

CMs to be consulted on Governors

States get more powers on taxation

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Nov. 16. — The Centre today conceded the long-pending demand of states that legislative powers on residuary matters, including those relating to taxation, be transferred to the Concurrent List.

The immediate benefit that will flow from this decision is: a share for states in the taxes on the service industry, which has been growing at a fast pace. What this means is that states that provide infrastructure will, henceforth, get a share of taxes imposed on the industry.

The Centre's decision at the Inter-State Council meeting of chief ministers follows complaints by many states that the present system of distribution of legislative powers is already biased in favour of the Centre. Owing to this, states for long have been demanding that all residuary powers should vest with the state governments.

The council also recommended fundamental changes to appointments and role of Governors. The council said the Centre must consult the chief minister of a state for appointment of the Governor. The council insisted that this provision be made obligatory and not be left as a matter of convention. This would require a constitutional amendment when put into practice as a law.

The West Bengal chief minister, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya, had initiated the debate on the issue. West Bengal, which has also been in the forefront to demand greater powers for states, said it was

satisfied with the residuary decision.

The Centre had earlier agreed only to accord legislative powers on residuary matters, provided they did not concern taxation.

The state's finance minister, Mr Asim Dasgupta, said this was not considered adequate earlier as the finance ministry had already accepted another demand for concurrent powers of the states in matters of taxes.

It was decided in the Council that appropriate safeguards be built into the Commission of Inquiry Act to prevent its misuse by the Centre with regard to setting up an inquiry against any minister of a state government.

State governments had expressed the need for revising royalty rates on minerals, including coal. It was noted that a high-power committee on coal royalty, involving all aspects, had just concluded its deliberation. It was expected that the committee would address concerns that the states had expressed from time to time. The issues relating to royalty and allied matters would soon be considered by the Cabinet Committee of Economic Affairs.

On the issue of Governors, Mr Bhattacharya had proposed that the President make the selection from a panel of three eminent people identified by the state government.

The sole supporter of Mr Bhattacharya's proposal was Tamil Nadu. But the state government feels it has moved

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a step forward as the Centre has agreed to consult the state government before appointing a Governor.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani, however, said that for the past three years when the NDA has been in power chief ministers have always been consulted on this issue.

The state government had also proposed that any person appointed as Governor should not be eligible for further appointment in any capacity under the Union or state governments or even in the private sector.

It put restrictions on the Governors who returned to active politics after retirement.

The standing committee of the council had earlier favoured single term for the Governors and also allowed them to enter politics treating them as free citizens on retirement.

The council recommended that the Governors would be eligible for a second term in the same state or in another state. Though they could not join active politics, they would be eligible for election to the office of President and Vice-President.

It was decided at the meeting that a person to be appointed as a Governor should be an eminent personality, not connected with the local politics of the state.

Persons belonging to a minority community should also be given a chance.



Chief ministers of different states at the seventh Inter-State Council meeting in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

THE STATESMAN

NOV 1997

'Centre must consult CM while appointing Governor'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 16. The Inter-State Council today recommended that consultation by the Union Government with the State Chief Minister in the matter of selection and appointment of a Governor should be made obligatory.

Touching upon the sensitive issue of the appointment and role of a Governor, the Inter-State Council suggested that the process of consultation between the Centre and the State Chief Minister be made mandatory and it should not remain a matter of convention. For implementation, it would need a Constitutional amendment.

Briefing presspersons after the Council's seventh meeting here today, the Union Law and Justice Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley, said the Council recommended that the Governor would be eligible for a second term but would not be expected to return to active politics. "However, he will be eligible for election to the offices of Vice-

President/President of India," he said. Since the Vajpayee Government assumed office three-and-a-half years ago, it has established a healthy convention of consulting Chief Ministers in appointment of Governors, Mr. Jaitley said. "The system has worked well," he added.

The Council agreed that a person to be appointed as a Governor should be an eminent personality, not connected with the local politics of the State. Persons belonging to minority community should also be given a chance, it suggested.

At today's meeting, the Council covered as many as 59 recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission which covered subjects such as Legislative Relations, All India Services, Mass Media, Inter-Governmental Council, Mines and Minerals, and Language.

In a major concession, the State Governments managed to get the nod of the Council in recommending that taxation powers should be transferred from the



Chief Ministers of various States at the seventh Inter-State Council meeting in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

Union to the Concurrent List. The Sarkaria Commission had recommended that all residuary powers of legislation, other than taxation matters, should be transferred from Union to the Concurrent List. The power regarding taxation matter could continue in the Union List. However, at today's meeting the State Governments

insisted that in view of the need for mobilising more resources, the taxation powers should also be transferred from the Union to the Concurrent List.

The Council also accepted the Sarkaria Commission recommendation that for legislation in respect of subjects — Concurrent list and sphere — there should be

active consultation with the State Governments except in emergency cases.

In the matter of setting up of Commission of Inquiry against any Minister of a State Government, the Council recommended that appropriate safeguards should be built in the Commission of Inquiry Act itself to prevent its misuse by the Centre.

"Over the past two decades, such a contingency has not arisen. All Chief Ministers agreed to have appropriate built-in safeguards in the Act. There have been just two cases of Inquiry Commissions against the State Governments in the early 60s against the Punjab Government and in 70s against the Tamil Nadu Government," Mr. Jaitley said.

The Council favoured a comprehensive Central legislation with regard to the imposition of taxes by the local bodies on the properties of the Union Government which are of industrial and commercial nature.

Governor must be impartial, say CMs

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 16. Cutting across party lines, the Chief Ministers at the Inter-State Council meeting here today stressed upon "impartial and independent" role of the Governor and favoured constitutional arrangement for a Centre-Chief Minister consultation in appointment of the Governor.

The West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, said the appointment of Governor should be made by the President from a panel of three eminent persons suggested by the Chief Minister of the State concerned. "This would necessitate amendment of Article 155 of the Constitution. The tenure of the Governor should be kept as five years in a State,"

On the procedure for the Governor's removal before completion of his tenure, he wanted consultation with the Inter-State Council if there was a sharp difference of opinion between the Centre and the State.

On exercise of functions by the Governor in his capacity as Chancellor of University, he said the Governor should be guided by the advice of the Council of Ministers.

The Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. Digvijay Singh, argued in favour of a constitutional provision laying down the time limit within which the Governor should decide on giving assent to pending bills.

While stressing the importance of the office of Governor for proper functioning of the federal polity, the Karnataka Chief Minister, Mr. S.M. Krishna, said the debates of the Constituent Assembly conclusively established that the Governor must be impartial and independent. "Unfortunately, the last 50 years have shown that on several occasions the Governors have used their office to serve the interests of the ruling party at the Centre. The time has come to bring about such amendments to the Constitution which would ensure that the faith of the architects

of the Constitution is incorporated in the written word so that the States' autonomy is not violated," he said.

Broadly agreeing with the Sarkaria Commission recommendations, the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, said the Governor should generally be an apolitical figure and consultation with the Chief Minister on the selection of Governor should be made mandatory.

"However, the role of the Governor as Chancellor of any university should also be made subject of the advice of the Council of Ministers and should not be a matter of discretion for the Governor as recommended by the

Sarkaria Commission," he added.

The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. O. Panneerselvam, said the Governor should be appointed by the President from a panel of names with the consent of the Chief Minister. The choice need not be restricted either to politicians or to retired civil or defence personnel.


"The person to be appointed Governor should be of high calibre and of absolute integrity, and free from partisan politics. There should be a fixed tenure for the Governor, which may be terminated by the President, only if a resolution to that effect is passed in the Legislature," he said.

The Assam Chief Minister, Mr. Tarun Gogoi, said the Chief Min-

ister should invariably be consulted in the matter of appointment of the Governor.

SC/ST panel presents report

NEW DELHI, NOV. 16. The Chairman of the National Commission for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes, Mr. Dileep Singh Bhuria, today presented the sixth report of the Commission to the President, Mr. K.R. Narayanan, at the Rashtrapati Bhawan. The report gives the highlights of the activities of the Commission during 1999-2000 and 2000-01. It is a statutory requirement to apprise the President of the activities of the Commission. — PTI



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THE HINDU

17 NOV 2002

Centre looks to win over CMs on Poto

Chandan Nandy
New Delhi, November 15

POTO AND the role of Governors would be the two crucial issues the Centre and States will discuss over the next two days when all the Chief Ministers gather here for separate meetings on internal security and the Inter-State Council.

Prime Minister A B Vajpayee will address both meetings and reason with the Chief Ministers on the efficacy of Poto and the need of a strong legislation to wipe out terrorism.

The Inter-State Council meeting will be held tomorrow and the conclave on internal security on November 17.

The Home Ministry has prepared itself well to weather opposition from States ruled by parties other than the BJP. Home Minister LK Advani will focus on some "apprehensions" that the Ordinance has raised. He will try to allay fears that Poto is a draconian law.

Advani is also expected to drive home the point that barring a few exceptions, most Chief Ministers had agreed at their meeting last August that an anti-terror law with enough safeguards was needed. Besides, he will argue in favour of Poto by focusing on the stringent provisions of similar laws in Maharashtra, Karnataka

and Andhra Pradesh.

A new disaster management plan will be unveiled before the Chief Ministers. Officials are confident that the plan will be approved by the States, who will have to shoulder the burden of implementing it.

Some of the key recommendations of the Group of Ministers (GoM) on national security will be placed before the CMs. The recommendations would provide the basis for restructuring new strategies — offensive and defensive — against terrorism.

At the Inter-State Council meet, recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission and the Standing Committee of the Council will be discussed. Also crucial is the debate on the role of Governors and the transfer of some Constitutional provisions from the Central to Concurrent and State Lists.

In September last year, the Standing Committee, headed by Advani and comprising Chief Ministers of five States, had recommended that no politician from the party ruling at the Centre be appointed as Governor of a State being run by some other party or combination of parties. It was also considered that it should be "obligatory" on the part of the Centre to consult the State before appointing a Governor.

Buddha moots east, N-E pressure bloc

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

BHUBANESWAR, Oct. 15. — The eastern and north-eastern states could form a "pressure group" to present their case of Central neglect and place certain demands, Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said at a press conference today.

Mr Bhattacharya said he would convene a meeting of the states and a core committee would be formed to identify specific issues, areas of neglect and demands to be placed before the Centre.

Mr PA Sangma had suggested the idea of a pressure group of eastern and north-eastern states, Mr Bhattacharya said. The West Bengal chief minister is here to attend functions organised by the state CPI-M unit.

Mr Bhattacharya criticised the Centre for neglecting the eastern states. Mines are closed, PSUs have shut down, the PDS is a complete failure - some of the problems the states face, he said.

West Bengal got Rs 103 crore as flood relief against a demand of Rs 1870 crore. The states run by NDA allies have always got a better deal, he said.

A "magnificent failure on all fronts" is how Mr Bhattacharya chose to describe the Vajpayee government. The economy is in bad shape, the foreign policy lacks direction and on the political front, the Centre is trying to rake up communal issues before the Uttar Pradesh elections.

India has become a "strategic junior partner" of the USA, and stands isolated among Third World and Non-Aligned nations, Mr Bhattacharya said. He criticised the US strikes on Afghanistan saying it was dangerous to support this kind of "military adventurism".

Mr Bhattacharya voiced concern over the deteriorating situation in Jammu and Kashmir. The ISI had spread its network to Hyderabad, Mumbai and West Bengal, he said.

On the infiltration problem

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CPM to up the ante on Centre

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Sept. 8. - The CPI-M has launched a nationwide, month-long agitation against the policies of the Vajpayee government, which is to culminate in dharnas by 'around one crore people' in front of the central government offices from 25 to 27 September.

Addressing a press conference here, the CPI-M politburo member Mr Sitaram Yechury described this agitation as the "biggest mobilisation of people by the CPI-M". The agitation is focussed on four fronts; against the Vajpayee's government's economic policies, "pro-imperialist" foreign policies, communal agenda and corruption at high places.

Mr Yechury said, the agitation will also give a call to the poor "to break the locks of FCI godowns and take away the foodgrains lying there undistributed".

The party has also brought out four pamphlets, detailing the failures and shortcomings of the Vajpayee government. Responding to a question on the reported statements of

the Congress chief ministers, Mr Digvijay Singh, in support of teaching astrology and Mr A K Antony, against 'politicking saffron colour', Mr Yechury said, "The basic issue is the communal agenda of the Vajpayee government. Because of it, the difference between saffron and saffronisation has become one between Hinduism and Hindutva."

On the issue of teaching astrology, he said "our opposition is to the government move to impose it as a subject in the curricula of all the universities and also the move to give special financial aid to those colleges which have included the subject. Nobody should be pressured to study astrology. Let the government make its stand clear on this".

NON-BJP Cms' MEET CALLS FOR SECULAR POLICY

Govt. move to 'saffronise' education rejected

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By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 2. The BJP-led NDA Government's attempts to "saffronise" the educational system today received a setback as an ally — the National Conference — and the Mr. E. K. Mawlong-led United Democratic Front of Meghalaya joined hands with the Congress and the Left parties in rejecting the Government's move.

A meeting of the non-NDA Chief Ministers and Education Ministers held at the initiative of the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, made it clear that they would not follow the directives of the Human Resource Development Ministry in this regard.

"We are here to protest against the Government's attempts, there is no question of accepting or following the HRD Ministry's directives till a national consensus emerges on the issue," said the Delhi Chief Minister, Ms. Sheila Dixit.

Significantly, Ms. Dixit's views were also echoed by two of the NDA's constituents. The Jammu and Kashmir Education Minister, Mohammed Shafi, voiced the National Conference's opposition to the move saying education was also a State subject and the State Governments were under no obligation to accept such a measure.



The Chief Ministers of Delhi, Meghalaya, West Bengal and Tripura, Ms. Sheila Dixit, Mr. E. K. Mawlong, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and Mr. Manik Sarkar, at the non-BJP Chief Ministers' conference on 'saffronisation' of education in New Delhi on Sunday. — Photo: Rajeev Bhatt

He said the Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, had registered his protest with the Prime Minister. "They will soon realise that three fourths of the people do not accept their policy," said Mr. Shafi.

The Meghalaya Chief Minister, Mr. E. K. Mawlong, who heads a coalition government with the BJP and the Nationalist Congress Party, also made his position

clear. "There appears to be an attempt to saffronise education, it must stop because we will not accept it." He joined the other Chief Ministers in calling on the Government to consult the States before trying to change the education policy. "The Government must try and evolve a consensus."

A resolution adopted at the end

of the meeting called for an education policy "that was consistent with the secular and democratic values enshrined in the Constitution." It also demanded that decisions on formulating the education policy be taken on the basis of a consensus among the Union and the States. Adopted unanimously, the resolution called on the teaching community and the secular forces to "thwart" attempts by the Centre to undermine the value system in education.

It called on the Central Government to withhold all decisions, orders, circulars, and documents issued or published so far in this regard, and take steps to reconstitute the Central Advisory Board of education (CABE). This should be followed by a conference of State Education Ministers for a fruitful interaction before going to Parliament for approval.

Mr. Bhattacharjee, prime mover behind the meeting, accused the Government of "vitiating the secular spirit of the Constitution by bringing in such measures". The resolution adopted would be sent to the Centre for its consideration.

The Bihar Chief Minister, Ms. Rabri Devi, the Tripura Chief Minister, Mr. Manik Sarkar, and the Education Ministers of 12 States attended the meeting.

3 SEP 2001

14-point agenda to reverse slowdown

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Sept. 1: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today unveiled a 14-point reform agenda to reverse the economic slowdown and asked states and to take tough measures, even if they are unpopular, to achieve an 8 per cent growth in the Tenth Plan.

Admitting that growth has slowed, Vajpayee said agricultural production, industrial production and exports have come down besides poor credit offtake, with investments drying up.

Addressing the National Development Council meeting here today, Vajpayee said there was "no quick solution" to the economic problems presently faced by the country.

"We must have the courage and the will to accept this challenge; we cannot afford to be complacent. Nor can we afford to make promises that we know we cannot fulfil without taking correct decisions, be they for the moment unpopular," said Vajpayee.

"The people expect us to act—expect me to act and they expect you (chief ministers) to act. They expect us to take such necessary decisions that will infuse confidence and impart a new momentum to the economy," he added.

The Prime Minister asked the states to improve their finances, bring about reforms in the power, labour and financial sectors and engineer a recovery in the agricul-



Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the NDC meeting on

Saturday. Picture by Jagdish Yadav

tural, industrial and services sectors. Unproductive and unnecessary expenditure will have to be drastically pruned, he said.

However, all the economic reforms to be undertaken during the Tenth Plan need to have a "strong pro-poor focus and make elimination of poverty the central objective of development," Vajpayee said.

Highlighting the importance of "good governance," Vajpayee told the NDC that there must be a reorientation of executive accountability towards results by

laying stress on the implementation and making the Tenth Plan a "people's Plan".

Expressing his concern over the fall in revenue generation by both the Centre and state governments, Vajpayee suggested a series of measures to be taken on a priority basis.

He also emphasised the need to reduce untargeted non-merit subsidies.

Vajpayee stressed that the downsizing of the government has to be undertaken at the earliest.

He also asked the state govern-

ments to hasten labour reforms to attract new investments in various sectors.

The Prime Minister urged the state governments to lay special emphasis on implementing poor projects.

The government will launch the Saamporna Rozgar Yojana within this month to provide assured employment to the rural poor for building durable assets, Vajpayee said. He also sought the co-operation of state governments to implement this scheme.

Commenting on the power sec-

Bengal critical

New Delhi, Sept. 1 (PTI): Contesting the Centre's claim that the approach paper of the Tenth Plan has been accepted unanimously at the National Development Council, West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee today said there was no consensus.

