about were an eye opener. She recalled how while visiting some villages near Bhuj, people belonging to the minority community had complained to her of how they were being denied relief on communal grounds.

She said she was shocked to learn that people were being forced to raise slogans in favor of a particular religion before being given relief. The Congress president said she would be taking up these issues with the Prime Minister at the meeting of the Disaster committee. "This is of great concern to us, we should never allow such things to come in the way of the relief and reha-

ilitation efforts," she said. Mrs. Gandhi said there was a difference in the manner in which the Government had reacted at the time of the cyclone in Orissa and its reaction to Gujarat. She pointed out that "the government has given a blank cheque to Gujarat but this was not the case in Orissa."

On the Budget session of Parliament, Mrs. Gandhi said her party had shortlisted several issues which were of concern to the people. "We will take them up vigorously," she said. Asked if she planned to convene a meeting of the leaders of opposition to formulate a joint strategy for the session, Mrs. Gandhi said "I have been meeting leaders of different political parties from time and plan to continue doing so." Asked pointedly if she had also been interacting with Mr. Sharad Pawar she was quick to reply, "I haven't seen the NCP leader lately."

On the issue of the reprieve granted by the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court to BJP Ministers in the Babri Masjid case, Mrs. Gandhi said that the "U.P. Government must issue a fresh notification at the earliest."

THE HINDU

17 FEB 2001

Sonia rejects mahajot; quit hint by Saugata

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 16. — The rebel team, led by Mr Saugata Roy, virtually threatened to leave the Congress today after Mrs Sonia Gandhi ruled out an alliance with the Trinamul Congress as long as it remains in the NDA.

"We have national compulsions," Mrs Sonia Gandhi told the five Congress leaders from West Bengal who met her today, explaining why she would not join Miss Mamata Banerjee's party.

The rebel leaders wondered what the AICC president meant by "national compulsion". "Does she mean the compulsion of BJP or that of the CPI-M?" asked one. It is probably the CPI-M, for the party has 33 MPs in the Lok Sabha.

Asked if they would leave the Congress if the central leadership decides against a

tie-up with Trinamul, they said it remains a "possibility".

But their official statement said: "Dialogue is on with West Bengal leaders to evolve a strategy for best results in West Bengal against the Left Front." The AICC general secretary in charge of West Bengal, Mr Kamal Nath, endorsed the statement.

The rebel leaders later met Miss Banerjee and briefed her on the outcome of their talks with Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

Mr Saugata Roy said: "The Congress has no option in West Bengal but to join the front led by Miss Banerjee." He said the five-member delegation — including MLAs, Mr Tapas Ray and Mr S K Sardar — had explained this to Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

Mr Roy tried to reason with the leadership that seat adjustments with Miss Banerjee would not mean a direct alli-

ance between the Congress and the BJP. But Mrs Sonia Gandhi rejected the proposition.

The central leadership's argument: "Mr Roy does not have more than six MLAs with him who could leave the party." The anti-mahajot leaders were reportedly able to wean away some 12 of the 22 MLAs willing to quit the party.

But Mr Roy said: "It is not the question of a group or of number, it is a matter of hard reality. Congress will get a thrashing when it goes to the people saying the party is opposed to the Left Front as well as the Trinamul-led front."

"A situation may arise when Congressmen would be free to choose an independent course for a one-on-one fight with the Left Front in the Assembly elections," he said.

Mr Roy said the signals from

■ See MAHAJOT: page 8

MAHAJOT:

(Continued from page 1)

the central and PCC leadership indicate that the Congress wants to contest the polls on its own. "This is a hopeless proposition," he said.

Surprisingly, WBPC president, Mr Pranab Mukherjee, was not invited to join Mr Kamal Nath when the rebel leaders met Mrs Sonia Gandhi. Later, she met Mr Mukherjee and Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury and asked the latter to prevent Mr Roy from leaving the party.

THE STATESMAN

17 FEB 2001

Pranab keeps PCC flock together

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, February 14

B. A. Ghani Khan Chowdhury has decided to stay on in the Congress. What CPM apparatchiks achieved with Subhas Chakrabarty, PCC chief Pranab Mukherjee has done with his veteran colleague. And the man with egg on his face is Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, State Congress squire and party Chief Whip in the Lok Sabha.

When Ghani Khan Chowdhury indicated last week that he would float a new party and tie up with the Trinamool Congress, very few knew that the idea was Pranab's. It was Das Munshi who had egged the grand old man of the West Bengal Congress to go for

the Mahajot and split the Congress.

But even as Saugata Roy — and his loyalists — were making threatening noises about crossing over to the Trinamool in the Assembly lobby and their mentor Das Munshi was peddling the Congress' "Mahajot stand", a silent coup was taking place in their backyard. To Das Munshi's horror, the man he had wanted to use to

split the party was won over by PCC chief Pranab Mukherjee and State Congress strongman Somen Mitra. Ghani, happy after being retained as permanent invitee to the Congress Working Committee and confident of winning tickets for his nominees in Malda district, did a flip-flop on Das Munshi. He

is reported to have told Das Munshi: "I am too old to launch a new party at this age. Why don't you do it? People will follow you."

Das Munshi is yet to get over the shock. Das Munshi's exclusion from the CWC and rumours that he would be removed as party Chief Whip in the Lok Sabha after

Ghani Shelves Quit Plans

the budget session, were among the reasons for Ghani's volte face, insiders said. "Ghani has come to know that the names of Santosh Mohan Dev, Suresh Kalmadi and Prithviraj Chauhan are making the rounds as Das Munshi's replacements," said a senior Congress leader. "Ghani's key aides, CLP

Chief Whip Abdul Mannan and MLA Shankar Singh too have urged him to shelve his plans.

Sard Somen Mitra, a Ghani protégé who is reported to have settled the deal: "Barkata will not leave the Congress. How can a person who has served the party since the days of Indira Gandhi be expected to leave the Congress? Moreover, Kamal Nath's arrival as general secretary in charge of Bengal is also good news for him because he was unhappy with Prabha Rau."

Pranab Mukherjee was triumphant. "I have spoken with Barkata. There is no problem. He is a Congressman to the hilt and loyal to Sonia Gandhi," the State Congress chief told The Hindustan Times today. He had harsh words

for Saugata Roy and his colleagues who have already decided to switch to the Trinamool, and will meet Sonia Gandhi tomorrow.

"These renegades will not be pardoned by the voters. Mamata Banerjee's popularity notwithstanding," Mukherjee said.

"These Congressmen are so naive that they did not realise that Mamata would have ultimately come around and the Congress would have been in a bargaining position without compromising on its ideology. After all, the stakes are the highest for her — it is she who wants to become Chief Minister. But they were in a hurry. But nevertheless, there is still time for an understanding with Mamata. The options are open."

Cong. emissary for Chennai soon

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 13. A Congress emissary will travel to Chennai in the next few days, as planned. The party has taken note of the weekend "deadline" set by the AIADMK, and senior Congress leaders say they will act "in due course of time". The visit, party sources however clarify, has nothing to do with the "deadline" set by Ms. Jayalalitha.

Having decided to work in tandem with the TMC, the Congress is waiting for the meeting of the TMC executive committee to get over before the two parties make their next move. The PMK issue remains a serious problem for both parties and unless it is sorted out, "anything is possible", says a senior Congress leader. Both parties, insist sources, have not foreclosed any of the options, including a third front or a "DMK-TMC-Congress minus the BJP" tie-up as well.

Sources say the Congress has been receiving feelers from parties such as the Dalit Panthers party, the New Justice Party, the Tamil Desam Party and other smaller outfits to form a third front and take on both the Dravidian parties. The votaries of such an alliance argue that though the combination may not be in a position to form a government on its own, the number of seats it wins could determine who eventually forms the government.

Despite its indifferent posture, it is clear the Congress will have to make up its mind sooner rather than later.