"There was no consensus on the draft plan... There were divergent views which were not accommodated," Bhattacharjee told reporters here. "If they (Centre) do not accept these modifications, this document does not carry any meaning. It is superfluous and is based on the advice of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)," he said.

Debt burden of the states should be addressed first besides review of the disinvestment plans, he said regretting that the approach paper has not made a mention of land reforms.

He suggested that a committee headed by the Union finance minister be appointed to look into the issue of rescheduling of the debts of the state which was mainly due to the central government policies.

He expressed doubts about the Tenth Plan proposal to achieve eight per cent annual growth.

Opposing the disinvestment programme, Bhattacharjee said "just selling away profit making PSUs at throwaway prices will not help us. Privatisation is not the only solution of the economic problems."

Pant warns against slippage

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Sept 1: The Planning Commission today warned the state governments that any slippage in resource mobilisation to achieve the proposed eight per cent growth target during the Tenth Plan will have serious consequences for the economy.

Addressing the 49th National Development Council meeting here today, deputy chairman of the Planning Commission K.C. Pant sought the states' help to contain the Rs 90,000-crore revenue deficit and cautioned that the consequences of inaction are too serious to contemplate.

"Not only will growth falter and unemployment rise, but it could also threaten the cohesiveness of our social fabric," Pant said. He pointed out that "we are now borrowing more and more just to meet our current expenditure on salaries, interests and subsidies. We see that there has been a 200-fold increase in the pension bill of just 15 major states."

It has gone up from around Rs 100 crore to nearly Rs 19,000 crore in the last 25 years."

He emphasised the importance of disinvestment to fund the Tenth Plan.

PM hints at tough measures to revive cooperatives

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 25

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee today deplored the politicisation of cooperatives and warned that tough decisions might be taken to speedily achieve the revival of cooperative credit institutions.

"We cannot book any delay in the establishment of better norms of cooperative governance and strict adherence to them by all concerned," he said. Inaugurating the conference of chief ministers on "Recommendations of the task force on cooperative credit system and the rural infrastructure development fund", he admitted that excessive government control, supersession of duly elected boards, arbitrary changes in government nominees and frequent transfer of key executives had an adverse impact on the functioning of the cooperative institutions.

Vajpayee called for all help from different sections to "democratise, de-bureaucratise, professionalise and professionalise the cooperative movement." He urged the cooperatives to marry the positive policy and ethos of cooperation with modern practices of professional management.

Dwelling at length on prob-

lems faced by the cooperatives, he said, "Certain hard decisions may have to be taken to reliably and speedily achieve revival of cooperative credit institutions. Those cooperatives that have no hope of revival may have to be wound up. Such difficult but unavoidable decisions can only help us in the long-term."

The prime minister said that in many parts of the country cooperative institutions were being used as levers of political power, and elections to the boards of cooperative banks and other institutions had become an arena of rivalries between parties and individuals.

"All this saps the cooperative spirit of these institutions," he said and added that prevented them from being run on professional lines.

"Bad debts and losses mount, irregularities grow. Stories, both real and imaginary, of corruption and favouritism spread. This erodes the faith of members and the general public," he said.

The resultant problems and controversies become a pretext for further tightening of bureaucratic control over cooperatives, he said, adding "this vicious circle was the root of financial and organisational ill-health of our cooperatives."

Vajpayee said the government



WITH FOLDED HANDS: Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha greeting Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at the inauguration of the conference in New Delhi on Saturday. Agriculture Minister Ajit Singh is on the right

envisaged a larger role for the cooperatives in the planned development of the rural areas. The Insurance (Amendment) Bill will allow cooperatives to sell insurance services.

Earlier, Finance Minister

Yashwant Sinha said there was a need for cooperatives to become more dynamic. The cooperatives should themselves give strong signals to exhibit their desire to improve.

He felt that the present weak-

nesses of a large number of cooperative credit institutions were too deep-rooted to be rectified by a dose of additional finances.

"Hard decisions needed to be taken. Consolidation where

necessary and exit where nothing else is possible would be essential. The state governments also need to inspire confidence in the financial system by honouring their

he said.

PM wants an end to the mess in cooperatives

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By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 25. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today called for difficult but unavoidable decisions to bring about a speedy revival of cooperative credit institutions.

Inaugurating a Chief Ministers' meeting on cooperative credit systems, organised here by the Union Finance Ministry, the Prime Minister said many cooper-

ative institutions were financially weak and beset with problems of low volume operations, inefficient functioning and lack of professional and competent manpower.

Their credit discipline was often poor and the basic democratic tenet that these should be member-driven organisations was routinely compromised as these were being perceived as State-run institutions.

"Excessive Government control, supersession of duly elected boards, arbitrary changes in government nominees and frequent transfer of key executives have had an adverse impact on the functioning of our cooperative institutions. I should point out that our cooperative institutions, especially credit cooperatives, have also become victims of politicisation. In many parts of the country, these institutions are being used

as levers of political power. Elections to the boards of cooperative banks and other institutions have become an arena of rivalries between parties and individuals," the Prime Minister said.

'Hard decisions needed'

Pointing out that the faith of the members and the general public was being eroded, Mr. Vajpayee said it was time to take certain *hard decisions to rapidly achieve* a revival of the cooperative credit institutions and those having no hope of revival would have to be wound up. The cooperatives had to be de-politicised, de-bureaucratised, democratised and professionalised, the Prime Minister said and suggested that all concerned should establish better norms of cooperative governance and ensure strict adherence to them.

On the utilisation of the Rural Infrastructure Development Fund, Mr. Vajpayee suggested that the Finance Minister and the Chief Ministers concerned should have a meeting to see how faster disbursements of funds could take place.

On their part, most of the Chief Ministers were not in favour of most of the recommendations of the task force on cooperative credit system, which formed the agenda for today's meeting. Citing lack of resources, most States wanted greater Central assistance in revamping the credit institutions instead of the task force recommendation of a 40 per cent contribution each from the Centre and the State Governments and 20 per cent contribution from the members.

CMs want to retain control

Many of the Chief Ministers were also not in favour of giving up control over the cooperative institutions. The task force had said that cooperative credit institutions should be brought completely under the control of the Reserve Bank through the implementation of the Banking Regulation Act.

Many other States, particularly the north-eastern States, cited lack of professional and trained people to manage the cooperatives and called for Central help in providing training facilities to professionalise the cooperative bodies. There was also a near unanimous demand from the Chief Ministers for lowering interest rate on cooperative credit and for assistance from the Centre to wipe out the non-performing assets (bad loans) of the cooperative institutions. In fact, most Chief Ministers wanted to Centre to provide a recapitalisation package for the cooperative credit institutions as had been done in the case of public sector banks and regional rural banks.

Think of the farmer for a change: Chautala

By Alok Mukherjee

NEW DELHI, AUG. 25. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, had to face some embarrassing moments today at the Chief Ministers' Meeting on cooperative credit systems when his NDA alliance partner and Haryana Chief Minister, Mr. Om Prakash Chautala, came down heavily on the Government for being 'pro-industry' and not being considerate towards farmers.

Further embarrassment was in store for the Prime Minister when two of his Ministerial colleagues — the Agriculture Minister and the Finance Minister — openly differed on policy issues.

While Mr. Vajpayee, in his inaugural address, called for de-politicisation of the cooperative institutions and suggested difficult and unavoidable decisions, a strong dose of criticism came from Mr. Chautala of the Indian National Lok Dal.

In a presentation that seemed like an election rally speech, Mr. Chautala took the Central Government to task for "writing off crores of dues from the rich industrialists" while choking the flow of funds for the "poor farmer." It was the farmer who had toiled hard to fill the granaries so that the country was saved the embarrassment of "going around with a begging bowl" as was the case till the recent past." Mr. Chautala pleaded with the Finance Minister, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, to "tilt your pen towards the poor also, sometimes." Mr. Chautala pointed out that subsidies on agriculture inputs, fertilizers,

pesticides and power had become a thing of the past and it was only some cheap cooperative credit that was sustaining the farmer. "And you want to close that avenue also? If you cannot give a subsidy, at least bring about parity between the farmers and the industrialists. Loans to industry are being given at a concessional rate than what the farmers are getting. We used to call the previous (Congress) Governments as beholden to the industrialists. At least, our Government should not be seen as one."

There were some additional moments of embarrassment for the Prime Minister when his newly appointed Agriculture Minister, Mr. Ajit Singh, openly differed with the agenda prepared by the Finance Ministry. In particular, Mr. Singh disagreed with the funding proposal for recapitalising the cooperative institutions which called for a 20 per cent contribution from cooperative members.

The Minister said he failed to understand why the Finance Ministry could not provide Rs. 8,000 crores to clean the balance sheets of the cooperative credit institutions when it had given three times that amount to cleanse the balance sheets of public sector banks and regional rural banks. When the Finance Minister replied that the Centre could not provide this money as the cooperatives functioned under the State Governments, the Agriculture Minister shot back to say that the money belonged to the people and the Centre had similar responsibilities towards the cooperative institutions as it had towards commercial banks.

One killed in police firing in Ahmedabad

By Our Special Correspondent

AHMEDABAD, AUG. 25. An indefinite curfew was clamped in Dariapur police station areas in the heart of the city this evening after one person was killed in police firing and scores of others injured in stone throwing and stabbing.

Police fired six rounds, killing a middle-aged person after the bursting of about 50 teargas shells proved ineffective to disperse the riotous mobs indulging in arson and violence. Three incidents of stabbing were reported from the Kalupur and Dariapur areas as the disturbances continued for the second day today following a

bandh call given by the Muslim Traders Association and supported by the newly-created Lok Janshakti Party to protest against "harassment of small vendors allegedly by the Bajrang Dal activists". Police, however, denied that the alleged attackers on the small vendors in Vatva area earlier this week had any connection with the Bajrang Dal.

The disturbances spread to Dariapur today as several groups forced some of the shops to keep the shutters down and set about half-a-dozen cabins and vehicles afire. Several shops in the locality were also broken open and looted. The City Police Commission-

er, Mr. P. C. Pande, said while the situation in the evening was "tense but under control", in other affected areas, including Khanpur, Kalupur and Mirzapur areas, it remained by and large peaceful.

The Gujarat unit president of the Bajrang Dal, Mr. Ranchhodhai Bharwad, and the State Vishwa Hindu Parishad general secretary, Mr. Jaideep Patel, in a statement denied the involvement of the Dal or Sangh Parivar activists in the attack and claimed that the disturbances had been "deliberately sparked by Muslim organisations working at the behest of Pakistan and its intelligence agency, the ISI".

State to move SC over WTO deal on agriculture 18/8

HT Correspondent
Baranagar, August 17

HT-5
Centre State

THE LEFT Front Government will move the Supreme Court against the Centre's "unilateral decision" to throw open the agricultural sector to world players without consulting the States.

Announcing this here at a function to mark the silver jubilee of the Front Government in power, Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said, "Agricultural products such as rice, tea and even vegetables from other countries are making inroads to the State at the cost of our own farmers."

"The Centre didn't consult us before signing the agreement with the World Trade Organisation. How could it do this when agriculture is in the State List," Bhattacharjee asked.

However, the Chief Minister wasn't averse to inviting Microsoft to West Bengal. "Microsoft is welcome because we don't have the technology. We can't cultivate our potential without the technological backup.

"There is no point opposing the American software giant on grounds that it comes from the US. We have to stop brain drain," Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said to his partymen.

He, however, didn't miss out to remind them of the perils of

globalisation. "It (globalisation) hasn't been able to boost the country's economy.

"On the contrary the country is passing through a recession with the worst impact on our traditional engineering units," he said.

Bhattacharjee admitted that recent spurt in the mind industry — Information Technology — other knowledge-based sectors, and for that matter even the Haldia Petrochemical Limited, couldn't create enough job opportunities to keep pace with the job loss in the traditional sector.

"The Centre has already downed the shutters on eight Public Sector Units in West Bengal. Another 12 textile mills and five other jute mills are awaiting closure. Even the coalmines are under threat. But these are labour-intensive sectors."

Instead the Chief Minister harped on a middle path.

He encouraged the emerging areas in science and technology and was bent upon to create employment opportunities in the small-scale sector such as hosiery, plastics, leather goods, handloom, floriculture and fishery.

"We don't deny our responsibility towards the urban unemployed. The Left Front conducted land reforms, set up panchayats for the rural poor. But what about the urban poor?"

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

18 AUG 2001

Transfers politically motivated, says Jaya

HT Correspondent
Chennai, July 30

TAMIL NADU Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa today described the Centre's move to transfer three police officers from Chennai as "politically motivated," and also said the Centre would have to give an explanation for the transfers.

After discussing the matter with the State cabinet, Jayalalithaa during a brief interaction with the media today, said her Government would send an appropriate response to the Centre's requisition after consultations at the highest level. She said the State advocate-general was being consulted, indicating her Government was preparing for a long battle with the Centre on the issue.

Meanwhile, former IFS officer and senior Congress leader Natwar Singh said the Centre must use the proper mechanism available through the Ministry of Personnel to effect such transfers



J JAYALALITHAA

instead of resorting to ad hoc measures, adds PTI. Addressing newsmen here, he urged political parties to keep civil servants above political manoeuvres.

"While political masters should not use the civil servants to settle scores, civil servants too should resist the temptation to please their political masters," he said.

While the TMC, a major ally of the ruling AIADMK, felt that the Centre's move was an 'infringement' of the State's rights and asked the Centre to drop the proposal, Tamizhaga Rajiv Congress, headed by former union minister, Vazhapadi Ramamurthi termed the proposal as politically motivated and urged the State not to relieve the officers.

PIL twist: A Chennai advocate has filed a petition with Madras High Court seeking to stop the Centre and the Tamil Nadu Government from taking any action against the policemen charged with roughing up Karunanidhi while arresting him on June 30.

Lawyer K R Vijayakumar also sought a direction to restrain the Union and State Governments from passing remarks detrimental to the interests of the police officers of the State, and another to speed up the probe into the night's incidents by the Justice Raman Commission.

Centre sends another letter to T.N.

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, AUG. 14 Contrary to the expectations of a harsh *démarche* to the Tamil Nadu Government to make available immediately the services of three "controversial" IPS officers, the Centre this evening sent a rather mild communication to the Jayalithaa regime, seeking its "concurrence" to the proposed transfer "forthwith" of the officers "in the public interest" on Central deputation.

In a letter addressed to the Home Secretary of the Tamil Nadu Government, the Union Home Ministry has virtually rejected the Tamil Nadu Government's plea of August 1, 2001, and has pointed out that as against the Tamil Nadu quota of 46 Officers, only 23 Officers from the State cadre have so far been tapped by the Centre.

The Centre, according to this communication, was "empowered to draw IPS officers from the States up to the CDR [Central Deputation Reserve] share for manning posts in the Government of India.

Assuring the Tamil Nadu Government that these officers would be "assigned posts/duties commensurate with their seniority," the Centre's communication adds that these officers are needed "for

sensitive assignments in the Government of India."

The tone and tenor of the Central communication appears to be reasonable and conciliatory. The Vajpayee Government seems to

be mindful of the fact that the senior echelons in the bureaucracy are not exactly happy at being made a pawn in the battle between two political parties in Tamil Nadu.

Rajagopalan case may be treated separately

By Suresh Nambath

CHENNAI, AUG. 14. As the Centre begins to step up pressure for the release of four IPS officers from Tamil Nadu for their services in New Delhi, the State Government is considering the possibility of treating the case of Dr. R. Rajagopalan, who was appointed Director-General of the National Security Guards (NSG), separately.

This is primarily because the State Government believes that the transfer of the other three IPS officers is "politically motivated" and "punitive" in nature.

In the case of Dr. Rajagopalan, the main grouse of the State Government is that it was not consult-

ed before-hand. Of course, in its reply to the Centre, it had claimed that his services were required in Tamil Nadu for sensitising and training police personnel.

But, with Dr. Rajagopalan being keen on taking up the new assignment, the State Government does not want to be seen as retaining him out of "vindictiveness," Dr. Rajagopalan, who was the DGP during the DMK period, was actually shifted to the relatively insignificant post of DGP (Training). Following the latest missive from the Centre, wherein it was stated that the services of Dr. Rajagopalan were required for the much more essential post of the NSG chief, the State Government might not put up resistance

any further.

However, in the case of the other three officers — Mr. K. Muthukaruppan, Mr. S. George and Mr. Christopher Nelson — the State Government would only harden its stance. None of the three officers wants to take up the new assignment in the Capital. And the State Government feels justified in persisting with the argument that their shift is in violation of the transfer norms laid down by the Centre itself.

There would not be any great difficulty in treating the case of Dr. Rajagopalan differently as the orders for his transfer had come separately. A decision is likely in the "next few days."

15 AUG 2001

Centre mulls truce retreat

9 Centre 10/8
FROM RADHIKA
RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, July 24: The Centre seems to be coming around to the view that the accord with the National Socialist Council of Nagalim (Isak-Mulvah) should be confined to Nagaland and not extended to neighbouring states.

Home ministry sources said a review of the ceasefire agreement — in force in Nagaland, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and the upper hills of Manipur — would take into account the "interests" of the Northeast as a whole, not only Nagaland. The NSCN (I-M)'s presence outside Nagaland had compelled the Centre to extend the truce outside its boundaries.

Manipur legislators have set July 31 as the deadline for the Centre to revoke the extension of the ceasefire outside Nagaland, failing which they have threatened to resign en masse.

The Centre's interlocutor for the Naga accord, K. Padmanabhaiah, recently held talks with Mulvah in Amsterdam following the Centre's decision to review the accord. "The talks are bilateral between the government and Mulvah and any solution can be found within the bilateral framework only. But the solution will have to be in the larger interest of the entire Northeast and not only Nagaland or Manipur," home ministry sources said.

"Arunachal, Assam and Manipur don't want the accord, so

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there is a feeling that just for one state, Nagaland, there is no point continuing with it," they added.

However, they conceded that if the truce was lifted from Assam, Manipur and Arunachal, it was bound to have repercussions in Nagaland. "We will have to take care of this. We are in a catch-22 situation," the sources said.

In the Lok Sabha today, Congress MP from Nagaland, K.A. Sangtam, warned that the ceasefire review would have "serious" consequences in the Northeast. "We do not know who is handling the issues," he said.

But the growing perception is that if the Centre has to make the "best of a bad situation", it is "better" to deal with Nagaland alone than have a host of problem states on hand.

The Manipur issue had its echoes in Parliament today with the Opposition grilling the Centre for its "inept" handling and warning it against taking the issue "lightly" as this would lead to the separation of the north-eastern states from India.

Parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan told the House that the Prime Minister had convened a meeting of chief ministers of north-eastern states on July 27 to find a solution to the Manipur impasse. Both Houses are expected to discuss the issue on July 30 after which the Ordinance enforcing presidential rule in Manipur will come up for ratification.

Northeast MPs to launch forum against Centre

BY SANJAY BASAK

New Delhi, July 22: The Manipur crisis deepened on Saturday with state MLAs and MPs planning to launch a forum, including the chief ministers of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya to take up the cudgel against the Centre against its decision to extend ceasefire beyond Nagaland.

Rejecting the Centre's decision to review the ceasefire decision, the Manipur legislators have demanded complete withdrawal of the decision. In protest against the recent firing in the state, the legislators also demanded that the forces and administrative machinery operating under President's Rule be withdrawn immediately.

The legislators also met the NDA convenor, Mr George Fernandes, and urged him to raise the Manipur issue during the NDA meeting, slated for 23 July. The legislators were also awaiting the outcome of the chief ministers' meet with the Prime Minister on 27 July.

The Manipur legislators said that they have already established contact with the chief ministers of Assam, Arunachal Pradesh and Meghalaya. It has been decided

that if Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee failed to withdraw the decision to extend ceasefire, during his meeting with the concerned chief ministers of the state, the three CMs along with the Manipur legislators would form a forum to launch an agitation against the Centre.

The leaders now intend to launch a joint campaign against the Vajpayee government's policy in the northeast. The Manipur leaders reiterated that the first step against the Centre would be their decision to resign from the Assembly and Parliament. With regard to the demand for the resignation of the Union minister of state for food processing, Mr Chauba Singh, the legislators maintained that he would quit the ministry along with other legislators on July 31. The United Committee of Manipur, an umbrella organisation in the state had demanded the resignation of Mr Singh, on Saturday.

The Centre is now pinning its hope on the talks with NSCN leader, Th. Muivah. Sources disclosed that the Centre would now try to persuade the NSCN (I/M) to agree to the Manipuri's demand for withdrawal of the decision.

PM to meet N-E CMs over ceasefire review

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 18

THE CENTRE today decided to hold a meeting with all Chief Ministers of the North-East, especially those who want abrogation of the pact which extended the truce "without territorial limits".

The decision was part of a process to review the ceasefire extension agreement with the NSCN (I-M). At a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee this afternoon, it was decided that the CMs' views be taken before the Centre broaches the issue with the NSCN(I-M) leadership which is reportedly in

The Netherlands awaiting the arrival of K Padmanabhaiah the Government's interlocutor for the Naga peace talks. Apart from the PM, the meeting today was attended by Union Home Minister L K Advani, Padmanabhaiah, Home Secretary Kamal Pande and senior intelligence officials.

This will be the third time that Vajpayee will hold discussions with the North-east Chief Ministers. He had held two such meetings with the Chief Ministers of Assam, Manipur and Arunachal Pradesh, which have pockets of Naga population, for their approval to the truce being extended to the whole of North-east. Subsequently, Assam's new

Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi, MLAs from Manipur (which is under President's Rule) and Arunachal Pradesh rejected the agreement and demanded a review. The "strong" stand by the three States and the continuing unrest and threats of "civil disobedience" in Manipur will weight heavily on the PM's mind when he meets the North-east CMs "within a few days".

The stand taken by the Assam and Arunachal Pradesh Governments and the peoples' representatives from Manipur is clear. Only Nagaland Chief Minister S C Jamir has asked the Centre not to go in for a review of the ceasefire, which, according to him,

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would "adversely affect" the situation in his State "where peace has returned after decades".

In a letter to the Home Minister, Jamir has said the Centre should quickly start a political dialogue with the NSCN (Khaplang) faction. He said the dialogue process with the Khaplang faction should be set in motion before any further talks with the NSCN(I-M).

He has also proposed an immediate meeting of the Ceasefire Supervisory Board, comprising representatives of the Centre, State Government and the NSCN(Khaplang) to work out the modalities of a formal ceasefire agreement.

Delhi's warning

By Rajeev Dhavan

The 'warning' mechanism suggested by the Sarkaria report is a part of the due process of federalism, not a unilateral political punishment.

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THE TAMIL Nadu crisis ended with a symbolic warning by Delhi asking the Jayalalithaa Government to behave itself and a short list of remedial directions. There is little doubt that the savagery with which Mr. Karunanidhi's post-midnight arrest and humiliation was planned and executed (including as it did, the arrest of Union Ministers on charges of obstruction) deserves the severest condemnation. June 30, 2001, will be remembered as the unprincipled nadir of Tamil Nadu's "revenge regime" politics which has reached impossible limits.

But, Delhi's warning to the Tamil Nadu merits rigorous scrutiny. For some time now, BJP-led coalitions have tried to re-write the script and scope of Indian federalism. This is in sharp contrast to its rhetoric on federalism. Out of power, the BJP remonstrated against the imposition of President's Rule on States ruled by it in the wake of the destruction of the Babri Masjid in 1992. Once in power, the BJP's stance on federalism changed. Partly due to the politics of appeasement towards its coalition allies, the BJP's own view of federalism is profoundly skewed — no less on Kashmir as any other State. We are not too far from the events of 1997-98 when the BJP tried to send an official team to West Bengal only to be strongly rebuffed by Mr. Jyoti Basu's left front regime. Mr. Karunanidhi can surely not have forgotten a similar initiative against his DMK Government.

In 1998-99, Kerala's Planning Commission was more than upset by the new ground rules sought to be created about Union grants to the State. Concern was expressed by activists in Madhya Pradesh about the manner in which employment schemes were rendered unavailable in the inter-crop season when they were needed most. If Ms. Mamata Banerjee needed the BJP-coalition to re-write federal arrangements in West Bengal, Mr. George Fernandes's Samata Party was equally subversive in its plans for Bihar. President's Rule was sought to be imposed on Mr. Laloo Yadav's Bihar. But, the political malafides were so glaring that the President, Mr. K. R. Narayan, exercised his refer-back veto to stop the imposition. Even

this did not stop the BJP-led Government from having another shot at President's Rule in Bihar months later; but, it failed to pull it off against resistance from parliamentary parties at the Union.

Matters have got worse. In 2001, the BJP brought down its Samata ally's Government in Manipur to precipitate President's Rule. Unfortunately, because of the Nagaland ceasefire imbroglio, this was precisely the time when Manipur needed an elected Government. On

June 30, 2001, the Tamil Nadu crisis began. The BJP-led Government flexed its muscles. It wanted to humiliate the humiliators and to be seen to be morally in charge. Floundering for style, it committed constitutional improprieties at every step. First, the Union Law Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley, held up the confidential report of the then Governor, Ms. Fathima Beevi, for ridicule. This was uncalled for. Second, it carried the humiliation of the Governor further by engineering her dismissal. Governors have five-year terms. No doubt, they hold office at the pleasure of the President. But, the BJP's recall of Ms. Beevi was not a dismissal simpliciter, but because of her allegedly incompetent report. Years back, Mr. Barnala was the BJP's ideal Governor of Tamil Nadu because he stood up to Delhi. Now, a disagreeing Governor was disagreeably sacked.

But, the BJP-led Government's moral one-upmanship was not complete. It issued a 'warning' to the Tamil Nadu Government. Both Mr. Jaitley and the Attorney-General, Mr. Soli Sorabji, justified 'warning' on the basis of Paragraph 6.7.08 of the Sarkaria Commission Report. But, the Sarkaria Commission is neither gospel nor scripture. It is randomly invoked by politicians when it suits them. Many of its salutary provisions have never been implemented. In this case, the Sarkaria Commission's invocation is palpa-

bly misleading. We can never overlook the fact that President's Rule subverts both federalism and democracy. It does not exist in isolation. India's federalism prescribes 'cooperation' not confrontation between States. The 'warning' mechanism suggested by the Sarkaria Report is an extreme step, to be taken only if the Union Government is convinced that a case for President's Rule is made out. It is

LAW AND SOCIETY

a part of the due process of federalism, not a unilateral political punishment.

Unfortunately, after Kerala in 1959, breakdown of law and order has been regarded as legitimate ground for imposing President's Rule. But, even the Sarkaria report emphasises that the Union needs to evolve a way of resolving the problem through discussions and directives.

This gets us back to the core question on the constitutional status of Delhi's warning. The first principle is that the Union must refrain from exercising its muscle in areas within the exclusive competence of the State, which include the police and some aspects of law and order. The second principle is that the Union has no general power to issue warnings to the States; or, to recount the West Bengal example, send fact-finding missions to the States. Third, Indian federalism is cooperational not confrontational in nature. It follows that under the guise of governance, the Union cannot direct State governance. Fourth, a 'Sarkaria' warning is to be given as part of a federal due process as a prelude to President's Rule after due discussions with the State. In other words, warnings exist only if a case is made out for President's Rule itself.

This takes us to the inner core of the controversy. If the 'warning' was constitutionally proper, the Union must be deemed to have taken a view that a constitutionally transgressive arrest accompanied by large scale protests and arrests

amount to a breakdown of the Constitution to justify President's Rule. Such a basis for President's Rule is simply not acceptable. It is Kerala (1959) and Bihar (1998-99) all over again — a horrible recipe which invites Oppositions in States to foment discontent to invite President's Rule. Impositions of President's Rule on grounds of corruption (Tamil Nadu, 1976, Manipur, 1979) or breakdown of law and order are inconsistent with federalism. The BJP-led Government has tried to have its cake and eat it too. Constitutional warnings are not political toys to gain moral advantages.

It is unfortunate that the BJP has never really understood Indian federalism except as a means to grab power and public attention for itself and its allies. The BJP's stance on abolishing Article 370 which confers a special status on Kashmir reveals its malunderstanding of India's federal structure. Again, the Nagaland ceasefire which has exercised Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and Assam shows an inability to recognise the distinctness of each State. Indian federalism is quite unique — even more so than the Chinese's after Hong Kong and Macao joined their Union. What is at issue in the Indo-Pakistan talks is Indian federalism. India is as, if not more, varied as Europe. But, India has chosen federalism as its vehicle for pulling the subcontinent together. Pakistan and some of the Kashmiri groups are threatening the "balkanisation" of Kashmir. This is not an idle threat. We have witnessed a balkanisation process in the former Yugoslavia regions. A similar gameplan is being pushed for Kashmir by Pakistan and its contrived allies. If this is accepted for Kashmir, it will apply to other regions to put the very concept of India at risk. India's stance at these talks has to be founded on the twin principles of secularism and federalism. The BJP seems to understand both imperfectly. To each group and part of India, India offers autonomy, its sense of uniqueness, democracy, the rule of law and a sensitive and equitable federalism. The fundamental principle is Delhi does not rule India. India rules India. This is the key which unlocks the secret of Indian democracy and governance.

Centre to review Naga truce

HT Correspondents
New Delhi/Imphal, July 8

THE CENTRE will review the new ceasefire agreement with the NSCN (I-M) "in its entirety", Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee assured Manipur's politicians in New Delhi today.

At a meeting attended by L K Advani, I D Swami and K Padmanabhaiah, the Centre's negotiator with the NSCN (I-M), Vajpayee said: "We shall review the agreement, including the words "without territorial limits". Among others present were National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra and Home Secretary Kamal Pande.

That Manipuri society is deeply divided over the ceasefire issue was reflected by the absence of the nine Naga MLAs from today's meeting. Notable among the absentees was former Chief Minister Rishang Keishing.

Meitei organisations in Imphal accepted the Centre's decision with cautious optimism. But the Nagas threatened to strike back.

"This is a positive statement, but we'll have to wait and see the outcome of this review. We shall keep our fingers crossed," R K Anand, Adviser to the All Manipur United Clubs' Organisation (AMUCO) said.

For Manipur's politicians, the Government's assurance came as a welcome breather. "This is just an assurance from

the Prime Minister. There is no reason for us to be happy or unhappy yet," L Chandramoni Singh, convener of the Manipur MPs' and MLAs' Forum, said in New Delhi.

Even today, agitating Manipuri students tried to prevent the Manipuri politicians from reaching the Prime Minister's home, delaying the meeting by an hour.

"Any review of the truce will be very dangerous and will have grave consequences in the hill districts of Manipur and in Nagaland," Ringkahao Horam, president of Naga Cultural Development Society, said in Imphal. "If the agreement is tampered with, the consequences will be unimaginable and the outburst difficult to contain," said a leader of the All Naga Students' Union of Manipur.

Swami, who returned to New Delhi after a visit to Imphal, apparently recommended a review of the truce to the Prime Minister. The Minister of State for Home later told reporters that Padmanabhaiah would visit Bangkok soon to discuss the ceasefire rethink with top NSCN-IM leaders. "This is a bilateral agreement between the Centre and the NSCN(I-M); so it is obvious that the interlocutor will meet their leaders before the agreement is reviewed."

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Statute panel papers on inter-State row

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 6

THE NATIONAL Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution (NCRWC) today released two papers for public debate on constitutional mechanisms for settlement of inter-State disputes and "effectuation" of fundamental duties of citizens.

Another paper on probity in governance is expected to be released soon. It favours enactment of a law for confiscation of illegally acquired assets of public servants.

The NCRWC's suggestions are in line with the Supreme Court's observations that a legislation similar to the Smugglers and Foreign Exchange Manipulators (Forfeiture of Property) Act be brought to deal with corrupt public servants. Besides, the paper stressed the need for enactment of laws such as Public Interest Disclosure Act and Freedom of Information Act. Seeking public opinion on "effectuation" of fundamental duties of citizens, the NCRWC suggested incorporation in the Constitution of more such duties such as the duty to vote in an election, duty to pay taxes and duty to resist injustice. At present, a total of 10 fundamental duties are enlisted in the Constitution.

The NCRWC also proposed enforcement of fundamental duties by the legislatures. It has suggested drawing up conduct rules for compliance of duties by public servants.

The consultation paper dealing with the mechanisms for settlement of inter-State disputes suggested conferment of more powers on the Supreme Court to entertain non-governmental parties in such cases. Presently, the Supreme Court has the exclusive jurisdiction to adjudicate disputes between different States and between a State and the Centre. The court has no powers to exercise if one of the parties in the dispute is a non-governmental party.

Jayalalitha goes slow on Centre's warning

BY R. BHAGWAN SINGH

Chennai, July 6: Apart from releasing the former chief minister M. Karunanidhi and the two Union ministers Murasoli Maran and T.R. Baalu, the Tamil Nadu government appears in no big hurry to take any follow-up action on the Centre's warning with regard to the controversial events of last Saturday, sources here said.

While seeking the release of the three DMK leaders, the Central directive had also asked that action should be taken against the police officers who allegedly attacked them. The Maran-owned Sun TV had named six officers in this connection, so too had Mr Karunanid-

hi after his release from jail on Wednesday.

However, five of them issued statements claiming they were not part of the team which had knocked on Mr Karunanidhi's door in the wee hours of Saturday to arrest him. They were on different duties at that hour and had nothing to do with arresting the former chief minister, these officers have said on Friday. The main target for the DMK ire, deputy inspector general of police Mohamed Ali, made no such claim since the Sun TV video clips have repeatedly shown him in the skirmish during the arrest.

The state director general of police A. Ravindranath said he had

not yet studied the Centre's directive. However, care would be taken to protect the police morale in whatever action that would be ultimately taken, he told reporters at

Stalin granted bail

Chennai, July 6: DMK president M. Karunanidhi's son and Chennai mayor M.K. Stalin was on Friday granted bail by a sessions court in the alleged multi-crore "flyover" scam.

Mr Stalin, the prime accused in the scam, surrendered before the principal sessions judge Ashok Kumar on June 30 and was remanded to judicial custody till July 10. (PTI)

that Chennai airport while seeing off the former governor Ms Fatheema Beevi, who was returning home to Kerala following Delhi's decision to recall her Saturday's turmoil.

"I am just doing my professional job," the DGP quipped, when asked to comment on Mr Karunanidhi's charge that he had acted out of personal vendetta since he did not get the top police post during the predecessor DMK regime despite visiting his (Karunanidhi's) house several times to plead his case.

It may be recalled that while ordering the release of the two Union ministers on Tuesday, the Jayalalitha government insisted

that they were being released upon requests from the Centre and Prime Minister Vajpayee, even though they had violated the law. It was also announced then that the government would stand by its police officers and they must continue to discharge their duties without fear.

The tenor of that statement made it clear that the state government did not subscribe to the view that its officers had misbehaved with the three DMK leaders and so deserved punishment. It remains to be seen if this stand would be diluted in the coming days if only to buy peace with Delhi. Present indications are that no officer, involved in the events, would be touched.

THE ASIAN AGE

Jaya soft stance forced Centre's hand

Jay Raina
New Delhi, July 4

WHAT LED to the Union Cabinet's sudden climbdown from its tough posturing against Jayalalithaa to let her off with just a warning without resorting to the existing penal constitutional provisions?

The answer is obvious. Even before the Centre could crack the whip, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, having seen the writing on the wall, adopted a softer line in her stand-off with the Vajpayee regime.