THE HINDU

14 FEB 2001

Shinde dropped, Kamal Nath included in CWC

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, FEB. 12. In a major reshuffle, the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, today dropped three Congress Working Committee (CWC) members while bringing in a new chief spokesperson and constituting a 12-member Central Election Committee (CEC), besides changing the AICC office-bearers.

The all-important CWC saw the exit of two general secretaries, Mr. Sushil Kumar Shinde and Mrs. Prabha Rao, and the powerful Andhra Pradesh leader, Mr. K. Vijaybhaskara Reddy. The new entrants include the Lok Sabha member, Mr. Kamal Nath; the former Youth Congress chief, Mr. Mukul Wasnik; relatively unknown Ms. Sarojini Pulla Reddy; the former UPCC chief, Mr. Mahavir Prasad; the former Union Minister, Mr. L.P. Shashi. The party will now have a new spokesperson in Mr. Jaipal Reddy.

The CEA chairman, Mr. Ram Niwas Mirdha, Mr. Sumil Dutt, Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyer, Lok Sabha member, and the former Union Ministers, Mr. Chama Mohan, Mr. Bhajan Lal, Mr. Madhavsinh Solanki and Mr. P.M. Saweed are special invitees to the CWC, in addition to all party Chief Ministers. The permanent invitees, Mr. A.B.A. Ghani Khan Chaudhary, Mr. K. Karunakaran and Mr. S.C. Jamar are being retained.

Though the Congress president retained a majority of the old guards in the CWC, she took care to infuse fresh blood and bridge the generation gap, dubbing youngsters Mr. Kamal Nath and Mr. Wasnik. The 23-member

CWC now has five women, including Ms. Gandhi and six members from the minority communities, besides three SCs and STs. Though the number of women falls short of the required 33 per cent, Ms. Gandhi has left three vacancies unfilled, leaving the option open for inducting some more later.

Those retained include Mr. Ahmad Patel, Mr. A.K. Antony, Mrs. Ambika Soni, Mr. Arjun Singh, Mr. Chulam Nabi Azad, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Mrs. Mohsina Kidwai, Ms. Motamma, Mr. Motilal Vora, Mr. K. Nayyar Singh, Mr. N.D. Tiwari, Mr. Oscar Fernandes, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee and Mr. R.K. Dhawan.

Today's reshuffle, which comes two months after Ms. Gandhi was elected party president, points to an exhaustive reorganisational exercise. According to Article XIX of the party's constitution, 11 of the 23 CWC members have to be elected by the AICC and the remaining nominated by the president. However, almost a month ago, the AICC authorised Ms. Gandhi to nominate all 23 members.

Though Ms. Gandhi took a month to undertake the reshuffle, the attempt seems to be on making it broad-based and representative. She has tried to do a balancing act by accommodating Mr. Reddy, Mrs. Rao and Mr. Shinde in the CEC.

The all-powerful, 12-member CEC headed by Ms. Gandhi includes most of the big names. A significant inclusion is that of the family loyalist, Mr. M.J. Pothar. The other members are Mr. Antony, Mrs. Ambika Soni, Mr. Arjun Singh, the former Haryana PCC chief, Mr. Birendra Singh, Mr. Mahavir Prasad, Mrs. Margaret Alva, Mr. Mukherjee and the former

Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Ram Nares Yadav.

Two new general secretaries and six secretaries have also been inducted. Mrs. Ambika Soni will head the media department, in addition to looking after Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Karnataka and the Congress president's office. Mr. Azad will continue to look after Tamil Nadu, in addition to Kerala, Andaman & Nicobar, Lakshadweep, Pondicherry, Uttar Pradesh and Uttaranchal.

Mr. Kamal Nath will look after Delhi and West Bengal, in addition to Assam, while Mr. Mahavir Prasad will look after Jharkhand and Bihar. Mr. Wasnik and Mr. Sumil Dutt have been given independent charge of the Mahila Congress and the Youth Congress respectively, while Mr. Aiyer has been put in charge of the Northeast.

The new AICC secretaries include Mr. Subodh Kant Sahay, the former APCC chief, Mr. Hanumantha Rao, the Bihar PCC chief, Mr. Chandan Bagchi, Mr. B. Kalia and Ms. Sudha Joshi. The former Union Minister, Ms. Selja, has been retained as one of the secretaries.

Dr. Singh, Mr. Natwar Singh and Mrs. Ambika Soni will continue as head of the departments of economic affairs, foreign affairs and media. While the Minorities, OBCs, SC/ST and the Vichar Vibhag departments will be headed by Mr. A.R. Antulay, Mr. P. Shiv Shankar, and Mr. G. Venkateswamy and Mr. Ashwani Kumar respectively, Mr. Jai Ram Bhamish has been retained as the economic affairs secretary, while Mr. Avtar Singh Bhadana is the new secretary of the OBC department.

Sonia reshuffles Cong cards but avoids toppling the pile

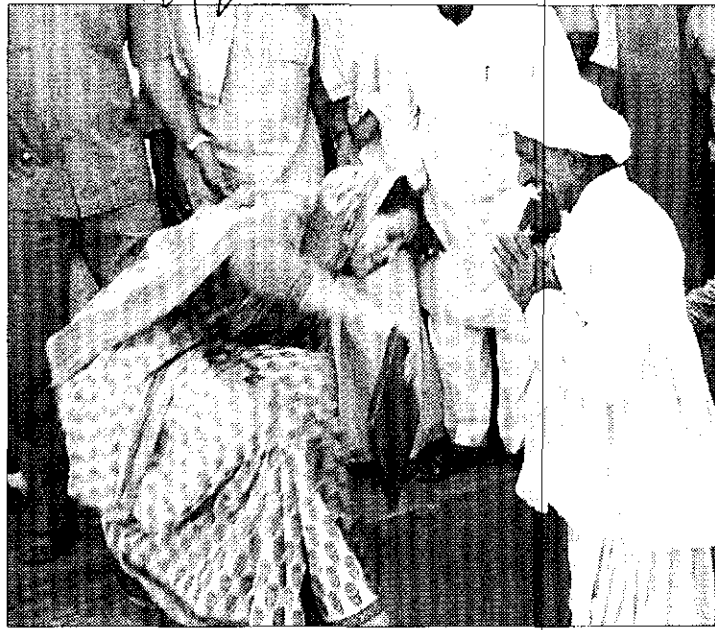
Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 12 FEBRUARY

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Sonia Gandhi on Monday finally effected the much-awaited reshuffle in the top echelons of the party including the CWC and the AICC hierarchy, with the most striking feature being a clear effort on her part to be as accommodative as possible.

Along expected lines, Ms Gandhi retained a majority of the members in the CWC proving that she, all along, had few options despite a lot of talk earlier about her "own dream team" following her resounding victory as party president. Her decision to prefer a virtual 'status quo' in the CWC and decide against upsetting the applecart as far as senior leaders were concerned, also means that she has continued to disregard the allegations of a coterie surrounding her even if they stick.

Three members were dropped from the existing apex decision making body — Vijay Bhaskara L Reddy, Sushil Kumar Shinde and Prabha Rau. The five brought in as replacements are Kamal Nath, Mahavir Prasad, Mukul Wasnik, Sarojini Pulla Reddy and L.P. Sahi. Wasnik, a Dalit leader from Maharashtra is the only real youth representative in the CWC. The inclusion of Prasad, a Dalit from Uttar Pradesh and Sahi, from Bihar, has obviously been done keeping the caste equations in mind. Pulla Reddy, on the other hand, seems to be a non-entity, whom Sonia Gandhi has brought in from the cold as an addition to the Mottamas and Lakshmi Devis.

However, to offset charges that the CWC is virtually the same as well as prevent sulking and indirect protestations, Ms Gandhi has added five new faces as special invitees including Mani Shankar Aiyar, Bhajan Lal, Chintamohan, Ram Niwas Mirdha and Sunil Dutt.