Tuesday's Cabinet meeting at Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Race Course Road residence witnessed a mix of anger and relief at the events unfolding in Chennai.

Even as several Ministers pressed for tough action to meet Jaya's challenge, many advocated moderation in pursuit of a long-term policy.

It is unlikely that the new Governor will reappoint Jaya as once her deadline expires in November. Moreover, with a few cases still pending against her, the prospects of her indictment in at least one of them is high.

The mood at the Cabinet conclave changed with the news of that Jaya had withdrawn cases against Murasoli Maran and TR Baalu and ordered their release. Also, the assurances of an AIADMK delegation Jaya had

sent to broker peace with the Centre added to the Cabinet's optimism of former Karunanidhi's release (ordered today).

The Cabinet discussions revolved around the twelve-and-half-page report of an official team sent to Chennai. The findings of the NDA delegation, led by Fernandes, were also considered.

Earlier, two Cabinet notes on possible recourse to Articles 355 or 256 were finalised by Law Minister Arun Jaitley and Attorney General Soli Sorabjee.

Legal experts said to resort to either of the statutory provisions will have to be followed with conclusive action under Article 356. This, they said, could help Jaya politically at a time she was expected to face problems in her reappointment as Chief Minister in the absence of a popular personal mandate.

The arguments drew strength from the Sarkaria Commission's report on Centre-State relations and the Apex Court's judgement in the SR Bommai case. The Cabinet's memory was refreshed on the questions raised by President KR Narayanan while returning the Cabinet's recommendation for Central rule in Bihar. Cabinet members were conscious of some coalition partners' opposition to invocation of Article 356. Together, these considerations made the Government opt for a mere warning to Jaya.

Art 355 back in focus

Chandan Nandy
New Delhi, July 4

THE TAMIL Nadu crisis and the "perceived" erosion of the Centre's authority has once again brought to fore a Government proposal seeking an amendment of Article 355 to make intervention under the provision more effective.

The Home Ministry recently put the proposal on hold without giving it up. North Block time and again approached the Law Ministry and the Law Commission to work out a draft Bill to "strengthen" the Centre's hands while dealing with law and order and constitutional crises in States.

The GoM, led by LK Advani, made specific recommendations on amending Article 355 and the Emergency provisions in the Constitution.

Article 355 assigns the Union Government the responsibility to protect States from external aggression and internal disturbances besides guaranteeing that States are run in accordance with the Constitution. But sources say it's a "powerful

and potent" provision that has remained in disuse.

"The Centre can act during instances of external threat and internal disturbances by sending in security forces, but the Constitution is delightfully vague and silent on how the Article can be invoked when there is a constitutional crisis or a serious law and order situation," an official said.

Officials said the proposed amendment would involve framing laws, in consultation with States, which vest in the Centre powers to "regulate" law and order to some degree in the States. This would mean "interference" in areas under the State List.

The exact contours of the proposed law are yet to be worked out, but there are enough indications that moves are afoot to secure clearer constitutional sanction for the Centre's interventionist role in these areas. One way to achieve this could be the introduction of legislation favouring creation of a Central Law Enforcement Agency to deal with "federal offences".

Centre-States balance restored: BJP

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 4. With the situation in Tamil Nadu more or less defused, the aggressive tone with which the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had been demanding the imposition of President's rule on the State, was replaced today with a reasonable comment that the "delicate balance between the Centre and the States" which had been "disturbed" by the Jayalalithaa Government now stood restored.

The BJP president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthi, today spoke in defence of the Centre's actions even as he criticised the "overenthusiasm" of police officers and the lack of decency displayed in the arrests of DMK leaders.

While agreeing to the IAS officers' plea that they should not be made the scapegoat in the high drama that took place, Mr. Krishnamurthi, nevertheless, demanded that they be held "answerable" for the "acts of commission and omission."

Welcoming the release of the former Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, and the release and withdrawal of charges against the two Union Ministers, Mr. Murasoli Maran and Mr. T.R. Baalu, he said, "after the remarks by the court yesterday," the State Government could not have but come to the conclusion that it could no longer detain Mr. Karunanidhi.

Both the Centre and the State had to function within the democratic system and help maintain the "delicate balance" between the two.

The Vajpayee Government had "restored the balance" upset by the actions of the Jayalalithaa Government.

CENTRE VS STATES

AFTER FATHIMA BEEVI'S RESIGNATION, SPOTLIGHT ON GOVERNORS AGAIN

When things fall apart in the states, why doesn't the Governor's office hold? An analysis by SANKARSHAN THAKUR

The ties that bind, and gag

If political battles have to be fought between the Centre and states, aren't they better fought as political battles? Why does a governor need to flagellate in between two parties and why does the taxpayer have to pay?

CENTRE-STATE ties lie blistered again and at core of the problem, like very often in the past, is that much maligned and much abused office of the governor. If the case of Fathima Beevi, the sacked Tamil Nadu governor, was different from most others caught in Centre-state tussles, it was only because hers was a Raj Bhawan seen to be acting in active collusion with the state government rather than with the Centre.

In any event, the role of the governor, on the occasion that he or she has had a meaningful role to play, has seldom been a role intrinsically of the office; most often it has been the role of a tool of partisan political forces at war. On paper, the governor's office was meant essentially to facilitate smooth conduct of centre-state relations but quite the contrary has happened in practice. Instead of working on the seams of the federation, governors have unworked them.

Right from 1959, when the first elected Marxist of E.M.S. Namboodiripad in Kerala was dismissed on the basis of a report presented to the Centre by the then Congress President, Indira Gandhi, the governor has been a

kowtowing, if also an ornamental and caparisoned, lackey of political forces, in almost all cases the centre. Instances of the Raj Bhawan being used to push political ends are only too many.

In the Congress era, it was almost the acceptable thing to do to order governors to dismiss Opposition state governments — the Left Front in West Bengal, the Samyukta Vidhayak Dal (SVD) governments in Bihar. When the Janata regime came to power for the first time in New Delhi in 1977, it set a poor example itself — it aped the Congress'

authoritarianism and dismissed all Congress governments in the states in the name of a country-wide anti-Congress mandate. When Indira Gandhi rode back to power three years later, she returned the compliments in equal measure. Jagmohan was used to effect a legislature party coup in Farooq Abdullah's National Conference in 1984 and dismiss his government for no apparent reason other than that Abdullah was not palatable at that time to those in power in New Delhi.

The Congress employed similar tactics to rob N.T. Rama Rao

of office in Andhra Pradesh. Ram Lal, a typically durbari Congressman, was sent as governor to Andhra and he took little time to perform the job he had been assigned. He found a willing Trojan horse in Nadendla Bhaskara Rao, signed NTR out of office without so much as verifying the strength in the legislature and swore Nadendla in. NTR, in hospital with a heart ailment at that time, came to New Delhi in a wheelchair with his legislature party in tow and won back the chief ministership in dramatic fashion.

G.D. Tapase did a Ram Lal to the Devi Lal government in Haryana with the result that in 1987, the Jat chieftain came back with an unprecedented majority. In recent times, the two Bhandaris — Romesh in Uttar Pradesh and Sunder Singh in Bihar — have contributed their bits to eroding the credibility of Raj Bhawans. That they tend to act out of overweening loyalty to their appointees has always been a factor that has distorted the conduct of governors; what has added to this is that, more and more, active and practising politi-

cians are being appointed to Raj Bhawans.

The appointment of Sundar Singh Bhandari as governor to Bihar was a classic case in point. Just weeks before he arrived as constitutional head in Patna, Bhandari had led a BJP dharna in New Delhi for the dismissal of the Rashtriya Janata Dal government in Bihar. What he demanded as BJP leader, he was able to recommend as governor. It was quite another matter that his recommendation was rebuffed, by the establishment in New Delhi and, in elections held

a little later, by the people of Bihar.

Considering that they only act out the role of partisan political officers — the less charitable would say hatchet men — the question must arise whether governors should at all be maintained by the state at such a huge cost to taxpayers. Most Raj Bhawans live in the era of imperial opulence — retinues of valets and attendants, cooks and cleaners, gardeners and washermen, fleets of automobiles and platoons of drivers, and above all these an entire white-collar bu-



reaucracy dedicated to the care on one person whose essential role is of a frill. For the most part, governors cut ribbons, and make speeches that induce slumber when they don't induce cynicism. There have been governors who have also used Raj Bhawans as platforms for profit or political propaganda. The Patna Raj Bhawan was once a flourishing poultry farm — cultured quails and chickens used to be sold across the Raj Bhawan fences quite openly. A former UP governor had all but opened a regular *shakha* on the Raj Bhawan lawns in Lucknow.

Probably the only occasion the governor has proved his use is when there is a genuine breakdown of constitutional machinery in a state and the Centre needs, for a time, to rule a province directly. In a democracy and federation that is still evolving, there have been several occasions when the Centre has had to assume control and prevent things falling apart. But if a temporary chief executive officer is what the Centre needs to handle such exigencies, isn't it a good idea for it to appoint such a chief executive officer as and when the need arises? There isn't any dearth of talented and experienced hands available to take on the role. Must there be a Raj Bhawan that bleeds the economy and a governor that bleeds the federation? If political battles have to be fought between the Centre and the states, aren't they better fought as political battles why does a governor need to flagellate in between two parties that would scrap anyway and why does the taxpayer have to pay him, or her, being there?

COMPLIANCE REPORT WILL BE SOUGHT

T.N. Govt. to be 'warned' to mend its ways

HDI
1/7

J. Lenin - State

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JULY 3. Rather than exercising the extreme option of invoking Article 356, the Centre today decided to issue a "warning" to the Tamil Nadu Government. The crux of the proposed "warning" is that the AIADMK Government would be required to "rectify" all the violations of law and Constitutional provisions that have taken place since the June 29-30 eruption. Also, the State Government would be asked to identify and penalise "as per the law" those officials who exceeded their brief and committed "excesses".

The "warning" would be issued as per the recommendation of the Sarkaria Commission that before invoking Article 356, the Centre must "warn" the offending State Government to mend its ways. The idea of "warning" is also inherent in the Bommai case. The Centre would also demand a "compliance" report within a time-frame from the Tamil Nadu Government. The actual "warning" would be drafted by the Union Home Ministry.

The decision came after a two-hour meeting of the Union Cabinet at the Prime Minister's residence. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L. K. Advani, was

present, for the first time since the "crisis" erupted on June 30. Mr. Advani is believed to have pointed out the pitfalls of invoking Article 356, when the ruling National Democratic Alliance did not have the requisite numbers in the Rajya Sabha to have the Centre's decision ratified. However, he also felt that a "message" should go out to the AIADMK regime that it could not violate with impunity the letter and spirit of the Constitution. The Cabinet also had the benefit of the advice of the Attorney-General, Mr. Soli Sorabjee. Mr. Sorabjee enunciated the Constitutional options open to the Centre. His presence was requisitioned by the Prime Minister to ensure that the Centre's response was strictly within the Constitutional parameters, and was not dictated by political intemperance. The "warning" strategy satisfies the hotheads within the NDA that the Constitutional book has been thrown at Ms. Jayalalithaa, but the strategy also puts the pot of confrontation on the back burner.

Gradual climbdown

With today's decision, the brewing confrontation between the Centre and the State Government appears to have been dissipated. On her part, having made

the point of inflicting political vengeance against Mr. Karunanidhi and other senior DMK leaders, Ms. Jayalalithaa had no interest picking up a confrontation with the Centre. The AIADMK regime had, in fact, begun yesterday its very slow climb-down from the commanding heights of defiance of the Centre; it had ordered that the two Ministers be released, and began today the process of releasing from jail the DMK activists who had courted arrest in the wake of Mr. Karunanidhi's arrest.

Furthermore, the Jayalalithaa regime chose to blink one more time today when it announced its decision to drop the cases altogether against the two Central Ministers. But the State Government made it out that this was being done as a gesture of "deference to the views expressed by the Government of India and, more specifically, the Prime Minister of India".

'PM didn't seek concessions'

However, the Centre was not willing to let the Tamil Nadu Government get away with this show of political reasonableness. An official statement from the Prime Minister's Office termed as "incorrect" the State Government's

assertion that Mr. Vajpayee had sought any concession for his ministerial colleagues. "The Prime Minister never made any request to the State Government to consider dropping the charges against the Central Ministers," it said. Sources insisted that no one was authorised to make any request to the State Government.

Keen on defusing crisis

The Prime Minister was also keen on ending the standoff with Ms. Jayalalithaa. It was beginning to dawn here that the AIADMK too had joined the battle of political images and prejudices, and responsible officials at the Centre were convinced that the conduct of two Central Ministers on June 30 would not stand close scrutiny; one view was that by their conduct the two Ministers had put at stake the credibility and dignity of the Centre. Hence, the willingness to meet the AIADMK regime halfway. Earlier, Mr. Sorabjee held consultations with the Union Law Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley, on the legal issues arising out of the two Union Ministers' arrest. Mr. Sorabjee also called on Mr. Vajpayee and probably got a drift of Mr. Vajpayee's thinking on how to defuse the situation.

Maran's arrest was unwarranted: Page 13

THE HINDU

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Left warns against Central intervention

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By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 2. The Left parties today warned the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance Government against Central intervention in Tamil Nadu stating such an act could create a serious political situation in the country.

A CPI-M politburo statement today said the Vajpayee Government, after virtually sacking the Governor of Tamil Nadu, was now contemplating further measures to intervene. "Whether it be the use of Article 356 or 355, they would amount to gross misuse of the Constitutional provisions by the Central Government."

It said the 'specious arguments' being set out for Central intervention concern the arrest of the two Union Ministers whose behaviour had anyway been questionable in the events connected with Mr. Karunanidhi's arrest and the disregarding of the Governor's report merely because it did not conform to the DMK-BJP view.

Condemning the threat against the State Government by the NDA convener, Mr. George Fernandes, on behalf of the alliance, the CPI (M) said the record of the BJP-led Government and the NDA had been 'shameless as far as misuse' of Article 356 was concerned.

The party said any move against the AIADMK Government which came into office on popular mandate less than two months ago would be a 'grave assault on democracy'.

The CPI charged the Vajpayee Government with giving a 'politically motivated twist' to the developments in Tamil Nadu and cautioned it would have a 'serious bearing' on the functions of the Constitution and Centre-State relations.

The party's central secretariat said the DMK-BJP combine was 'deliberately' building up a case for Central intervention and clear indications to this effect were available in the form of recall of

the Governor and 'belligerent' statements by Mr. Fernandes and the Union Law Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley.

"Their accusation that the Speaker's office was not even informed was exposed by the Speaker himself confirming the receipt of information of arrest from Chennai," the CPI said adding the NDA leaders had not explained what the official functions of the two Union Ministers in Chennai were and how they could go for confrontation with the State administration.

"The cry of the State's defiance of Union Government's authority is loaded with the idea that the States must be subordinate to the Centre. This is totally against the federal spirit of our Constitution. It cannot go unchallenged," the statement said.

'Make reports on arrest-related incidents public'

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, JULY 2. A former Member of Parliament, Mr. Era Sezhiyan, today asked the Centre to make public the reports of the Governor, the Chief Secretary, the NDA panel and others about the incidents surrounding the arrest of the former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi.

The reports need not be treated as secret documents, he said and pointed out that whenever President's rule was imposed in a State, the copy of the proclamation under Article 356 would be placed before Parliament along with the Report of the Governor.

In this context, he noted that the NDA had committed itself to transparency in the decision-making process.

Mr. Sezhiyan recalled that the Centre was not pleased with the Governor, Ms. Fathima Beevi, for not consulting it before inviting Ms. Jayalalithaa to form the Gov-

ernment. The Governor had also not sent a report to suit the wishes of the Centre against the State Government. "In the past, it has been the demand of the DMK and the BJP that the Governor not be treated as an agent of the Centre and not be called to affix signature on the reports prepared in Delhi. The same parties, now in power, seem to have no need for a Governor acting on those principles," he said.

Laloo condemns recall of Governor

By Our Staff Correspondent

PATNA, JULY 2. The former Bihar Chief Minister and RJD president, Mr. Laloo Prasad Yadav, today condemned the Centre's decision to recall the Tamil Nadu Governor, Ms. Fathima Beevi, and warned against any move to dislodge the Jayalalithaa Government.

The RJD would oppose any move by the NDA Government to dislodge a Government which was formed with a massive mandate. Mr. Yadav said the Governor could not have had any prior information about the police action. He alleged that the NDA Government had been targeting Ms. Fathima Beevi ever since she administered the oath of office to Ms. Jayalalithaa.

Hegde against Central rule

BANGALORE, JULY 2. The former Union Minister, Mr. Ramakrishna Hegde, today ridiculed the NDA for having sent to Tamil Nadu, a team led by the former Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, who had "lost all credibility" following the Tehelka scam.

Mr. Hegde also strongly opposed any move to impose President's rule in Tamil Nadu.

BALL IS NOW IN CENTRE'S COURT

NDA team for stern action against Jayalalithaa Govt.

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JULY 2. The National Democratic Alliance today passed the Tamil Nadu "hot potato" on to the Prime Minister and the Union Cabinet by demanding that the Centre take "exemplary and stern action" against the State Government and those police officials who had inflicted "brutality" on two Union Ministers and others on June 30. The NDA also recommended that the Centre ask the Tamil Nadu Government to drop the criminal cases against the Union Ministers, Mr. Murasoli Maran and Mr. T.R. Baalu as well as the former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi.

Briefing the media after an hour-and-a-half-long meeting of the NDA at the Prime Minister's residence, its convener Mr. George Fernandes, insisted that the case registered against Mr. Karunanidhi was untenable as it was based on a complaint by an official who himself was 'corrupt'. Also, according to Mr. Fernandes, many of the NDA constituents were in favour of invoking Article 356 against the Jayalalitha Government, the combine as such did not endorse the demand. The Prime Minister was in the chair.

Cabinet meet today

The Union Cabinet is scheduled to meet tomorrow evening to consider the NDA recommendations. The Cabinet would also have before it the report of the Home Ministry team, headed by the Special Secretary, Mr. M.B. Kaushal, that had visited Tamil Nadu, as well as the report of the three-member NDA team, led by Mr. George Fernandes, that had gone to make its own assessment. The Fernandes report notes that "the leaders of various political parties whom we met, including the BJP, have also told us very strongly that with the breakdown of the Constitution in the State, the Union Government should invoke Article 356 and dismiss the Government."

The ball is now in the Union Government's court. The indications are that having allowed the NDA to make the requisite political noises, the Centre would take a realistic view of the situation. The maximalist option under discussion is believed to be issue of specific directions under Article 257 to the Tamil Nadu Government that the charges against the Union Ministers be dropped. The Centre is believed to be considering advising the State Government to release political activists as well as not to intimidate and obstruct Sun TV.

Maran complains to PM

However, the sense of confrontation between the Centre and the



The NDA team, led by Mr. George Fernandes, submitting its report and showing photo clippings of the former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, in jail, to the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, at his residence in New Delhi, on Monday. At extreme right and left are the Union Minister for Chemicals, Mr. S. S. Dhindsa, and the BJP leader, Mr. V. K. Malhotra.

Tamil Nadu Government appears to have dissipated. In fact, responsible officials of the Tamil Nadu Government had communicated, informally, to various functionaries at the Centre this morning that the release of the two Union Ministers would be ensured by the evening. In effect, the Tamil Nadu Government showed itself willing to address the gravamen of the Central resentment that two Union Ministers were under detention. To drive home the point, Mr. Maran even sent a fax message to the

AG summoned

NEW DELHI, JULY 2. The Attorney-General, Mr. Soli Sorabjee, has been summoned from London for attending tomorrow's Cabinet meeting which will discuss the situation in Tamil Nadu. An official spokesperson said the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, asked him to cut short his visit to London and be present at the meeting. — PTI

Prime Minister, that because he was "under arrest by the Government of Tamil Nadu and kept in judicial custody at Chennai" he was being "prevented from discharging my duties as a Cabinet Minister of your Government."

Once the word on the release of the Ministers was available, the Prime Minister decided to postpone the meeting of the Union Cabinet, slated for the evening. The NDA's recommendations would be vetted by Central officials to decide whether the Centre could make the demands on the State Government.

Obviously, the feelings over the detention of the two Union Ministers continue to run high within

the NDA. As Mr. Fernandes put it: "One cannot be allowed to play with the Constitution and to challenge the authority of the Central Government." An unmollified Mr. Fernandes remarked that "by releasing them (the two Union Ministers), they (the State Government) have not done any favour."

PM under pressure

However, the Prime Minister obviously found himself under pressure from his political colleagues in the NDA who want to inflict some kind of retribution on Ms. Jayalalithaa's regime. Earlier in the day, Mr. Vajpayee found himself constrained to grant audience to Mr. George Fernandes. The NDA convener is believed to have presented the report of the three-member team that had visited Tamil Nadu on Sunday to make an on the spot assessment.

The political tenor of the NDA team report was blatant as was its conclusion that the majority view in Tamil Nadu favoured the imposition of President's rule in the State.

Earlier in the day a Rashtrapati Bhavan communique noted that the President had accepted the resignation of Ms. Fathima Beevi as Governor of Tamil Nadu, and had appointed Dr. C. Rangarajan, Governor of Andhra Pradesh, "to discharge the functions of the Governor of Tamil Nadu, in addition to his own duties, until regular arrangements for the office of the Governor of Tamil Nadu are made." The announcement ended speculation whether the President was having some reservations about the advisability of the Union Cabinet's decision to show Ms. Beevi the door in order to make a political point against the Jayalalitha Govern-

ment. The National Human Rights Commission got involved in the middle of the act and took suo motu cognizance of the "serious human rights violations" in the incidents on June 30. The Commission has issued notice to the Chief Secretary and the Director-General of Police in Tamil Nadu to file their reply within a week.

Advani speaks to PM

PTI reports:

The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, who is away on a foreign tour, today spoke to the Prime Minister and the NDA convener and discussed the situation in Tamil Nadu, official sources said.

Protest against Jayalalithaa's visit

By Our Staff Reporter

GURUVAYUR, JULY 2. The demonstrations by the BJP-Bharatiya Janata Yuva Morcha workers during the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalithaa's visit to the Guruvayur temple, led to a clash between the protesters and the law-enforcers, in which three persons were injured, one of them seriously, and nine arrested.

Police had cordoned off the temple surroundings by about 6.30 a.m., but when Ms. Jayalalithaa reached the temple at 7 a.m., the protesters, numbering about 15, holding black flags, broke the cordon. They trooped towards the temple entrance, as she was about to enter. One of them, who fell down amid the crowd of officials positioned close to Ms. Jayalalithaa, was picked up by police and arrested.

Presents elephant: Page 13

FATHIMA BEEVI'S REPORT UNACCEPTABLE: UNION CABINET

T.N. Governor resigns before recall

9 cover story
H0-1 M7 9-8 Fathima

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JULY 1. Giving in to the collective mood within the National Democratic Alliance to assert the Centre's authority vis-a-vis an unheeding Tamil Nadu Government, the Union Cabinet on Sunday recommended to the President, Mr. K. R. Narayanan, that he withdraw his pleasure from the Tamil Nadu Governor, Ms. Fathima Beevi. As the Cabinet saw it, the Governor failed to live up to the constitutional obligations of her office in the wake of the unprecedented arrest of the former Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, and two Union Ministers, Mr. Murasoli Maran and Mr. T. R. Baalu in Chennai on Saturday.

The Cabinet's decision was telephonically conveyed by the Prime Minister to the President. However, even before the Cabinet's recommendation could be formally communicated to the Rashtrapati Bhavan that Mr. Narayanan should invoke Article 156(1), withdrawing the President's pleasure from the Tamil Nadu Governor, Ms. Fathima Beevi — perhaps acting on media reports — sent in her resignation to the President who, in turn, forwarded it to the Prime Minister. Till late in the night there was no official word from the Rashtrapati Bhavan, though it is believed that Ms. Beevi's resignation would be accepted, and that the Governor of Andhra Pradesh, Dr. C. Rangarajan, would be asked to hold "additional charge" of Tamil Nadu.

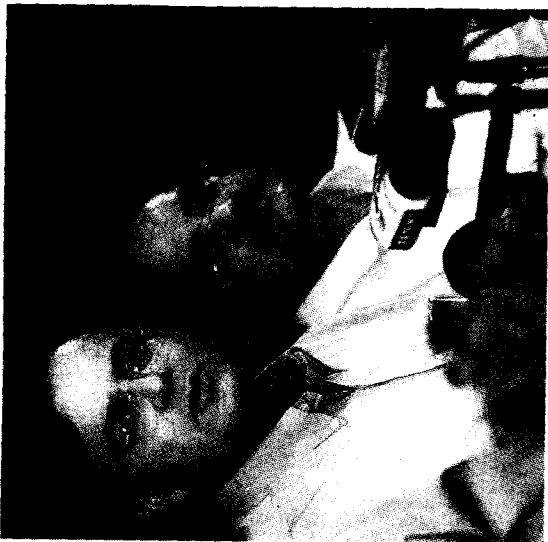
Having asserted its authority, the Centre is next slated to invoke Article 355 to issue a directive to the Tamil Nadu Government. (Article 355 reads: "It shall be the duty of the Union to protect every State against external aggression and internal disturbance and to ensure that the government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution.") The "directive" is likely to ask the State Govern-

ment to ensure that federal officers (i.e. Union Ministers) are respected and protected, civil rights are not violated and the media is allowed to carry out its professional duties.

However, since the release of the Tamil Nadu police's video version of the events on the night of June 30, sober voices within the Vajpayee Government believe that the Centre would be constrained to take "a more balanced view" of the allegation that the Union Ministers were mishandled.

The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, presided over the Cabinet meeting which took note of the Governor's report on the situation and the circumstances in which Mr. Karunanidhi (and two Central Ministers) were arrested. The Governor's report itself came after the Centre virtually issued a kind of demarche to Ms. Fathima Beevi to send a report by nine this morning. The Governor's failure to send a report earlier was deemed as "a clear defiance" of the Centre's authority.

The Union Law and Company Affairs Minister, Mr. Arun Jaitley, and the Minister for Rural Development, Mr. Venkiah Naidu, addressing mediapersons after the Cabinet meeting in New Delhi on Sunday.



Nor did the Cabinet find the Governor invoking the moral authority inherent in her office. For instance, Ms. Fathima Beevi is believed to have this to say on the arrest of nearly 23,000 DMK workers: "The DMK is a very large party and this factor necessitated the arrest of so many people."

Cabinet meeting today

The Cabinet is scheduled to meet tomorrow evening to formally approve the "directive". By then the Cabinet should have before it the report of the Home Ministry team, which is in Tamil Nadu to assess the situation. Also, the NDA team, led by Mr. George Fernandes, should be making its report.

State Govt. views endorsed

As far as the Centre is concerned, the Governor was expected to exercise independent judgment; instead, she merely chose to endorse the views and assessment of the State Government. Officials were also unwilling to appreciate the argument that a Governor had no independent means of collecting information and verifying facts. It is pointed out that even in the most ordinary circumstances a Governor is expected to try independently to feel the pulse of people of the State. Ms. Fathima Beevi is seen as guilty of failing to explore judiciously the limits of independent gubernatorial judgment, as implied in Article 336.

Nor did the Cabinet find the Governor invoking the moral authority inherent in her office. For instance, Ms. Fathima Beevi is believed to have this to say on the arrest of nearly 23,000 DMK workers: "The DMK is a very large party and this factor necessitated the arrest of so many people."

At the meeting, the case for asserting the federal authority was forcefully made by Mr. Nitish Kumar, Mr. Yashwant Sinha, Mr. Sharad Yadav. There was total unanimity that the least the Centre could do was to recall the Governor. However, Mr. Jaswant Singh counselled caution when a demand for invoking Article 356 was raised; the Prime Minister too favoured a cautious approach.

TDP to back Centre's move

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, JULY 1. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) has said it would support any decision the Centre takes in response to the political developments in Tamil Nadu following Saturday's arrest of the former Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi.

The Home Minister, Mr. T. Devender Goud, and Mr. Lal Jan Basha, politburo members of the TDP, said the party president, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, had conveyed this view to the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, during their telephonic conversation. "Mr. Vajpayee is a mature leader and we are confident that he will take the correct stand," they told a press conference on Sunday.

Replying to a question whether the party would back imposition of President's Rule in Tamil Nadu, they said no such decision had been taken by the NDA last evening and it was only a demand of the DMK.

"We have expressed solidarity with the NDA and with the DMK. The Centre will involve us in the decision-making process," they said.

Describing the manner in which Mr. Karunanidhi was arrested as 'most unfortunate', they said the incident was a blot on democracy.

It deserved strong condemnation because an aged leader who had served the people of Tamil Nadu for long was treated in a brutal manner by the police.

President's rule if T.N. does not abide by directives: Advani

By Kesava Menon

HD-13
2/7

ISTANBUL, JULY 1. The resort to Article 355 of the Constitution is unavoidable for the Central Government as it tries to handle the fallout of the developments in Tamil Nadu, the Union Home Minister Mr. L. K. Advani, said here today.

He also strongly hinted that the Centre would not hesitate to impose President's rule if the Tamil Nadu Government did not abide by the directives that the Centre had the right and duty to issue under Article 355. (Article 355 empowers the Centre to protect States against external aggression and internal disturbance).

Speaking to *The Hindu* Mr. Advani, who concludes his official visit to Turkey today, said the developments in Chennai were akin

to those of the imposition of Emergency in 1975.

"It is disturbing that in June 2001 we are seeing June 1975 repeat itself in Tamil Nadu. The two principal characteristics of June 1975 were the assault on the media and assault on dissent and opposition. What has happened in Chennai day before yesterday is worrisome because both these tendencies which are hallmarks of any authoritarian regime have manifested themselves flagrantly.

"Therefore what has happened is not just a case of wrongful confinement or *mala fide* prosecution of a leader.

"It is on the one hand, an attack on democracy and on the other a defiance of the Central Government by a State Government in as much as two Union Ministers

have been arrested without rhyme or reason.

"The Cabinet at the moment is considering the matter. I am sure it would take all these aspects of the situation into consideration," Mr. Advani said.

'Violation of Constitution'

Mr. Advani was asked whether there was not an obvious implication to his statement. As per his statement, he saw the Tamil Nadu developments not just as a breakdown of the constitutional machinery but as a violation of the Constitution itself.

In reply Mr. Advani said that for this reason the Union Cabinet would have no option but to resort to Article 355 and issue certain directives to the State Government.

A directive for the immediate

release of Mr. Murasoli Maran and Mr. Baalu could be part of the Centre's package of instructions, Mr. Advani hinted.

Mr. Advani pointed out that the Central would be constitutionally justified in imposing President's rule if the Tamil Nadu Government did not abide by the directives issued under Article 355. The indications are that the Minister would not hesitate to recommend the imposition of President's rule if it is necessary but wants available constitutional procedures to be exhausted first.

Contradicting the Chennai police version, Union Home Minister officials are understood to have reported that Mr. Maran, instead of resisting arrest, had been pleading with the policemen before he was taken into custody.

The

Recall of Governor violative of federalism: secular front

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, JULY 1. After having condemned police high-handedness in the arrest of the DMK president, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, yesterday, the "secular" allies today rallied behind the AIADMK and opposed the demand for dismissal of the Jayalalithaa government.

In a joint statement, the AIADMK general secretary and Chief Minister, Ms. Jayalalithaa, and her allies, strongly deplored the statements by a few NDA leaders and Central Ministers that the AIADMK Government be dismissed. "We wish to point out that such talk and moves are opposed to federal philosophy and democratic norms".

They also condemned the recall of the Governor, Ms. Fathima Beevi, and said it was "violative of democratic norms and federalism".

Besides Ms. Jayalalithaa, the statement was signed, among others, by the TMC president, Mr. G.K. Mooppanar, the CPI(M) State secretary, Mr. N. Sankaraiah, the CPI State secretary, Mr. R. Nallakannu, the TNCC president, Mr. E.V.K.S. Elangovan, the Indian National League leader, Mr. Abdul Latheef, the Indian Union Muslim League leader, Mr. Khader Moideen, the Dravidar Kazhagam general secretary, Mr. K.

Veeramani and the Forward Bloc leader, Mr. L. Santhanam. The PMK also endorsed the statement.

While deploring the Centre's move to recall the Governor, the statement said the entire nation was aware that the NDA Government had viewed with hostility her action swearing in Ms. Jayalalithaa Chief Minister in keeping with Constitutional provisions.

They demanded the immediate withdrawal of the Centre's decision to recall the Governor, who had acted justly, unmindful of the "threats and intimidation" to present a report "suited to its motives".

Referring to the DMK's demand for imposition of President's rule despite its avowed opposition to the use of Article 356, the statement said, it was "blatantly opportunistic politics". This would imperil democracy and federalism in Tamil Nadu.

The leaders of the AIADMK-led front appealed to the people to reject the "politically motivated" bandh call given by the "opportunistic" NDA. They charged that the NDA had called the bandh with the intention of disrupting peace.

The joint statement came after leaders of the AIADMK and its allies met at the residence of Mr. Mooppanar this afternoon to dis-

cuss the fast-paced political developments.

The meeting was attended by the senior AIADMK leader, Mr. K.A. Sengottaiyan, Mr. Nallakannu, the State CPI(M) leader, Mr. T.K. Rangarajan and Mr. Elangovan.

Unfortunate but inevitable, says Chidambaram

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, JULY 1. The TMC-Democratic Forum leader and former Union Minister, Mr. P. Chidambaram, today said the Centre's decision to recall the Governor, Ms. Fathima Beevi, and her subsequent resignation was 'unfortunate but inevitable'.

In a statement, he said the Governor failed to understand the letter or the spirit of the Constitution and remained a mute spectator to the 'distressing events' before and after the arrest of the former Chief Minister, Mr. Karunanidhi yesterday.

While he extended his 'personal sympathies' to Ms. Beevi, he said the change of Governor was a 'good and necessary step' in the interest of the Tamil Nadu people.

DMK thanks Centre

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, JULY 1. The DMK heading the NDA in Tamil Nadu tonight thanked the Centre for acting on their plea to recall the Governor, Ms. Fathima Beevi, in the wake of the serious developments leading to the arrest of the former Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi and the other DMK leaders and functionaries.

In the backdrop of a 'constitutional breakdown' and a political crisis in the State, the Centre's response to the NDA allies' request for recalling the Governor was a 'welcome step', the DMK's general secretary, Mr. K. Anbazhagan, said, speaking to *The Hindu*.

After yesterday's urgent meeting of the State NDA, the Centre, which directed the Tamil Nadu Government to submit a report, should have come to the conclusion that what the Governor had sent in her report — on the reasons and incidents leading to the arrest of Mr. Karunanidhi and others — was only the 'State Government's point of view' with no "independent assessment of the Governor", Mr. Anbazhagan said.

Hence, knowing the 'true state of affairs' in Tamil Nadu, the Central Cabinet asked for the Governor's recall, he said.

Defending the DMK's relaxation of its stand on invoking Article 356 of the Constitution, Mr. Anbazhagan said, this was an "extraordinary situation". "Our motive is not to get the (AIADMK) Government dismissed".

About 50,000 DMK cadres were jailed in the last

two days, Mr. Anbazhagan said, warning that it would be a 'terrible situation' if they were not released immediately. The Centre will have to find some way to tackle this situation.