TAKING HURDLES IN HER STRIDE: Sonia scales a steep stair at a relief camp in Dhanoti village on Monday. — PTI

The surprising inclusion has been neo-convert Jaipal Reddy, who has been named chief spokesperson and will now be the public face of the party. It was obvious that the articulation skills of the former United Front leader overrode other reservations that the party might have felt otherwise.

The most worthwhile appointments, according to party circles, are those of the general secretaries. There is a unanimous feeling that Ms Gandhi had put considerable thought while reshuffling AICC secretariat. The six general secretaries — Ambika Soni, Ghulam Nabi Azad, Kamal Nath, Mahavir Prasad, Mohsina Kidwai and Oscar Fernandes besides treasurer Motilal Vora — not only have a reputation to be workaholics but are also known to be extremely accessible. Mr Azad has been handed the charge of crucial states like Uttar Pradesh, Uttaranchal besides Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Pondicherry which go to polls

soon. Kamal Nath, on the other hand, has been entrusted West Bengal and Assam besides Orissa, Goa and Delhi. The move to put the Youth Congress under film star Sunil Dutt's direct charge too is expected to make some difference to the party's visibility during campaigns and rallies.

That Ms Gandhi had been under some strain to do a delicate balancing act and avoid rubbing many shoulders the wrong way was evident by her move to announce various appointments including the CWC, AICC general secretaries and different department heads, in one go rather than in a piecemeal manner.

As many as 140 appointments were made clearly illustrating that Ms Gandhi, along with her advisors, had gone into the exercise in detail for a considerable period of time. Today's timing for announcing the changes was also significant, as Ms Gandhi left for Gujarat on a three-day tour.

The Economic Times

13 FEB 2001

SONIA MEETS MOOPANAR; THIRD FRONT IDEA RECEDES

Cong., TMC to work in tandem

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, FEB. 9. The Congress leadership today continued efforts at finding a way out of the logjam in Tamil Nadu. The party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, held extensive consultations, first with the leaders of the TNCC, and later with Tamil Maanila Congress chief, Mr. G. K. Moopanar, and the CPI(M) politburo member, Mr. Sitaram Yechury.

Two broad choices appear to have crystallised. First, the "third front" option for the party would be a non-starter. And, second, the Congress-TMC combine should try to swim or sink together, especially in bargaining with the AIADMK.

There was a flurry of activity soon after Mr. Moopanar's arrival here this afternoon. The first to call on him was Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, Congress general secretary in-charge of Tamil

Nadu. The TMC chief also met the CPI(M) general secretary, Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, before turning up at 10, Janpath for the much-awaited meeting with Ms. Gandhi.

Most of the TNCC leaders barring Mr. Anbarasu and Dr. Rajeswaran, during the meeting with the Congress president, are said to have reiterated their preference for a third front and their strong feelings about the PMK. The AIADMK leadership seems to have prevailed on them to tone down their rhetoric, and leave the issue to the party president. Reflective of the leadership's concern of treading with caution was the care Mr. Azad took in emphasising that "till today the alliance with the AIADMK remains". Though he admitted that the party had serious reservations about the PMK, a final decision would only be taken after consulting "the AIADMK and the TMC".

The third front option espoused fiercely till yesterday by the TNCC also appeared to have receded, following the not-so-enthusiastic response of the TMC, the Left and the Muslim League.

Emerging from his meeting with the Congress president, Mr. Moopanar was characteristically cryptic and said a decision would be taken after the meeting of his party's national executive on February 12. It is, however, reliably learnt that the two parties decided to stick together and act in tandem.

The Left parties also helped nudge the Congress leadership away from a precipitate act. Both Mr. Surjeet in his meeting with Mr. Moopanar, and Mr. Yechury, during his meeting with Ms. Gandhi, are believed to have conveyed the view that third front option was an exercise in electoral futility.

THE HINDU
FEB 9 2001

Bengal Cong. MLAs' ultimatum to Sonia

By Our Special Correspondent

KOLKATA, FEB. 7. The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, has a week's time to give the go-ahead to her party in West Bengal for forming a mahajot or grand alliance, in the coming Assembly elections, with the Trinamool Congress headed by the Railway Minister, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, who has an ally in the Bharatiya Janata Party — the Congress' ideological foe.

At least 19 Congress legislators today virtually threatened to quit the party and cross over to the Trinamool, saying the high command would do well to realise the ground realities in the communist-ruled State and allow the party to go ahead with strategies for a grand alliance without bothering about the BJP.

"We should not allow our understandable antipathy for the BJP to stand in the way of an adjustment (with the Trinamool). So, there could be a one-to-one fight for all the seats," Mr. Saugata Roy, West Bengal Congress vice-president, said in a letter to Ms. Gandhi.

Mr. Roy, a close associate of Mr. P. R. Das Munshi, MP, also said it should not take more than a week for the high command to decide on the issue.

Only last month did Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, president of the State unit, Mr. Das Munshi and Mr. A. B. A. Ghani Khan Choudhury, also a parliamentarian, meet Ms. Banerjee at her South Kolkata residence and discuss the mahajot concept. The leaders reportedly

told Ms. Banerjee that a mahajot was the only way to oust the communists. Predictably, Mr. Mukherjee's and Mr. Das Munshi's arguments raised many eyebrows as the leaders were known to have held strong views against the mahajot concept, saying a secular party like the Congress could not dream of joining forces with the Trinamool which had allied with the BJP just for electoral gains.

Ms. Gandhi also had said time and again that she would not allow the Congress in West Bengal to do business with Ms. Banerjee as long as she collaborated with the BJP.

The pro-mahajot MLAs suggested that if the high command refused to shift its stand, an exodus to the Trinamool would continue in the days ahead. According to them, the Congress would have seat adjustments with the Trinamool and not with the BJP.

According to analysts, Ms. Banerjee, realising that Mr. Subhash Chakraborty, State Transport Minister and leader of the rebels within the CPI(M) is having second thoughts on quitting the party, is now examining the option of having the Congress by her side. Otherwise, ousting the communists from power would remain a dream.

PTI reports:

'Impose President's rule'

The Trinamool Congress today reiterated its demand for imposition of President's rule in the State alleging deterioration of law and order.

Gunman shot at outside White House

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, FEB. 7. Police shot and wounded a gunman outside the White House today. The Secret Service, after preliminary investigations, maintained that he did not fire from his weapon, but eye-witnesses said two to three rounds were fired by him. The President, Mr. George W Bush, was inside the White House and was informed of the situation.

The gunman was seen wheeled into the George Washington University Hospital with an injury on a leg. The Secret Service said he was a 47-year-old White man and was acting alone. It was not clear whether it was an act of attempted suicide by the gunman.

According to one version, visitors and passers-by alerted the law enforcement agencies in and around the White House of a person with a weapon. Secret Service Agents rushed to the South lawns, approached the man and asked him to hand over his weapon. A brief exchange of words was said to have followed when the gunman reportedly said he wished to kill himself. The Secret Service men then swung into action, fired one shot and injured the man in a leg. At no time was the suspect inside the White House premises, it was said.

The city police closed the streets around the White House, but the Secret Service, after a security sweep, cleared the area. "The President was never in any danger," the White House Press Secretary, Mr. Ari Fleischer, said.

It was said that the Vice President, Mr. Richard Cheney, was also in the White House and left later.

THE HINDU

- 8 FEB 2001

HT-13 Wrong move

IF THERE is a lesson to be learnt from the twists and turns of Tamil Nadu politics, it is this: there are no long-term friends and enemies; there are not even long-term interests and loyalties. On no subject is this more apparent than in attitudes to the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). J. Jayalalitha has always told us that she was and is opposed to the LTTE while seeking to portray her opponents in the DMK as being soft on the murderous outfit. Similarly, the Congress has claimed that it will never forgive the LTTE for its role in the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. In 1997, the Congress withdrew support to Inder Gujral's United Front Government on the grounds that it included the DMK which, the interim report of the Jain Commission suggested, had links with the LTTE.