The DMK MP, Mr. C. Kuppasamy, said the Governor's recall was a "victory for the people of Tamil Nadu" as the issue concerned the arrest of Mr. Karunanidhi, who has been 'targeted out of political vendetta' to the point of 'democracy getting derailed'.

The Puthiya Thamizhagam headed by Dr. Krishnasamy, who also attended the meeting with the NDA convenor, Mr. George Fernandes, at the DMK party office, demanded in a memorandum that the State Governor be removed and the newly elected Government kept in 'suspended animation'. The DMK also submitted a detailed memorandum.

Apart from reiterating the recall of the Governor, the DMK demanded that the "illegally constituted Government headed by Ms. Jayalalithaa be dismissed, invoking Article 356".

Meanwhile, several DMK MPs including the Union Minister of State for Health, Mr. A. Raja, Mr. C. Kuppaswami, Mr. V. P. Duraisamy and N. Siva and former MP, Mr. 'Misa' Ganesan, urged the Prime Minister, Mr. A. B. Vajpayee, to issue a 'constitutional directive' to the State to release all the arrested DMK partymen in the 'interest of human rights'.

Cong.,

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 1. The Centre's decision to recall the Tamil Nadu Governor, Ms. Fathima Beevi, has evoked a sharp reaction from the opposition parties. Predictably, the sharpest reactions came from the Congress and the Left.

The Congress described the decision as "vindictive, hasty, ill-considered and motivated." The CPI and the CPI(M) said it was "totally unwarranted and an undemocratic step." The Governor had only a nominal role to play as the Constitutional head and could not be held responsible for the events related to the arrest of the former Chief Minister, Mr. M. Karunanidhi, and two Union Ministers on Saturday.

The Centre had used the incidents as an excuse to get even with Ms. Fathima Beevi. "It was waiting to get even with her for administering oath of office to Ms. Jayalithaa against the wishes of the Home Minister," said the AICC general secretary, Ms. Ambika Soni — a view echoed by the Left as well. "The NDA and the DMK have been demanding her removal, the Government has used the developments in Tamil

Left slam Centre's decision

Nadu to fulfil that demand," the Left parties said. Taking up the cudgels for Ms. Fathima Beevi, the Congress took exception to the summary manner in which the Governor was recalled. The party defended the report sent by her in response to the Centre's directive. "A Governor cannot be expected to send a tailor-made report to suit the Central Government," said a senior leader.

The party also saw little merit in the charge that Ms. Fathima Beevi's report was prepared in consultation with the State Government. "She has no independent machinery of her own... How can a Governor be expected to collect facts independently," asked Mr. Jaipal Reddy.

Anticipating the Centre's thinking on imposing President's rule in Tamil Nadu, the Congress sought to pre-empt it by saying it

would oppose it tooth and nail. (The party's support is crucial as the NDA Government does not have a majority in the Rajya Sabha). "There is no constitutional breakdown and the situation does not warrant such a move," said Mr. Reddy.

The CPI(M) and the CPI also absolved Ms. Fathima Beevi and said in a joint statement "the Governor acted and behaved as per the Constitutional norms." The decision to arrest Mr. Karunanidhi and the two Union Ministers was taken by the State Government and executed by the police authorities concerned.

Accusing the BJP-led Government of trying to install pliable Governors in all States, the parties said Ms. Fathima Beevi was recalled so that the Centre could send a person of its choice to Tamil Nadu. They also warned that

the Centre would not be allowed to get away after trampling the Constitution and federal norms.

The CPI (ML) said the Centre over-reacted and the act underscored that there was "little dignity and meaning left" in the office of the Governor. The behaviour meted out to Mr. Karunanidhi was unfortunate.

Pranab criticises police

The West Bengal Congress president, Mr. Pranab Mukherjee, said his party condemned the manner in which Mr. Karunanidhi was treated by police during his arrest in Chennai on Saturday (a PTI report from Kolkata said).

"We want that law should take its own course but at the same time criticise the manner in which the veteran leader and some of his colleagues were treated during the arrest," he told presspersons.

No retrospective special status to J&K, Assam

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 30. A full meeting of the Planning Commission, chaired by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, on Friday ruled out any retrospective effect to the special category status to Jammu and Kashmir and Assam with effect from 1969.

Such a proposal was put on the agenda of the meeting, which took place in two instalments on June 27 and 29, in keeping with the demand from these two States which are enjoying the special category status from 1990-91.

The special category status en-

ables a State to get Central assistance in the form of 90 per cent grant and 10 per cent loan while other States get the same assistance in the form of 30 per cent grant and 70 per cent loan.

While these States had sought retrospective effect to the special status, the Union Finance Ministry had argued that the low interest and repayment burden would deprive these States of funds available under the head 'non-Plan revenue deficit covering grant' and debt relief grant as proposed by various Finance Commissions, especially the Elev-

enth Finance Commission.

Consequently, these States would not benefit much from the grant of retrospective status, the Ministry pointed out.

The Planning Commission meeting also came round to the view that since these States had been "compensated" by the Eleventh Finance Commission, there was no need for a double compensation.

The difficulty involved in the scrutiny of accounts since 1969 till date was another aspect which was taken into account.

Atal's authority under siege

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN
AND KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, June 30: Faced with a rebellion that some are interpreting as virtually a declaration of independence from the Union of India by Jayalalitha, a shaken Centre was tonight groping for a constitutional response to what is perhaps the biggest challenge to its authority.

Unable to find one, the Centre decided to send a stiff directive to the silent Tamil Nadu Governor, Fathima Beevi, to submit a report on the developments by 9 am tomorrow, after which the Cabinet will meet to discuss the options available to deal with Jayalalitha.

A home ministry team is leaving for Chennai tonight, adds PTI. It will submit its report before the Cabinet meets tomorrow.

A meeting of the NDA this evening chaired by the Prime Minister also decided to send a three-member team headed by its convener, George Fernandes. The report is expected by tomorrow evening.

The Centre was deeply exercised that the chief minister refused to take a call from Atal Bihari Vajpayee this morning after he was woken up by a phone call from Union environment minister T.R. Baalu, who reportedly went "hysterical" over M. Karunanidhi's arrest.

PMO sources said a "livid" Vajpayee immediately phoned Jayalalitha to seek an explanation, but she refused to come on line. The Prime Minister was forced to speak to the chief secretary, who was asked to submit a report on the various incidents, including the alleged assault on Baalu and Union commerce minister Murasoli Maran. Neither the Governor nor the chief secretary have done so.

However, Jayalalitha said she had not received any phone call. "The Prime Minister did not mention that he would like to speak to me. If he really desired to do so, I was readily available and could have been contacted over telephones at any time," she said.

Government sources said a beleaguered Vajpayee called the NDA's "troop shooter", Fernandes, who was in Guwahati, and asked him to take the first flight back to Delhi to convene a meeting. He also apprised the President about the developments.

Jayalalitha's action in first arresting Karunanidhi and then the two Central ministers, without bothering to inform the Centre, was best summed up by Arun Jaitley who said: "Each of the facts I have mentioned is a serious violation of constitutional guarantees and, therefore, to restore constitutional norms the Centre will have to decide what action is required to be taken in this matter."



Karunanidhi squats in protest outside Chennai Central Jail before he was taken in. (PTI)

But Jaitley, a leading lawyer, seemed unsure if the arrest of Central ministers by a state government amounted to flouting the Constitution. Asked if a state government had the powers to arrest Union ministers, he said: "If, without any basis, the government has enabled its police to reach the Union ministers' houses with no case under investigation against them and, subsequently, created a situation in which the two ministers were arrested and assaulted, it is a serious violation of federal polity and defiance of legislative authority."

However, government sources admitted that their hands were virtually tied while considering the possibility of imposing Central rule. "The last step just cannot be the first," said sources when asked if enforcing Article 356 was an option. The fear was the ordinance may not pass muster in the Rajya Sabha.

Sources said the only other "viable" options were using Article 355 or recalling the Governor, who was perceived as Jayalalitha's ally. Article 355 is in the nature of a warning to state governments of the Centre's power to intervene in case it feels that a government is not working in accordance with constitutional provisions.

In the war of attrition between Vajpayee and Jayalalitha, the only tactical advantage he seemed to have was the total support of the NDA and help from erstwhile allies. Mamata Banerjee phoned Fernandes today to convey her "solidarity" with the NDA in whatever decision it took. By signalling her support, Mamata has also come very close to rejoining the Central coalition.

Buddha for Centre-state fight against extremists

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 30. — Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya today sought more BSF battalions and joint-working of the Centre and the state to combat extremism, especially against the ISI, PWG and Kamatapuri Liberation Organisation activities in North Bengal as well as illegal migration from the Bangladesh border, during his meeting with the Union home minister here.

Mr Bhattacharya, on his first official visit to Delhi after the return of the Left Front to the Writers' Buildings, also called on the President and the Prime Minister, which were officially described as "courtesy calls".

He refused to divulge the details of his about half-an-hour meeting with Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee this evening and said: "I would rather discuss everything in detail on Friday's scheduled press conference here."

The chief minister is reported to have conveyed to Mr Vajpayee his government's desire to have a friendly and constructive and not confrontationist relations with the Centre.

On whether there was any mention of the "com-

plaints of rigging and poll violence", during his talks with Mr L K Advani, Mr Bhattacharya said: "There wasn't even a mention of such things during our meeting". The Union home secretary and state chief secretary were also present in the meeting at North Block.

During his over 40-minute discussions with the home minister, Mr Bhattacharya said that "without central assistance, the state just can't combat the growing incidents of extremism, ISI operations and infiltration of people from Bangladesh."

Stressing the need for more vigil on the Indo-Bangla border, he also informed the home minister that the Centre would have to change its strategy for safety of the Indo-Bangla border (at Boroibari) where 15 BSF personnel were killed recently. "We have asked the home minister that the state government is ready to participate in any joint operations with Central agencies to combat the menace."

Terming the visit as a "courtesy call", Mr Bhattacharya said several other issues concerning the state were discussed with Mr Advani.

The state currently had 22 battalions of BSF but the requirement was of 34 battalions.

THE STATESMAN

Redefine Centre-State ties: TDP

By S.Nagesh Kumar

VISAKHAPATNAM, MAY 29. The Telugu Desam Party (TDP) president and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. N. Chandrababu Naidu, today said his party would not destabilise the NDA Government but would press the Centre for a thorough redefinition of Centre-State relations.

Summing up the debate on resolutions on Centre-State relations, the political situation and

foreign policy on the final day of the three-day conference of party delegates, Mr. Naidu said his party's line was to support a stable Government in Delhi and, at the same time, build pressure for the devolution of more funds and powers to the States.

The 'Mahanadu' concluded after three-days of hectic deliberations conducted in a businesslike fashion but lacked the usual lustre because of thin attendance.

Recalling that the TDP had

been adopting resolutions at every 'Mahanadu' demanding more powers to the States, he said that some day, the Centre would be forced to give in to this request. The days of one-party rule were clearly over and coalition governments, supported by strong regional parties, had come to stay. It was high time the Centre shed its policy of formulating all schemes in New Delhi without knowing the ground realities and asking the States to implement them.

He took strong exception to the Centre imposing a service tax on the infrastructure sector although it was the States which provided facilities like land and water. In the long run, the services sector would yield more revenue than income tax and the States would be the losers. He demanded that the Centre make over 50 per cent of the funds to the States which were required to implement the second generation economic reforms.

MANIPUR LAWMAKERS MEET VAJPAYEE

PM given 5 weeks to roll back truce

Centre has
HT

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 24

A TEAM of 33 MLAs and three MPs from Manipur tonight met the Prime Minister and said later that they might have to resign as lawmakers unless the extended Naga truce was rolled back by July 31.

The PM assured the all-party team led by Speaker S Dhananjay Singh that a "review of various aspects arising out of the ceasefire" was under way and "the process would be expedited". "The territorial integrity of Manipur will be preserved," he told the delegation.

But his assurance seemed to have little impact in Manipur. AMSU president Oinam Shyamchand, secretary-general CS Khongsai and 10 other student leaders arrested with them on charges of arson and violence decided to go on a fast-unto-death behind bars. A union spokesman told reporters that the charges were baseless and concocted.

In the capital, the Prime Minister appealed to the people of Manipur to remain calm and help the administration to restore normalcy in the State. "They should not give any credence to rumours," he said.

The team which included Union Minister of State for Food Processing Chaoba Singh impressed upon the Prime Minister that if the review was not undertaken immediately, it would be difficult for

them to continue being part of the democratic system under which they had been elected.

The team submitted a memorandum to the PM, which was not much different to the one submitted yesterday to Home Minister Advani.

However, the legislators wanted the Union Government to review the various aspects of the situation arising out of the extension of the ceasefire.

A PMO spokesman said Home Minister L K Advani too would meet leaders from Manipur on July 8 on return from his three-nation tour.

At yesterday's meeting between Advani and the Manipur leaders, the Centre had offered to talk to student groups in Manipur which were agitating against the truce extension.

But official sources had then said that it was unlikely that the ceasefire would be reviewed.

In Imphal, leaders of the All-Manipur Students' Union rejected the demand for a review of the ceasefire, saying that nothing less than its immediate revocation would do. They threatened to continue with their agitation until the ceasefire was withdrawn.

Official sources in Manipur said curfew would be relaxed from 5 am for eight hours tomorrow in Imphal West and East districts though the situation was "still tense".

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES
THE TIMES OF INDIA

Centre will review Naga truce

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 23. — The Centre will review the issues arising out of its agreement with NSCN (I-M) and has offered to hold talks with the Manipur student groups protesting against the territorial extension of the Naga ceasefire.

Youths went on the rampage against the ceasefire on Monday, setting the Manipur Assembly and several other buildings on fire. Police fired on the protesters' killing 14 people.

Announcing the decision after an all-party meeting today, Mr LK Advani said: "As these were issues which not only affected just Manipur but all other North-east states, the Centre has taken due note of suggestions made by those who attended the meeting and they would be acted upon."

"The joint representation given by political leaders from Manipur will be considered by the Centre and the various issues arising out of the ceasefire will be reviewed."

(Some senior Manipur leaders boycotted the all-party meeting and the state Youth Congress unit demanded Mr Advani's resignation, reports PTI from Imphal. Police crackdown on anti-ceasefire protesters continued today and 12 top All Manipur Students Union leaders were arrested late last night. Officials said Amsu president and general secretary, Oinam Shyamchand and Chungsat Khongsaid were among those arrested.)

The all-party meeting called by the home minister in his office was rather stormy and failed to resolve the crisis over the Naga ceasefire extension. The meeting, initially scheduled for an hour, continued for three hours.

Mr Advani's remark that the meeting saw a "free and frank" discussion indicated the disagreement among leaders on several points.

No questions were taken either by

the home minister or by the home secretary, Mr Kamal Pandey, who briefed the media. Mr Advani said the meeting was "extremely fruitful".

Even as the Manipur leaders gave vent to their feelings their contributions were "invariably constructive". Some leaders suggested that politicians talk to student bodies, NGOs and political groups not represented in the state Assembly or Parliament.

Mr Pandey said Mr Advani reassured the leaders that under no circumstances would Manipur's or any other North-east state's boundaries be disturbed. The desirability of a "holistic approach" to the situation was stressed "as any conclusion would have repercussions in other neighbouring states apart from Manipur."



Members of the Manipur Students' Association, Delhi, protest against truce extension on Saturday. — PTI

"There's urgent need to remove the misgivings in the minds of people and to assure them of the determination of the government of not disturbing the geographical boundaries of the N-E states.

"Efforts will be made to have further dialogue through invitations to the agitating groups to hold talks in Delhi and Manipur. Commitment to the

Constitution, democracy and peace will not be diluted," Mr Pandey said. **Naga-Hoho:** The Naga-Hoho will oppose any move to revoke the ceasefire extension. It appealed to the Centre today to stand by its agreement.

Imphal: Imphal looks like a ghost town because of the curfew. The indefinite closure of government offices has hit regular supply of water and electricity at some places, officials said. The Bishnupur district youth Congress in a memorandum to the President, demanded a judicial probe into Monday's firing and amendment to Article 3 of the Constitution to ensure that the territorial integrity of the state would not be disturbed.

■ More reports on page 10

THE STATESMAN

Clamour for review of limitless ceasefire

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, June 21: The BJP and the Vajpayee establishment have come under intense pressure from almost all parties, barring the Samata Party, to revoke Central rule in Manipur.

Finding itself in a logjam, the government has decided to convene a meeting of Manipur parties here on Saturday to discuss the volatile situation in the state.

Even as the government is grappling with the situation in the state, the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) continued to be divided on the revocation of President's rule. While Samata Party is not in favour of it, the Janata Dal (United) said the Centre should take immediate steps to revive the popular government.

Party spokesperson Mohan Prakash said: "It is not an NDA,

but a national issue. If we start the political process it would help regain people's confidence." He said a Central team should be despatched to Imphal to restore people's faith in the NDA government.

The Samata Party, however, wanted only the ceasefire extension to be reviewed. A party source who did not want to be identified said revocation of President's rule is wrought with complications but it was possible for the government to add a line in the agreement that the ceasefire agreement "was not a reflection on the territorial integrity of Manipur".

Finding a chief minister is going to be difficult. While Samata Party insists on restoration of Radhabinod Koijiam, the ousted chief minister, the state BJP is opposed to the idea. Finding a compromise candidate may prove to

be a tricky issue.

The Centre, which had clamped President's rule under pressure from Samata chief George Fernandes, is worried not only about the tense situation following widespread violence but also the adverse political fallout for the BJP which had emerged as the single-largest party in Manipur after the recent realignments.

The twin decisions to impose Central rule and to extend the ceasefire agreement signed between the Centre and the NSCN (IM) have made both the BJP and the Samata Party unpopular in the state.

NDA sources said the Congress, which has governments in neighbouring Assam and Arunachal Pradesh, may fish in troubled waters. There is no guarantee yet from the Congress whether it would back the govern-

ment in the Rajya Sabha for ratifying Central rule in Manipur.

The home ministry felt that the situation warranted the immediate restoration of a popular government. A ministry note is learnt to have said that "in a situation wherein no fresh elections were possible, it is better to revoke the suspension of the Assembly so that a government is installed" in Imphal.

The government is under tremendous pressure from the public and legislators cutting across party lines who threaten to quit the Assembly en masse if the ceasefire extension to Manipur is not revoked.

Manipur State Congress Party (MSCP) chief Choabaa Singh, a constituent of the National Democratic Alliance, has warned of even a civil war, if the ceasefire agreement was not reviewed.

The BJP, which only yesterday

stated that there was no question of reviewing the ceasefire decision, toned down its stand today and hinted it was not averse to a reconsideration.

Party president Jana Krishnamurthi said though the ceasefire was not a wrong decision, the BJP has asked for a review taking local conditions into consideration.

"There is nothing wrong if the government reviews the situation but review does not mean revision of ceasefire. Of course, there was some communication gap because the real purpose of the agreement was not understood by political parties and people.

"But after all the explanation from the Prime Minister downwards, there should be no scope for misunderstanding that their territorial integrity will be compromised," Krishnamurthi said.

Manipur MLAs' ultimatum to Centre

IMPHAL, JUNE 20. Manipur legislators today said that they would resign en masse if the Centre did not withdraw the extension of Naga ceasefire to the State by August 1.

The 36 MLAs told PTI after a meeting here that they would first go to New Delhi and urge the Central leaders to retract the ceasefire extension by August 1. If the Centre did not do so, all the 36 MLAs would resign en masse from the Assembly.

The MLAs belonged to all political parties, including the BJP, the Samata, the Congress and others, they said adding 24 others could not attend the meeting due to various reasons.

The Speaker, Mr. Sapam Dhananjay, the former Chief Ministers, Mr. W. Nipamacha Singh, Mr. Rishang Keishing and Mr. R.K. Dorendra Singh, jointly presided over the meeting which held as "very unfortunate" the killing of 13 civilians in the CRPF firing on Monday.

The All Manipur Students Union (AMSU) and four other organisations yesterday set a 24-hour deadline for the MLAs and MPs to resign failing which they would take "action."

Several legislators in the 60-member House were in hiding, apprehending "attack from the people anytime," following Monday's widespread arson and disturbances, official sources said.

Last rites performed

The last rites of 13 people killed on Monday in the police firing during demonstrations against

the Centre-NSCN (I-M) ceasefire extension to Manipur were performed at Kekrupat, near the Kangla Fort here today.

Only 10 family members of each of the deceased and some AMSU leaders and the All-Manipur United Clubs Organisation were allowed to attend the funeral. Press photographers were prevented from taking pictures as the State administration feared that it might fuel resentment among the people.

Minister 'serious'

The condition of the former Manipur Minister, Mr. N. Bihari Singh, who was injured in Monday's violence, remained 'very serious', hospital sources said today.

They said he had sustained 70 per cent burns and inhaled smoke, partly affecting his lungs.

Mr. Singh, along with four MLAs, sustained injuries when demonstrators had set afire the State Assembly building.

Aerial patrolling

Army helicopters carried out aerial patrolling of Manipur valley following reports of congregation of people at several places despite indefinite curfew in three districts. Official sources said, the indefinite curfew will be relaxed for two hours from 7 a.m. tomorrow.

Assam bandh

According to a Guwahati report, the 48-hour bandh called to protest the ceasefire extension disrupted life in the hills district of Assam today. — PTI

Sonia's appeal for calm: Page 9

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

2001

Ethnic hostility underscores protest

HF9
29/6

Rahul Karmakar
Guwahati, June 19

SUB-NATIONALISM triggered by the fear of losing half the State and a political vacuum has combined to stoke the fire in Manipur.

Militancy in Manipur is concentrated in the Imphal Valley, which comprises 30 per cent of the State's geographical area. The Valley is dominated by the Meiteis who number 18 lakh out of a population of 23 lakh. Nagas, scattered across the hill districts of Chandel, Ukhrul, Senapati and Tamenglong, number over 2 lakh with the Kukis, Hmars and other ethnic groups making up the rest.

The hill State with a 2,000-year-old-history, the first Manipuri king Nongda Lairen Pakhangba established his empire in 33 AD stretching up to the Kabau Valley now in Myanmar, had always been the seat of ethnic tension. The Naga-Kuki clashes in 1993 and the Meitej-Pangal (Manipuri Muslims) riots are brutal reminders.

The Meiteis and Nagas have never come to blows, but they share a mutual animosity. The post-Naga truce extension riots have raised fears of an ethnic battle between the two groups. "forced upon by a submissive New Delhi".

That the Manipuri militants have hijacked the movement from overground bodies like the All-Manipur Students Union and



AP PHOTO

Centre's negotiator on Manipur K Padmanabhiiah confronts reporters after meeting L K Advani on Tuesday.

All-Manipur United Clubs' Organisation, is indicative of the sub-nationalism at play in the State. Unlike the Assam rebels, myriad Manipuri outfits like Peoples' Liberation Army do not have the NSCN connection.

The truce backlash on Monday, targetted at the so-called people's representatives and Government establishments like the Assembly, also showed Manipur's frustration with their power-hungry political leaders as well as the "Centre's insensitivity to the State's concern for territorial integrity". "More than humouring the NSCN, the Centre wants the ethnic fire to keep on burning in the North-East," Amsu

advisor A Montu told *Hindustan Times* from Imphal.

"There is only one solution to the mess created by New Delhi: the ceasefire extension should be withdrawn and the Parliament must take a decision to safeguard the territorial integrity of Manipur." He added that even the Nagas of Manipur, contrary to claims by Nagaland leaders, were against the truce extension, and they took part in the agitation to drive home the point.

Political analyst T Phanjoubam said the people of Manipur were fed up with their leaders.

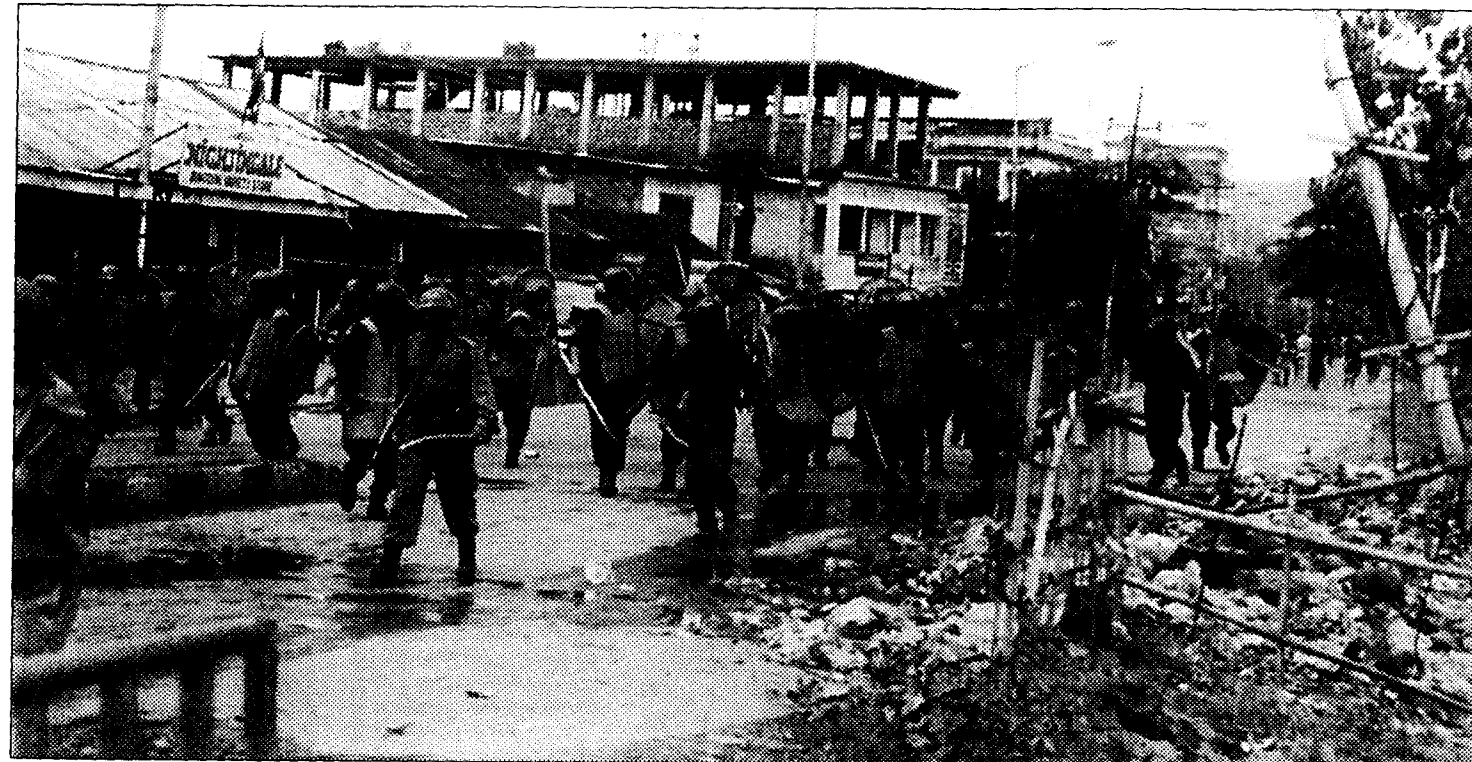
"But they dread losing the hill districts as a consequence of the truce extension. We believe that

the truce extension will legitimise the Greater Nagalim goal of the NSCN which is quite similar to the resolutions passed in the Nagaland Assembly to bring all Naga-inhabited areas under one administrative umbrella."

Interestingly, Meiteis do not consider Nagas living in Manipur as Nagas. They are referred to as Tangkhuls, Marings, Kabuis, Maos or Zemis, their individual tribe names. But neighbouring Nagaland and NSCN, whose leader Thuingaleng Muivah hails from Ukhrul in Manipur, think otherwise.

Therein lies the problem in Manipur.

Samata-stung BJP stands by truce



Securitymen patrol a street in Manipur. Picture by Eastern Projections

Nipamacha guns for Centre

FROM OUR CORRESPONDENT

Imphal, June 19: Former Manipur chief minister W. Nipamacha Singh today lashed out at Governor Ved Marwah holding him responsible for yesterday's flare-up in the state capital.

"There were obvious lapses in security on part of the state administration. It looks like the administration wanted to get people killed," Singh said.

Coming down heavily on the Centre, Singh, also the president of the Manipur State Congress Party (Nipamacha faction), said the Central government was responsible for yesterday's violence as the state was "directly under Delhi's rule".

He said the Governor should have taken "extra care" yesterday — the last day of the three-day

general strike — as the All-Manipur Students' Union had joined the agitation.

"Had Marwah taken special steps, the situation could have been avoided," he added.

Singh had been the most vocal opponent of the extension of the Naga ceasefire to Manipur. He had, in fact, come to power in December 1997 on the issue of Manipur's territorial integrity.

Angry protesters did not target his residence at Babupara VIP colony here. This indicates that people still recognise his efforts in not allowing the extension of the truce during his tenure.

Reacting to the Centre's decision to extend the ceasefire to other states of the Northeast, the former chief minister said: "Central leaders think insurgency in the region can be solved by negoti-

ating only with the NSCN (I-M). But it is a wrong concept."

He questioned the Centre's decision, asking: "What is the ultimate goal of the NSCN (I-M) and what is the underlying meaning of the ceasefire extension in Naga areas of other states?"

Singh held home minister L.K. Advani and the Centre's emissary for the Naga talks, K. Padmanabhaiah, responsible for the truce extension.

He suspected a "deep-rooted conspiracy" in the Union home ministry's decision to extend the truce. "Why did top officials tour the Naga-inhabited areas of Manipur?" he asked.

On Advani's assurance that Manipur's territorial integrity would not be sacrificed while holding talks with the NSCN (I-M), Singh said: "Advani's words can-

not be believed. When the ceasefire extension is one step towards the demand for 'greater Nagalim' by the NSCN (I-M), how can we trust Advani?"

He said he had met both Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and Advani at a joint meeting in New Delhi in July last year on the issue. "At that meeting, I clearly told both Vajpayee and Advani that if the Centre forced the ceasefire, I will have no option but to resign as the chief minister before such a step was taken".

Singh reiterated his stand that President's rule was imposed in Manipur to pave the way for extending the truce. "This was the hidden agenda of Advani," he said, adding that the Centre had created political instability in Manipur to create the ground for direct Central intervention.

T. S. M. Centre State
FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, June 19: The BJP has made it clear that the Centre will not review the extension of the Naga ceasefire to areas outside Nagaland despite the backlash in Manipur and the Samata Party's open criticism of the move.

"The ceasefire was extended with the sole purpose of creating an atmosphere of peace in the entire north-eastern region, including Assam," BJP general secretary and spokesman Sunil Shastri said. He asserted that both the Centre and the BJP were "committed to maintaining the territorial integrity of all these states".

To back up his point, Shastri quoted Section 27 of the NDA's National Agenda of Governance which pledges to "revitalise the north-eastern council, ensure territorial integrity of the north-eastern states and (evolve) special development, administration and security-related programmes".

"Since the national agenda specifically mentions this fact, it is not a matter which the BJP only has brought in," the spokesman said to counter the Samata's charge that the constituents were not consulted before the truce was extended. He claimed that while other north-eastern states had "understood the implications of the ceasefire extension, the Manipuri people were not convinced emotionally". But the Samata stuck to its stand, saying "peace should be given a chance but after consulting the concerned parties".

BJP sources said a meeting of the NDA may not be immediately convened to thrash out the differences. "After all, the matter concerns only two constituents — the Samata and Chaoba Singh (a Central minister). So, there's little point in asking all the constituents to congregate If the Prime Minister deems it necessary, he may call (Samata leader and NDA convener) George Fernandes for a meeting," they said.

There is a tacit admission within the BJP that the situation in Manipur would not have gone out of hand if the Samata had ex-

ercised restraint. On June 15 — the day the Centre announced the extension — former Manipur chief minister Radhabinod Kojiam had told reporters in the capital that "Manipur would go up in flames, the people are agitated and the youth are on the warpath".

The BJP's official response was one of circumspection: "There is no misunderstanding with the Samata," stressed Shastri. But, in private, three explanations are doing the rounds as to why the Samata had stoked the flames with its statements.

Sources said one reason was "frustration" after losing its government in Manipur. "Let's face it, the mutual suspicion that was created between us and the Samata during the events leading to the fall of the Kojiam government was never erased. The Samata continues to hold the BJP culpable for Kojiam's ouster," they said. Yesterday, Shastri himself said "some political parties could have instigated the trouble".

The second explanation was Fernandes' "restiveness" on being out of the Cabinet. "We never underestimated his capacity to create trouble. Even if he had no role to play in the present round of trouble, the least he could have done is to ask Kojiam and Samata spokesman Shambhu Srivastava from shooting off provocative statements," sources said.

The third reason, sources said, could have been the Centre's strategy to break the nexus between politicians/bureaucrats and militants in the Northeast which may have triggered an "extreme" reaction. Manipur had resisted efforts by the Centre to refer cases of corruption or those concerning links between the establishment and the militants to the CBI.

After President's rule was imposed, Governor Ved Marwah reportedly gave his consent to the CBI to investigate cases in Manipur. The move had, apparently, not gone down well with Kojiam and other politicians who felt the CBI should distinguish between those who gave money to militants under threat and those who gave out of "genuine sympathy".

Centre finds itself in a bind

By Harish Khare

ND-1
19/6
NEW DELHI, JUNE 18. The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, is believed to have apprised the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, of the worsening situation in Manipur in the wake of the Centre's decision to extend the ceasefire to all Naga-inhabited areas in the northeast. For now the Centre finds itself in a bind. The next step — perhaps a categorical and forceful rejection of the concept of a "greater Nagaland" — would be taken only after the Prime Minister returns to the capital on Tuesday.

Mr. Advani also spoke to the Governor, Mr. Ved Prakash Marwah. The absence of a popular government in Manipur is being felt, and there is the realisation that perhaps the situation would not have come to this aggravating

pass had there been no political vacuum. The depth of public anger has taken the Home Ministry by surprise. Even the residence of the Union Minister, Mr. Chaoba Singh, has been attacked, though the Minister had taken the unusual step of expressing in writing his dissent over the Centre's decision.

The eruption is being treated as a law and order problem, and not as a return of insurgency. Talking to reporters, Mr. Advani said the "situation is presently tense but under control. Additional forces have been rushed to the State to restore normalcy."

There is deep disappointment that the political parties, both at the Centre and in the States in the region, have not adopted a helpful stance. In particular, note has been taken of the Samata Party's

role in stoking the fires of public apprehension. After all, it were the machinations of the Samata Party's central leadership that forced the BJP's hands and saw the imposition of President's rule in the State, despite the fact that the majority of legislators wanted a new ministry under a new leader.

There is also the realisation that perhaps there should have been deeper consultation with the Chief Ministers in the region before the Centre agreed to the NSCN(I-M)'s demand to extend the ceasefire beyond Nagaland. The NSCN(I-M) was threatening to call off the ceasefire and was reportedly unappreciative of the Centre's desire, though lukewarm, to consult the newly-elected Government in Assam.

The kind of political communi-

cation and interaction that should have preceded the final ceasefire never took place. Mr. Advani's handling of the States and the periphery has been marked by the same insensitivity that characterised the Congress regimes.