Given that background, the events of the last few months are deeply mystifying. The Pattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) has left the ruling NDA coalition at the Centre, broken with the DMK in Tamil Nadu and decided that it will align with the AIADMK. At the same time, the Congress has also suggested that it will join the AIADMK-led front. This means that both Ms Jayalalitha and Sonia Gandhi have agreed to fight the forthcoming Assembly election in Tamil Nadu as part of a grouping that includes the PMK.

Now, consider the PMK's other loyalties. It has made no secret of its support to the LTTE and to the notion of a Tamil Eelam. In 1992, Ms Jayalalitha told the Tamil Nadu Assembly that Dr Ramadoss, the leader of the PMK, continued to support the LTTE — despite that organisation's role in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination. In September 1992, PMK workers took out a rally in Madras at which they not only carried large pictures of LTTE leader V. Pirabhakaran but also photos of Dhanu, the suicide bomber who murdered Rajiv Gandhi. Later that same month, Ms Jayalalitha even wrote to the Centre demanding a ban on the PMK.

Ms Jayalalitha has slightly less demanding standards for entering into alliances than many others. So, she was quite willing to enter into an alliance with the same PMK that she had wanted banned in 1992 a mere six years later, in 1998. Though that alliance later turned sour, she can at least claim that she is constant in her inconsistency. Sadly, no such alibi is available to Sonia Gandhi. How can the Congress possibly justify joining an alliance that includes unrepentant supporters of the murderers of Rajiv Gandhi?

It is not too late. Mrs Gandhi still has time to reconfigure her options in Tamil Nadu.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 8 FEB. 2001

Congress in a dilemma

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 8. — The Congress central leadership is confused about whether the party should ally itself with Miss Mamata Banerjee in West Bengal and Miss Jayalalitha in Tamil Nadu.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi today met WBPCC chief Mr Pranab Mukherjee. They couldn't decide how to react to a letter from 18 party MLAs, asking for a mahajot with the Trinamul Congress and the BJP.

Mr Mukherjee said the party's stand on the mahajot had changed. "We have already made it clear that no alliance with the Trinamul Congress is possible as long as Miss Banerjee is in the company of the BJP," he said.

In Tamil Nadu, the leadership faces a new problem with the

PMK joining hands with the AIADMK. The Congress discounted corruption cases against Miss Jayalalitha as it had earlier ignored those against Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav. It was going along with the AIADMK to contest the Assembly polls in Tamil Nadu. Now with the PMK in the alliance, a new challenge has been thrown to Mrs Sonia Gandhi. Mr Ramadoss and his party are known as sympathisers of the LTTE. The leadership would find it hard to accept this since the LTTE was behind Rajiv Gandhi's assassination.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi has called the Tamil Nadu leaders, including the PCC chief, Mr EP Elangovan, and Mr K Thankgobalu. The two leaders met the AICC general secretary, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, today. The Tamil Nadu leaders are reluc-



Miss Mamata Banerjee

tant to quit the alliance just because the PMK has joined it. They believe that Miss Jayalalitha's chances of returning to power are strong.

The state leaders may meet the Congress president tomorrow to brief the leadership on the changing political equations in Tamil Nadu.

THE STATESMAN

9 FEB 2001

HIGH COMMAND CAUTIOUS, AWAITS MOOPANAR MOVE

TNCC leaders for third front

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, FEB. 8. Senior All-India Congress Committee (AICC) leaders today went into a huddle with Tamil Nadu Congress Committee (TNCC) representatives to formulate a cogent response to the situation arising out of the Paattali Makkal Katchi (PMK) joining the AIADMK-led alliance. While the overwhelming opinion among the TNCC leaders was in favour of the party chalking its own course, the Congress central leadership was for a more cautious approach.

The Congress general secretary in charge of the State, Mr. Ghulam Nabi Azad, said his party would like to talk to the allies, the AIADMK and the TMC, before taking a final decision.

Despite the categorical position of the TNCC leaders, the task before the central leadership is complex. It has to take a decision without overlooking the sentiments of the State unit and in keeping with its objectives at the national level. The TNCC leaders are expected to meet the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, tomorrow.

The party seems to have decided to keep its options open for now. The Central and State leaders appear to have differing perceptions of the PMK. The Tamil Nadu leaders, in their meeting with Mr. Azad and the party spokesperson, Mr. Anil Shastri, made it clear that the PMK was anathema to them. They seemed to favour a third front with the TMC, the CPI and the Muslim League.

The Central leadership appears disinclined to do anything that will precipitate matters.

Despite its long-stated reservations about the PMK, it wants to move cautiously — ascertain the nature of the PMK-AIADMK alliance, whether the PMK has offered outside support, the number of seats promised to the PMK, whether these seats would be from the allies' quota or from the AIADMK's, and whether any commitment has been made on the question of Pondicherry (which the Congress says is "absolutely non-negotiable").

The Congress' course of action will, to a large extent, be determined by the position taken by TMC leader, Mr. G.K. Moopanar. A clear picture will only emerge after his talks with Ms. Gandhi tomorrow. The viability of the third front depends on the TMC being part of it and, therefore, the Central leadership wants to know where he stands before committing itself.

Not wooing AIADMK, says BJP

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, FEB. 8. While asserting that there was no question of deserting the DMK or trying to woo the AIADMK, the BJP noted today, almost with satisfaction, that far from getting a boost with the entry of the Paattali Makkal Katchi (PMK), the AIADMK-led camp was in disarray.

"The Tamil Maanila Congress and the Congress may now have second thoughts on remaining in a front of which the PMK is a part,

and as for the CPI(M), we do not know where it will go," the BJP spokesperson, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi, said. There was "every possibility" of a third front emerging in Tamil Nadu. This depended on what the TMC decided to do, he said.

On the possibility of the BJP trying to bring the AIADMK back to the NDA fold, Mr. Krishnamurthi said: "it is out of the question, out of our consideration, and beyond the realm of imagination."

He said that in 1998, the AIADMK leader, Ms. Jayalalitha, had consulted the parties in her front before taking the BJP on board, but this time she did not bother to consult her probable allies — the TMC and the Congress — before deciding to admit the PMK.

"Did Ms. Jayalalitha want to present her other allies with a *fait accompli*? Was she prepared to sacrifice the TMC and the Congress and present them with a 'take-it-or-leave-it' choice? The AIADMK has not played fair with them," he said.

The BJP leader indicated that it would "welcome" a TMC decision to go back to its former ally, the DMK. But, the party was not willing to go into any details on sharing of seats in that eventuality.

The TMC hoped to contest at least 50 to 60 seats, the BJP had "identified 60," Mr. Krishnamurthi said, and there was the MDMK and the TRC besides the main party, the DMK.

TMC not for third front: Page 13

THE HINDU

9 FEB 2001

Political overtones to Sonia's Kumbh visit

By Neena Vyas

KUMBH NAGAR (Allahabad), JAN. 21. The proposed visit of the Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, here tomorrow morning is fast becoming a political issue. Will she be coming here to send a message that she has embraced Hinduism? Will the visit send a signal that she is certainly no longer a "foreigner" but a person who has accepted Indian culture and traditions?

Some political leaders feel her visit will be symbolic. "She wants to send out a message that she is not alien to India, that she belongs here, that she wants to be where the masses are, she wants to mix with the people and with the sadhus and sants of this country, that she has accepted Hinduism as her own religion," says Mr. Reoti Raman Singh, Samajwadi Party leader and MLA in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly. But he adds: "Whatever she may do, the fact is that she does not have an appeal, her inability to speak Hindi fluently, to hold a conversation in Hindi, comes in the way." His view is that it is not mother Sonia, but daughter Priyanka who is "the crowd puller".

Mr. Pramod Tiwari, Congress Legislature Party leader in the State Assembly, is certain the visit will take place and "she will go to the Sangam, (the confluence of the rivers Ganges, Yamuna and mythical Saraswati)" but whether or not she takes a holy dip at the Sangam will entirely be a personal choice, he adds.

The district administration has not yet cleared her visit. The reason being given is

that no VIPs are being allowed to visit as it would disturb the arrangements. Too much attention gets diverted to VIPs, some police officers have said.

But Mr. Tiwari thinks this is a lame excuse. "We will take strong exception to the fact that the Union Minister, Dr. Murli Manohar Joshi, was allowed to go to the Sangam on January 14, one of the main bathing days, and Soniaji is being disallowed." He points out that tomorrow, when she proposes to visit, is not one of the main bathing days. Moreover, she will not be addressing any public meeting and "we are ready to accommodate the district administration on the timing of the visit and the route to be taken. We are even ready for her to go to the Sangam by boat so that she does not have to enter the Mela grounds," he adds.

If Ms. Gandhi was not permitted to go to the Sangam, the Congress would protest, he said. "Why the double standards? If no VIPs are being allowed why was Dr. Joshi permitted to go and why have half-a-dozen State Ministers been allowed?" The Mela is open to one and all, irrespective of caste or faith, and the Congress will not tolerate the BJP-led district administration creating a wrong precedent. "It is not the administration but its political bosses who are coming in the way," he says.

The reaction of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal leaders was rather low-key. Acharya Giriraj Kishore, VHP general secretary, said the visit would be welcomed. "If she feels like a Hindu from her heart why

should we object?" But Mr. Surendra Jain, Bajrang Dal chief, said, "if she is coming to purify herself and take the Congress down the Hindutva road, we have no objection. We are glad she is recognising Hindutva to be the national mainstream, that she may learn that Babri aggressiveness (Muslim fundamentalism) is not the mainstream." After a dip in the Sangam, Ms. Gandhi should "help build the Ram temple at Ayodhya", he added.

Ms. Gandhi's programme includes a visit to Anand Bhavan, ancestral home of the Nehrus, a visit to the Sewa Dal camp at the Kumbh Mela, a visit to the Sangam, and perhaps a visit to the Shankaracharya of Jyotishpeeth, Swaroopanand Saraswati.

The VHP is trying to spread the view that the Jyotishpeeth Shankaracharya was a Congressman, but at the Shankaracharya's camp it was pointed out that two days ago the State Assembly Speaker, Mr. Kesri Nath Tripathi, visited the Shankaracharya. "Does that make him a BJP follower? Anyone is free to come here for a darshan. If Ms. Gandhi comes she too will be welcome."

Visit confirmed

Our New Delhi Special Correspondent writes:

Ms. Sonia Gandhi will go to Allahabad tomorrow for the Kumbh Mela, it has been confirmed. Her visit had sparked a controversy, with the district administration expressing "inability" to provide adequate security.

22 JAN 2007

Basu shapes Subhas return

Arindam Sarkar
Kolkata, January 25

THE CRISIS in the CPI(M)'s North 24-Parganas unit is over. Subhas Chakrabarty is back in the district secretariat. And, Jyoti Basu was the man who made this possible.

The crisis in the unit had snowballed after Chakrabarty was dropped from the secretariat three years back. But after a marathon meeting at Alimuddin Street chaired by Basu today, peace was restored with Chakrabarty's reinstatement. He will contest from Belgachia East, his Assembly constituency, North 24-Parganas district secretary Amitava Basu confirmed. Chakrabarty, the man in the eye of the storm, skipped the meeting. "Differences in the party unit weakened our organisation. In the last Assembly polls we won only 24 of the 28 seats. All differences have

been settled now. Now, will put up a united front," Basu said after the meeting. "The decision (to induct Subhas in the district panel) was unanimous." Basu's interference and Chakrabarty's reinduction have dealt a body blow to the Amitava Basu and the Amitava Nandi factions. Both had wanted Chakrabarty taken to task for what they called anti-party activities.

Relaxed after the Sahara Cup finals at the Yuba Bharati Krirangan, Chakrabarty said he had not been attending district committee meetings for quite some time now and today's conclave was no different. Told that he has been accommodated in the district secretariat, he said: "I will live up to the responsibility the party has given me."

Before the meeting, Jyoti Basu is reported to have told party apparatus, including State secretary Anill Biswas, North 24-Parganas

district secretary Amitava Basu and Amitava Nandi that they should take heed of Chakrabarty's grievances. The octogenarian leader felt there was reason in what Chakrabarty was saying. The stalwart didn't want the party to take any hasty step that might cost the CPI(M) dear in the 28 North 24-Parganas Assembly segments.

Chakrabarty sees this as a small victory for the district committee berth would give him ample room to leverage seats for his supporters.

But more importantly, this would go a long way in holding him back in the party, especially when many disgruntled leaders have been urging him to leave. In fact, sources said, his associates are working hard to keep Subhas from following in the footsteps of Saifuddin Chowdhury. South 24-Parganas district secretary Samir Putataunda is reportedly getting ready to join Chowdhury next month.

US tells Pak to rein in militants

WELCOMING INDIA'S extension of the ceasefire in Jammu and Kashmir by a month, the US has asked Pakistan to "use its influence" with militant groups in order to halt the ongoing violence and further the peace process.

"We believe the peace process would be greatly enhanced if the militant groups responded positively to India's announcement by taking steps to halt the violence," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said.

The US, he said, would encourage all the parties to take initiatives to reduce violence and foster a process to end the conflict in Kashmir. Although Islamabad maintains it has no hold on the militant groups, Washington is not oblivious to the fact that the groups striking in the Valley have been operating from across the border. Detailed report on Page 15

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 JAN 2001

Jitendra Prasada passes away

By Our Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, JAN. 16. The senior Congress leader, Mr. Jitendra Prasada, who was admitted to Indraprastha Apollo Hospital here in a critical condition last week, died this afternoon following a heart attack. He is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.

Mr. Prasada, who slipped into a coma after suffering a brain haemorrhage last week, was on life-support ever since he was transferred to Apollo from Ram Manohar Lohia Hospital.

At 11-12 a.m., the 62-year old Congress leader — who contested against the Congress president, Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, in the party elections held in November last — suffered a massive heart attack after the damage to his brain became irreversible and the supportive measures failed. All efforts made to revive him through external cardiac massage, defibrillation, intra-cardiac adrenaline and external pacemaker proved futile and he was finally declared dead at 12-15 p.m. On hearing about his death, a huge crowd of Congress workers collected outside the hospital. Among the first to reach the hospital and console the grieving relatives was Mrs. Gandhi. Several senior party leaders, including Ms. Ambika Soni, Mr. Motilal Vora and Mr. R. K. Dhawan, visited the hospital.

The body will be kept at the AICC headquarters on Akbar Road tomorrow for people to pay homage. It will be taken to his home constituency in Shahjahanpur for cremation. Among the first ones to pay homage were the Delhi Chief Minister, Ms. Sheila



The Congress president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, paying homage to the party leader, Jitendra Prasada (inset), in New Delhi on Tuesday. — Photo: R.V. Moorthy

Dikshit, and the former chief of the Uttar Pradesh Congress Committee, Mr. Salman Khurshid.

Mrs. Gandhi also visited Mr. Prasada's residence around 7.50 p.m. where the body was kept. Other Congress leaders who paid tributes included Dr. Manmohan Singh, Mr. Madhavrao Scindia, Mr. K. Natwar Singh and Mr. N. D. Tiwari.

Cutting across party lines, leaders of other political parties also visited Mr. Prasada's house to offer floral tributes. Prominent among them were the president of the Nationalist Congress Party, Mr. Sharad Pawar; the Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Dr.

Farooq Abdullah, and the general secretary of the Samajwadi Party, Mr. Amar Singh.

Following his death, a steering committee meeting of the AICC was held and a condolence resolution passed. Talking to media-persons, Mrs. Gandhi said it was ironical that a few days ago he had attended a similar meeting and was in good health.

Family members said Mr. Prasada's brother, Mr. Jayendra Prasad — who is admitted in the ICU of Apollo — had not been informed about the death.

Quintessential organisational man: Page 13

THE HINDU

17 JAN 2001

Cong high command

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

'TIE-UP ONLY IF MAMATA DUMPS BJP'

NEW DELHI, Jan. 11. — The Congress High Command has once again turned its back on the idea of a mahajot.

But its main sponsor, Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury is undaunted. Today, he met Mrs Sonia Gandhi and invited her to visit West Bengal to make a "realistic assessment of the ground realities in the state".

"This time I did not talk to her about the mahajot. Instead, I invited her to visit West Bengal for a realistic assessment of the situation there. She will visit the state soon and I am confident that after personally assessing the ground realities there, she would agree to the mahajot", Mr Khan told **The Statesman** after his meeting with Mrs Sonia Gandhi this

MIDNAPORE, Jan. 11. — Mr Pranab Mukherjee today told reporters that the Congress can tie up with Trinamul only if Miss Mamata Banerjee severs her link with the BJP. His recent meeting with Miss Banerjee was only a "courtesy call". He said he did not propose any alliance. — SNS

evening.

Earlier in the day, Congress spokesman Mr Anand Sharma, asked about the possibility of a mahajot at a press conference, said that "the Congress stands by its stated policy of having no truck with communal parties".

In fact a section of the Congress leadership sees the talk of a mahajot as some state leaders' way of bargaining for a berth in the CWC which Mrs Gandhi is in the process of constituting.

When the statements

supporting a mahajot, by leaders like Mr Khan Chowdhury and Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, were pointed out, Mr Sharma said it were those leaders' individual opinion and not the party's official position.

Asked if action would be taken against any of these leaders for publicly speaking in favour of a mahajot, Mr Sharma said: "Ours is a democratic party and leaders may express their individual opinion on issues. But when it

comes to the death, all of them will stand by the decision of the leadership".

The Congress spokesman once again refused to commit the party's support for President's rule in West Bengal. "It's for the government of the day to assess the situation and take necessary steps. We will decide our stand at the right time. If the BJP wants to know our stand before taking its decisions, the government should leave the job of running the government to us," Mr Sharma said.

When asked about Mr Das Munshi's meeting with Miss Mamata Banerjee in the wake of the recent "killings" in Midnapore's Garbeta, Mr Sharma said: "In our party people are not barred from meeting anyone."

THE STATESMAN

12 JAN 2001

Cong scouts for Feb's plenary meet venue

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 8 JANUARY

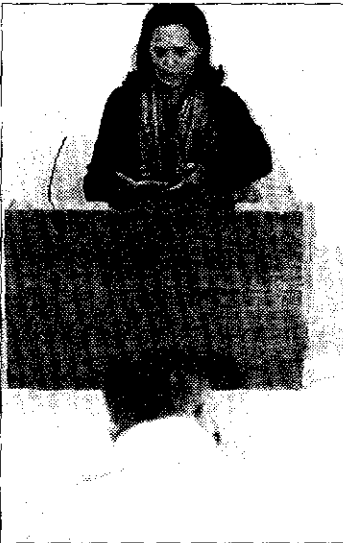
THE CONGRESS has decided to draw the curtains on its organisational elections by holding its plenary session next month.

The party's working committee, now converted into the steering committee, met this evening and agreed to hold the three-day session from February 9 onwards.

However, a decision on the venue for the event was not finalised, with the steering committee passing on the responsibility to party president Sonia Gandhi.

The plenary, a major event for the party, will outline the party's policies as well as future course of action for the next couple of years on political as well as economic front.

Making the announcement,



PALM GAZING: Sonia Gandhi and Pranab Mukherjee (front) at the CWC meeting in New Delhi on Monday.

— AFP

the party's media department chairperson Ghulam Nabi Azad said that several PCCs as well as some of the party ruled states had volunteered to host the party jamboree.

However it was decided to finalise the venue later since it was necessary to see if the states could host it on the dates mentioned by the AICC secretariat.

Party circles have indicated that Bangalore is among the frontrunners for hosting the event.

While Karnataka chief minister S.M. Krishna is among those state leaders who have shown keenness to hold the session, what has appealed to the party high command is the fact that the Congress conclave could act as a morale booster for the South where three states including Tamil Nadu, Kerala

and Pondicherry will be going to assembly polls immediately thereafter.

Among others who are also wanting to host the session are Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Maharashtra besides the PCCs of Tamil Nadu as well as Kerala. However, the drought situation in Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan seem to be a discouraging factor while the leadership is not keen on Maharashtra because of the NCP angle.

Mr Azad also indicated today that the CWC members would be nominated before the plenary session.

Ms Gandhi has already been authorised by the AICC members to nominate all 24 members to the apex decision making body and the expectation is that the new team will be in place for the plenary.

The Economic Times

9 JAN 2001

AICC plenary session from February 9

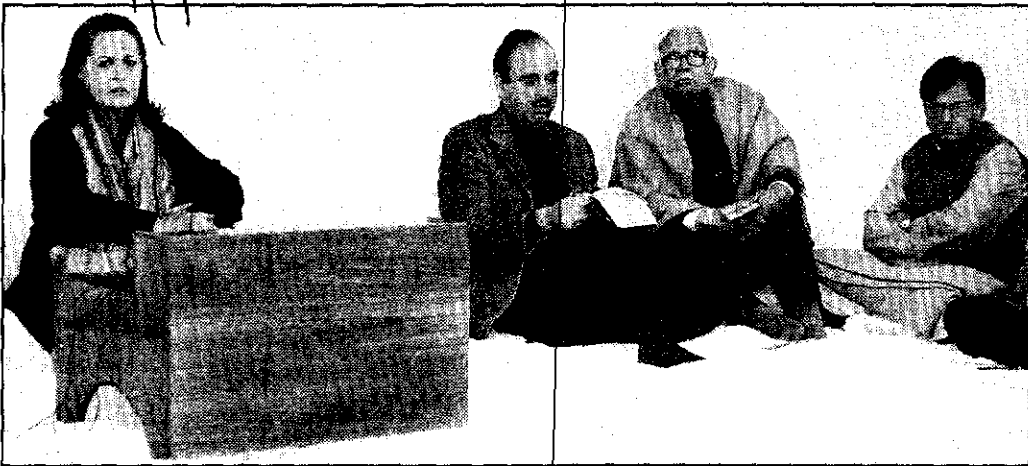
HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 8

A CONGRESS Working Committee (CWC) meeting today decided that a three-day plenary session of the All India Congress Committee (AICC) would be held from February 9-11.

Converted into a Steering Committee after Mrs Sonia Gandhi's election as Congress president, the CWC instructed the AICC secretariat to finalise the venue for the plenary in consultation with the State units willing to host the meet. The session is likely to be held in Karnataka or Maharashtra.

A senior leader said, the formation of the new CWC, the requisite authorisations for which had been received by Mrs Gandhi from the AICC delegates, wasn't discussed at the meeting. "How can CWC discuss its own formation," he asked, while ruling out the possibility of voting for the six elected seats (minus the six elected slots reserved for weaker sections) in the 24-member body.

Even AICC spokesman Ghulam Nabi Azad did not foresee any elections for CWC in view of the AICC delegates' decision to empower Mrs Gandhi to make the choice on their behalf. "But we did not discuss the nomination bit at



Congress president Sonia Gandhi presiding over the Congress Working Committee meeting at the party headquarters in New Delhi on Monday. Photo PTI

the meeting," he clarified.

From all available indications, it seemed that the Congress president would put together the working committee before the AICC session. "The plenary has to be organised by the party general secretaries," remarked another senior leader, adding: "It would appear very odd if CWC isn't formed before that. As of now, the general secretaries are merely members of the steering panel."

At today's meeting, the only question before the members was

whether to hold the AICC session before or after the Budget Session starting in the third week of February.

It was finally decided that the meet would be held before Parliament went into session, primarily with the objective of kicking off the party's campaign in time for the Assembly elections in five States.

A session in Karnataka would suit the Congress as three of the five States going to poll, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Pondicherry, are

in the South. The dates have been decided keeping in mind the fact that the plenary, besides discussing political issues, would focus on economic matters likely to dominate the Budget Session and the campaigning for the Assembly elections in five States, including Assam and West Bengal.

New Delhi, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu and Madhya Pradesh expressed their willingness to host the meet, however, the majority opinion at today's meeting was in favour of Karnataka.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

9 JAN 2001

FRIDAY, JANUARY 5, 2001

BACK TO THE HIGH COMMAND MODE

WITH ALMOST ALL the State units of the party having passed resolutions authorising Ms. Sonia Gandhi to constitute the Congress Working Committee (CWC) entirely with her nominees (rather than hold elections for at least 12 out of the 24 seats), the entrenching of the party in the servility to dynasty mode is complete. The Congress constitution, indeed, provides for nominations by the party president of at least 12 members to the CWC. The supposed rationale of this is the ensuring that such persons who do not command a large support base within the electoral college but are possessed with leadership qualities are involved in the decision-making process in the party; the provision for nomination was included in the party constitution also in order to ensure representation for party units from States where the party organisation is not all that strong. But then the manner in which the party's leaders in the various State units were vying with each other in getting the AICC members (the electoral college for the Working Committee) to endorse the idea of a nominated CWC and not elections appears to have been only a means adopted to display "loyalty" to the supreme leader. And sections in the party considered part of Ms. Sonia Gandhi's inner circle have been also found orchestrating such a campaign and ensuring that resolutions by the State units were conveyed to Mr. Ram Niwas Mirdha, the Electoral Officer.

It may be true that Ms. Sonia Gandhi herself is yet to take a formal position on these resolutions; she has not indicated her mind on whether she is going to accept the idea of a CWC whose members are all nominated by her. But then, the manner in which she has allowed her campaign managers to reduce the election to the party president's post — the drumming up of support for her and the cam-

HD-12
71
paign they were engaged in against Mr. Jitendra Prasad, even "encouraging" those who accused him of being an agent of the Congress' enemies and all such insinuations — to a mere farce points uncomfortably to Ms. Sonia Gandhi's own role in this. Ms. Sonia Gandhi was also there to willingly approve (if not orchestrate) the idea that presidents of the various State units be nominated by her rather than be elected to the post. That Ms. Sonia Gandhi has refrained from expressing disapproval of the ongoing project will be read as an indication of her mind. And by doing this, she is only injecting fresh life into the "high command syndrome" that is the party's bane since the days of Indira Gandhi and is now among the causes for its present moribund state.

A.P.P. 5/1
The tendency to scuttle inner party democracy is neither a new development in the Congress nor is it a means resorted to by members of the Nehru-Indira dynasty alone. After all, Mr. P. V. Narasimha Rao, even when he effected a decisive break with the nomination culture in the party at the AICC Tirupati session in 1992, obtained the resignation of two elected members to the CWC — Mr. Arjun Singh and Mr. Sharad Pawar — only to nominate them to the body once again. After the Tirupati AICC session, the Congress as a party was showing signs of getting out of the high command mode every now and then only to return to its own self soon after. It is this process that seems to have taken a beating with the return of a member from the dynasty at the helm. The members of the Congress are indeed well within their rights to rally around the supreme leader. But then, they cannot afford this luxury and yet hope to retrieve the party from virtual decimation. The choice has never been more stark.

THE HINDU

5 JAN 2001

HD-11
29/12

Cong. backs diplomatic offensive against Pak.

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, DEC. 28. The Congress(I) has welcomed the latest diplomatic measures announced by the Government against Pakistan. "We have noted the diplomatic steps taken on Thursday by the Government and we think they are justified," the party spokesperson, Mr. Jaipal Reddy, said here today.

The party, however, expressed dissatisfaction with the response of the United States, saying it had not done enough to get Pakistan to crack down on those responsible for the attack on Parliament. "It is making all the right noises but has not taken effective steps," Mr. Reddy said.

The statements were in line with the Congress(I)'s strategy of lending broad support to the Government in the standoff against Pakistan. The party appears unperturbed over the Government's failure to consult the Opposition before announcing its decision. In fact, the Congress(I) made it clear that it did not expect to be consulted on every decision taken by the Government.

The leadership is keeping a close watch on the situation and trying to keep itself abreast of the developments by consulting defense and strategic af-

fairs experts as well as former diplomats. The party president, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, has postponed her visit to China and cancelled her year-end vacation in view of the current situation.

Party insiders said that having extended support to the Government, the Congress(I) was not unduly perturbed at not being consulted on the details or being sounded out on the possibility taking part in the Government's moves to send MPs abroad as part of its diplomatic offensive. It is trying to strike a delicate balance between supporting the Government and yet not being party to the creation of war hysteria.

The senior leader, Dr. Manmohan Singh's statement in Bangalore on Thursday, in which he cautioned against any loose talk about war, reflects the party's concern on the attitude of some "hotheads" in the Government.

The leadership believes that given the delicate situation the nation is faced with, the response of those in Government should be sagacious and mature. "We must speak with maturity and strength, in a manner becoming of a mature and strong nation," a senior leader said.

THE HINDU

2001

Sonia back to Govt-bashing

21/12
HT-9

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 20

A DAY after lending her unstinted support to the Centre's efforts to combat terrorism, Sonia Gandhi today hit out at the Government on issues from Poto to CAG and the Intelligence failure that led to the December 13 terrorist strike.

In her hard-hitting speech, she underlined her party's role to keep "vigil" over the "administrative, political and diplomatic steps" the Government takes to meet "the needs of the extraordinary situation" stemming from the attacks.

Sonia flayed the Government for revealing "precious little of substance" during the debate on the terrorist attack. The Congress would very carefully monitor the developments on this, she stated, adding that no party had suffered as much as theirs at the hands of terrorists.

The Congress leader assailed the Government for failing to act against terrorism despite advance Intelligence from the Maharashtra Government. "It was the failure of Intelligence which led to the tragedy of Kargil," she said.

While reviewing the session which was adjourned ahead of schedule, the CPP chairperson sought to dispel impressions of a deal and indicated that while the party may have shelved some of its key issues — like Poto and CAG — to join the national resolve to fight terrorism, it would not give up on them.

The unfinished agenda reflected itself in the speech. For instance, Sonia may have

refrained from mentioning Ministers like George Fernandes or Harin Pathak by name, but she was critical of Atal Bihari Vajpayee for being "so weak" as to reinduct them into the Cabinet after asking them to leave it in the first place.

"If the Prime Minister has succumbed to internal political pressure to accommodate these flawed persons, then it gives the country no confidence in the ability of his government to resist unhealthy influences in other areas of concern," she said. "Even in buying coffins for our martyrs this government has not been above board," she said.

While the Congress was keen to discuss these issues in the House, the Government's adamant stand led to its procrastination. Such tactics may have saved the Government the embarrassment of exposure in Parliament, but it will continue to haunt it and lower its esteem among the people, she said.

Pointing out that Poto did not stop the terrorists from attacking Parliament, Sonia reiterated the Congress's "principled objections" to Poto as unilaterally conceived by the Government and called for a de novo examination of the law.

If she attacked the Government for its failure at the WTO's Doha round of talks, she also urged her MPs to ensure that the people's desire for a responsible secular governance was achieved in the forthcoming Assembly elections. She voiced her annoyance at the persisting problem of poor attendance in the House.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 DEC 2001

Congress not keen on full term for CMs

BY OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 2: Senior chief ministers in Congress-ruled states are being looked upon as potential threats to the party leadership. This seems to be the perception among the AICC mandarins who have sensed that the Congress is becoming popular since people are disillusioned with the BJP's "Hindutva" and the regional chauvinism of its allies in the NDA.

The bottom line of the political hypothesis in the Congress is that "no chief minister should be allowed to continue for a full term."

The continuation of a chief minister in office for a long time has always proved counter productive for while serving their term, the chief ministers get to know the weaknesses of the party leaders. This is the

Sonia loyalists are now encouraging dissidents to cut party CMs to size

reason chief ministers should not be given a long rope, some senior party leaders feel.

The Congress is in power in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh, Delhi, Assam, Pondicherry, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland and shares it with Laloo Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal in Bihar.

The party is now optimistic of winning the forthcoming Punjab and Uttaranchal Assembly polls.

A Cabinet rank minister in a Congress-ruled state confirmed the current thinking among Congress president Sonia Gandhi's

advisers, while AICC functionaries justified it by recalling how Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi used to replace chief ministers.

In Delhi, chief minister Sheila Dikshit has been kept in suspense after asking all ministers were asked to resign, to make way for a new Cabinet.

"The question is not whether she continues to remain in power or resigns suo moto. The high command wants to send out a political message by weakening her authority," party insiders feel.

Ms Dikshit and Rajasthan chief minister Ashok Gehlot have been in office since

1998, while Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh has been in the office since 1993. All three leaders are seen as an "eyesore" for some leaders.

After facing open challenges from Rajesh Pilot and Jitendra Prasad initially, Mrs Gandhi's loyalists are aiming to cut party chief ministers to size by encouraging dissidents in different states and later, accommodating them in power. This is a party ploy to help check chief ministers.

The design to promote rootless leaders has been reflected in the composition of the Congress Working Committee by Mrs Gandhi herself. The party's highest decision-making body has been dominated by Rajya Sabha members. "They are obliged (by the nomination to the Rajya Sabha) and therefore cannot pose any threat to the high command," a senior party MP said.

Naxals blast house of Orissa minister

Continued from Page 1

Dhali's wife, son and nephew to vacate the house and destroyed the building by detonating dynamite. However, the minister was not present at home at the time of the attack. The Naxalites left a banner near Mr Dhali's house, saying their attack was their revenge against the police oppression on the PWG activists and exploitation of the tribal population. "We attacked Mr Dhali's residence as his party has deployed Central Reserve Police Force to subdue our struggle against the exploitation and oppression of the tribals," the banner reads.

In Chhattisgarh, the PWG Naxalites triggered a landmine explosion on Kutru-Bedre road and fired at two police stations in tribal-dominated Dantewada district on Saturday night.

In Andhra Pradesh, outlawed the PWG activists killed a civil contractor, made an abortive bid to ambush three police stations besides destroying two houses of Telugu Desam MLA. Two activists shot dead contractor K. Bikshapati, 42, at Kazipet in Medak district on Saturday night. In a bid to loot weapons, the PWG activists opened indiscriminate fir-

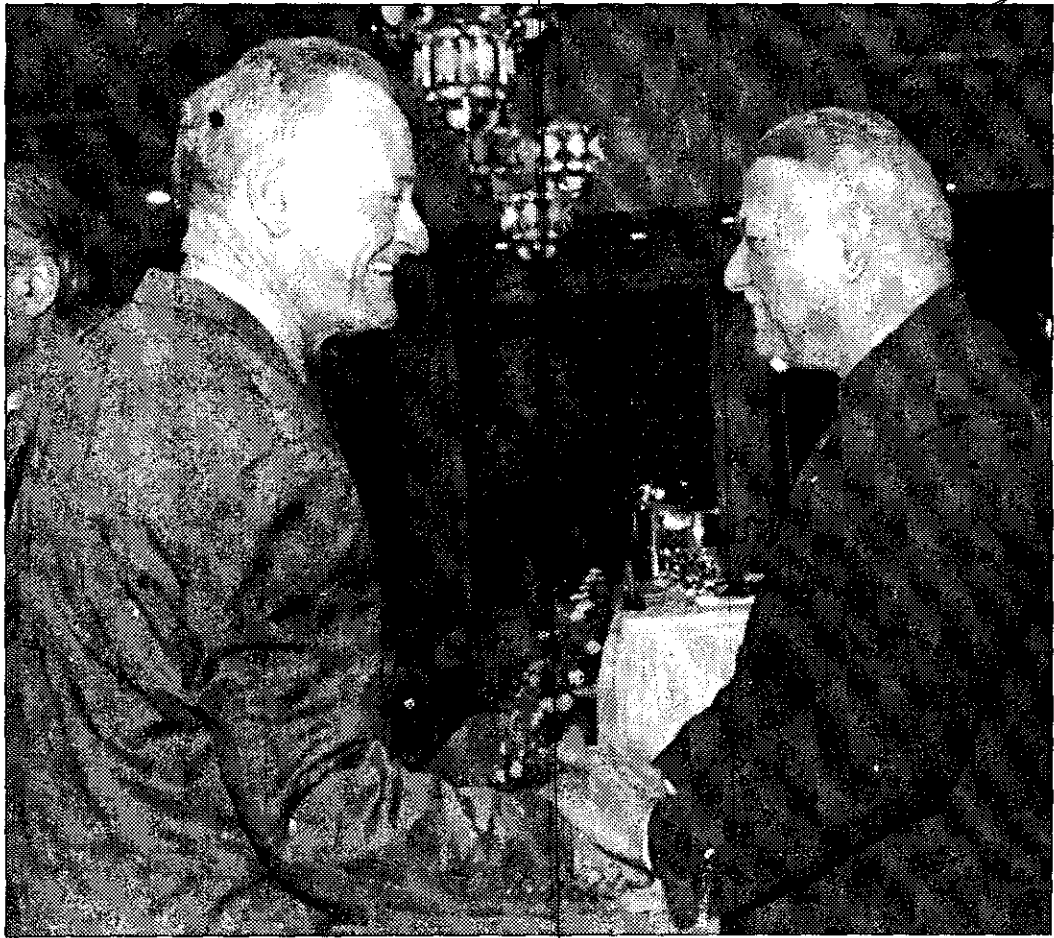
ing at three police stations, two in Vishakhapatnam district and one in East Godavari district.

Their attempts were thwarted by the police, but they managed to escape under the cover of darkness.

Naxalites also completely destroyed two houses of TDP MLA Y.V. Satyanarayana at Koyyur in Vishakhapatnam district. A mandal revenue office building at Gudem Kotha Veedhi and a telephone exchange at R.V. Nagar in the same district were also blasted with explosives which caused extensive damage to both. A group of 20 to 30 armed Naxalites also opened fire at Ramavaram police station in the district which prompted the police to retaliate. The police said there was no casualty in the attacks on police stations in the two districts.

They said Naxalites also blew up a guest house and office of a paper mill at Viduranagara in East Godavari district.

The fresh wave of attacks by Naxals in the state has come in the backdrop of stern warning by the state DGP H.J. Dora that PWG activists would have to pay a heavy price for their unabated acts of "mindless violence."



THE LIGHTER SIDE: Union finance minister Yashwantrao Chavan shares a light moment with former US ambassador to India Richard F. Celeste at the inauguration of the India Economic Summit at a hotel in New Delhi on Sunday. (PTI)

THE ASIAN AGE

3 DEC 2001