For instance, Mr. Advani told newsmen today the Prime Minister had called a meeting of all Chief Ministers in the northeast and they had "broadly agreed to the proposal". The fact of the matter, however, is that the only meeting that took place was six months ago, and all the four Chief Ministers had expressed their disapproval of the idea. Thereafter, the Chief Ministers were called to the capital individually and a reluctant acquiescence was extracted. And, since then Assam has a new Chief Minister, who rightly feels unconsulted.

Plan panel to discuss special status to Kashmir, Assam

H10-1
18/6

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, JUNE 17. The contentious issue of giving special category status to Jammu and Kashmir with retrospective effect from 1969, hanging fire over the past decade, is likely to be considered by the full Planning Commission when it meets here on June 27 under the Chairmanship of the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee.

After considering various aspects, the Prime Minister had approved that the issue of giving retrospective effect to the Special Category Status to Jammu and Kashmir and Assam should be placed before the National Development Council. It is in this context that the Planning Commission has to consider the issue, well-placed sources in the Government told *The Hindu*.

Mr. Pant's much-hyped visit to Jammu and Kashmir last month as the Centre's interlocutor had, in a way, helped bring to the fore several development issues as well as the need to generate job opportunities for the unemployed educated youth in the State.

As Mr. Pant, who is also Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, was keen on pushing through the development projects in the State, the issue of according it special category status also gained currency. The issue had been tossed up by various Central Ministries and Depart-

ments and has an interesting tale behind it.

The Prime Minister's Office had informed the Planning Commission on September 15, 1999 that the Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, had taken up the issue of giving retrospective effect to the special category status with effect from 1969 instead of 1990. A similar demand was also made by the then Assam Chief Minister.

The issue had been examined in the PMO in consultation with the Finance Ministry and the Planning Commission. A high-level meeting convened by the PMO in 1999 was also attended by the Secretary, Planning Commission and Secretary, Expenditure. It was pointed out that as the liberalised pattern of Central assistance to the two States was approved by the NDC on October 11, 1990, the issue of giving retrospective effect to this pattern for these States should also be decided by the NDC.

A committee of experts, under the chairmanship of Dr. C. Rangarajan, then a Planning Commission member, was set up in April, 1991 to suggest durable solutions for the financial problems of Special Category States. The recommendations of the Committee inter alia covered the issue of grant-loan assistance to the two States. It recommended that the date of application of liberalised pattern of Central assistance to the two States as 90 per

cent grant and 10 per cent loan may be advanced from April 1, 1991 to April 1, 1990. The Committee also indicated that it would benefit the two States to the extent of around Rs. 85 crores in 1992-93. The suggestions of the Committee had been accepted by the Government and the decisions were conveyed by the Finance Ministry to the concerned departments in January 1993.

In 1989, the Finance Ministry argued that a reduction in the loan component of Central assistance to these States would lead to a decrease in the payment of interest and principal and consequently the States would qualify for lower amount of non-plan revenue deficit grant and also debt relief grants from the Finance Commission. Thus, the reduced outflow of funds in the form of interest and principal would be offset by reduced entitlements of grant and lower debt relief and the overall position would, therefore, remain unchanged.

On the other hand, with the change in the pattern of Central assistance with retrospective effect, Central receipts on revenue and capital accounts will be affected adversely. Consequently, the amount of plan expenditure and the Gross Budgetary Support and Central assistance to States may also get correspondingly reduced.

Planning Commission warns States against 'reckless borrowing'

Subhamoy Chatterjee
Kolkata, June 9

THE PLANNING Commission warns that some States may be forced to declare 'financial emergency' during the 10th Plan, beginning next year, if they continue with "reckless borrowing" — mainly for salary, pensions and debt-servicing.

In its draft approach paper to the 10th Plan, the commission has made a thorough review of the financial position of the States. It shows the States have been borrowing more to finance non-Plan revenue expenditure than capital expenditure since the 1990s.

"The deterioration in the State finances in recent years is largely an outcome of the fact that in the face of a limited resource base, the States had to cope with a significant growth in expenditure."

"These include wages and salaries, pensions and interest payments, which account for a major proportion of the non-Plan expenditure and together form a sizeable part of revenue receipts," it says.

The document cites the instance of pension payments. "The pension liabilities of 14 major States have increased by 200 times from Rs 100 crore in 1995-76 to Rs 20,000 crore in 1998-99".

This was an increase from 2 per cent of revenue receipts to 12. It is likely to shoot up to 20 per cent by the end of the 10th Plan, the commission calculates.

The commission document says the States' balance from current revenue (BCR) had steadily declined from Rs 3,118 crore in 1985-86 to Rs 220 crore in 1992-93.

After that the balance had

turned negative, which during the current year stands at a mind-boggling Rs 32,306 crore. On the other hand, the States' overall debt had multiplied from Rs 53,660 crore in 1986-87 to Rs 4,18,583 crore in 200-01.

As the BCR turned negative and the States went on a borrowing spree to bridge the revenue gap, very little fund was available for investment in the core sectors.

"As a result, there has been a deceleration in the growth of

The States' balance from current revenue (BCR) steadily declined between 1985-86 and 1992-93, following which the States went on a borrowing spree. This left very little fund for investment in the core sectors.

capital expenditure from 37 per cent to 17 per cent between 1980 and 1998.

More importantly, not only has the share of Plan expenditure to total expenditure of the State Governments declined over successive Plans, but the allocations in the social sectors have also suffered in the process.

Plan expenditure has fallen from 27 per cent of State expenditure in the Sixth Plan to only 19 per cent in the Ninth Plan.

The share of States in overall Plan expenditure has fallen from 52 per cent in the Fifth Plan to 37 per cent in the Ninth Plan".

The commission has found that in many States, most Plan funds were being used to meet staff salaries. 'Staff', that was being paid out of non-Plan budget earlier, was being shown against the Plan.

This is complete reversal of what was in practice during the previous Plans when, on completion of a Plan period, 'Staff' was transferred to the non-Plan head.

This impinges on the delivery of Plan programmes in several ways. First, Central funds are often diverted for paying salaries and not passed on to the development departments for years, defeating the very purpose of funding social sector schemes by the Centre.

Second, the States do not release the matching funds in time, leading to further uncertainty over the availability of funds at the field level.

Third, lack of matching funds prompts States to demand that the Centre provide 100 per cent funds needed for the Centrally-sponsored schemes (CSS).

Fourth, the States failing to find counterpart funds fail to draw the allocations earmarked for the CSSs.

"The precarious financial position in many cases prevent State Governments from taking up committed liabilities of projects such as repairs or maintenance after completion, thus drastically reducing the project life. There can be no investment in future if the States make ends meet by excessive borrowing from the market or even 'stealing' funds from the Government of India".

Centre promises funds to Manipur

HT Correspondent
Imphal, June 8

THE CENTRAL Government has promised to Manipur Governor Ved Prakash Marwah to release funds for development of the State and reduce the debt burden.

The Centre's assurance came when the Governor requested the central officials concerned to release the funds.

Union Finance Ministry has given green signal to release funds to enable the State come out of the present financial mess and to overcome the overdraft crisis.

Besides, the newly formed Executive Council headed by the Governor has decided to allow the CBI, which will be given blanket authority to investigate different kinds of offences.

An official order signed by the Special Secretary, Cabinet, P Bharat Singh, states that offices of the both the advisors have also

been allotted works.

Kaikhokam Kipgen (retd IAS) has been authorised to supervise 20 departments and E N Rammo-hon (retd) IPS 16 departments. The departments, which are not allocated to the advisors, will come under the overall supervision of the Governor.

It was stated in a press statement issued by the Directorate of Information and Public Relations, Government of Manipur, on Friday.

It was released after the President's Rule administration swung into full action with the arrival of two advisors to the Governor Ved Prakash Marwah, who assumed their charges, and formation of the Executive Council on Thursday. The Governor is the head of the council and advisors are the members. The advisors include, K Kipgen, retired IAS officer and EN Ram-mohan IPS (retired).

The PR executive council in its first meeting at the Raj Bhavan

chalked out its plan of action. The first ever meeting of the council has given its top priority to the discussion on the financial situation of the State.

The meeting reviewing the financial position the State, which is facing with overdraft of Rs 136 crore, discussed the short and medium term measures required to stabilise the State.

The meeting noted that on the request of the Governor, the Central Government has agreed to bail the State out of its RBI overdraft trap. Salaries and pensions of the Government employees and pensioners for the months of April and May, 2001, are likely to be paid in the middle week of the month.

The ban on payment of salaries and arrears up to May, pension and retirement benefits, ration money, medical advances and reimbursement GPF and bills for Raj Bhawan, Assembly, secretariat, High Court and Manipur Public Service Com-

mission was lifted. The RBI clearance comes on Saturday. The ban will however, continue to be enforced for other categories not mentioned by the finance department.

The council also discussed the deteriorating law and order situation of the State as well as the public administration.

The council decided to set up public grievances redressal cells at the State and district level immediately.

The designated officers of the cells will hear the public grievances for at least one hour daily. Four administrative divisions will also be created and an equal number of divisional commissioners would be posted for supervising the development and administrative works, the release said.

In addition, four police ranges with a DIG police heading each will also be formed, the council decided during the meeting, the statement added.

President's rule in Manipur

*J. Centre
10-1*

*(W)
3/6*

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 2. Manipur was brought under President's rule to-night on the Union Cabinet's recommendation to the President that Article 356 of the Constitution be invoked to put the State under Central rule. The Cabinet accepted the Governor, Mr. Ved Marwah's report that it was not possible to form a stable government in the State.

According to Mr. Jaswant Singh, External Affairs Minister, who briefed reporters after the Cabinet meeting, the State Assembly would be kept under "suspended animation". He also said all political parties, including the Congress, in Manipur had been consulted.

The Vajpayee Government is proceeding on the assumption that it would take about eight weeks of Central rule before the intractable political groups in Manipur sort out their equations. The Vajpayee Government does not have the numbers to get the Presidential proclamation ratified

in the Rajya Sabha; but, it clearly has at least three months before it would be necessary for the Centre to seek Parliament's mandatory approval.

The BJP and the Samata in Manipur have been firmly told by their central leadership that defectors were not to be rewarded with ministerial berths; now the State level leaders have nearly two months to form new and stable group(s) before they can convince the Governor that Manipur could return to a "popular" government.

For now, the Cabinet decision should bring considerable satisfaction to the Samata leadership, which has threatened of dire consequences at the national level in case the BJP countenanced ministry-formation by the former Samata legislators in Manipur. Rather than have an annoyed Mr. George Fernandes and an even more annoyed Ms. Jaya Jaitly on its hand, the BJP leadership found itself constrained to renounce its ministerial ambitions in Manipur.

THE HINDU

10-1

'Creation of smaller States, threat to federalism'

410-11
2/8

Centre State

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 1. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) today spoke against the growing demands for creation of smaller States, like Telengana and Vidharbha, and said the move would seriously undermine the federal concept of a multi-lingual country. It also criticised the Congress and the BJP for promoting such causes. The party Central committee, at the end of its two-day meeting here, said if all the existing demands for smaller States were to be considered, India would be divided into more than 60 units.

"This will seriously undermine the federal concept of a multilingual country... It will lead to an authoritarian unitary State structure, further worsening Centre-State relations," it said.

Regional backwardness and economic imbalance must be addressed through concrete economic packages and consequent financial allocations. "Instead of

doing this, the BJP and the Congress in many places (such as Telengana, Vidharbha) are fanning such disruption," the party said.

Welcoming the proposed visit of Pakistan's Chief Executive, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, the committee asked the Vajpayee Government to define the agenda and scope of the summit talks. Any discussion on the Kashmir issue would have to be based on the Shimla Agreement.

On the political front, the Central committee asked the Kerala unit to analyse further the reasons that led to the defeat of the Left Democratic Front and noted that the "marginal erosion" in the Front's vote was due to various shortcomings. Addressing presspersons on the deliberations, the CPI(M) general secretary, Mr. Harkishan Singh Surjeet, said the defeat of the BJP and its allies — the DMK in Tamil Nadu and the AGP in Assam — in the Assembly polls reflected the people's discontent and disapproval of the NDA's policies.

THE HINDU

JUN 2001

Tenth Plan's bitter pill for States

By Alok Mukherjee

NEW DELHI, MAY 27. With a majority of the incumbent Governments losing out heavily in the recent Assembly elections, the draft Tenth Five-Year Plan document prepared by the Planning Commission may not pass muster with the States, which have to clear the final Plan at the meeting of the National Development Council.

The draft document contains a number of policy prescriptions such as levying higher user charges for almost all services provided by the Government and withdrawing of a host of tax concessions, most of which would be politically difficult to implement.

While political analysts have given their version of the reasons for the defeat of the sitting Governments in three of the four States which went to the polls recently (in West Bengal, other considerations prevailed), the report from the ground reveals that there has been largescale discontent among the general population against the prevailing economic situation.

The current phase of transition in the economy has resulted in lack of money with the public, chocking of savings avenues, lower interest incomes and loss of casual employment. At the same time, the general cost of living has gone up substantially, particularly in the case of essential services such as electricity, transportation and health care. In such a situation, it is unlikely that the States would be willing to increase the burden.

In fact, the Planning Commission itself seems to be aware that a projected growth rate of eight per cent during the Tenth Plan period would be a difficult proposition and has plainly said that the stated growth target can be achieved only if "sufficient political will is mobilised and a minimum consensus achieved which will enable significant progress to be made in critical areas. If that is not possible, then growth would be correspondingly lower."

Significantly, the Commission has left the draft document incomplete, saying it would give its con-

cluding views after receiving the response to its suggestions. The States' role in achieving a higher national growth has been stressed repeatedly, as otherwise, the Commission fears that inter-State inequality could increase with serious consequences for regional and national harmony.

Some of the prescriptions listed out by the Commission are by the very nature "unpopular" in political terms. For instance, it says that the public has got used to not paying economic charges for key services such as power, water supply, irrigation and transport and has quoted the Finance Ministry to say that hidden subsidies on non-merchandise amount to as much as 10.7 per cent of the gross domestic product (GDP) on an annual basis. On the power front, the losses resulting from lower than economic prices to the agriculture and domestic sectors amount to Rs. 25,000 crores a year — this would have to be rectified if the Tenth Plan objectives are to be achieved.

A connected document to the

Tenth Plan — a specialised paper on tax policy during the Plan period — has advocated the deletion of many concessions in income and corporate taxes and has estimated that if these are done, the Government could immediately expect over Rs. 25,000 crores a year. It also advocates the imposition of a tax on practically all services used by the public, including by the State Governments.

Even on the employment front, the recommendation is for an absolute freeze on Government recruitment during the five-year period of the Tenth Plan, accompanied by a reduction of three per cent of the existing workforce on an annual basis.

Given the fluid political situation in most of the States as well as at the Centre, economists connected with the Government are apprehensive that the tough conditions attached to the Tenth Plan draft may not find favour with the political leadership. Consequently, a lower growth target for the Plan period is very much on the cards.

THE HINDU

THE HINDU

28 MAY 2011

Allies can't digest Atal's grain plan

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 21: The squabbling within the National Democratic Alliance today spilled out into the open at a meeting of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee with chief ministers on stopping Central purchase of foodgrain from farmers.

Parkash Singh Badal and Om Prakash Chautala, BJP allies and chief ministers of Punjab and Haryana, denounced Vajpayee's plan to ask states to buy their own wheat and rice for sale through the public distribution system. Other NDA chief ministers, including Andhra's Chandrababu Naidu, joined the protest.

Vajpayee did not push the proposal and had to be content with announcing a committee of chief ministers to "examine the possibility of decentralisation and efficiency of the current system".

The climbdown came after a humbling tirade by key allies. When Vajpayee pleaded that the price of buying and storing grain was "unacceptably high", Chautala bluntly said: "Any decision to do away with Central procurement would go against us."

The Centre has long been complaining that it cannot buy any more grain as its silos are bursting at the seams. It has stock valued at nearly Rs 60,000 crore.

Earlier this year, the government announced a new system, which would let states buy their own grain with fixed subsidy from the Centre. Today's meeting was to stamp a seal of approval on the policy, which could have sent grain prices tumbling. Asim Dasgupta of Bengal advocated continuation of the current policy.

■ Another report on Page 8

THE TELEGRAPH

At WTO's strategy meet, CMs end up discussing money

states may not have enough financial resources to procure, store, and handle huge quantities of foodgrains — considering the government spends Rs 32,000 crore on this exercise annually, and the states are mainly broke, their reaction was hardly surprising.

None of the Chief Ministers, though, responded to the point made by Food Minister Shanta Kumar that while expenditure on procurement had risen dramatically, states were picking up less and less from the ration system — today, states pick up just around 47.4 per cent of their quota for rice and 33.8 per cent for wheat.

Food Minister Shanta Kumar, in his opening remarks, pointed out that while the Central Government had increased the quota of ration shop foodgrains for the poor dramatically, there were virtually no takers for this — Public Distribution System quota for below-poverty-line families was doubled to 20 kg per month last month and an Anty-

dya scheme was launched for one crore poorest families.

Instead, Chandrababu used the occasion to ask the centre for cheaper credit for the farm sector, to develop more infrastructure, and to set up agro-focus zones.

Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi also asked, in abstentia, for greater central assistance, including clearing of a Rs 2,500 crore scheme sent by the state, and a Rs 4,300 crore scheme for enhanced irrigation.

None of the chief ministers, however, explained what they were doing to ensure that proper collection was done for irrigation charges in their states.

Planning Commission Deputy Chief K.C. Pant pointed out that it was paradoxical that while the whole world was dismantling boundaries to trade, states still have restrictions on movement of foodgrains — Pant said such restrictions were anti-farmer, as they depress prices.

At WTO strategy meet, CMs end up discussing money

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI, MAY 21

IT was meant to be a brainstorming session on India's strategy at the WTO, but what the chief ministers discussed today was mainly CASH, or rather their lack of it.

CM after CM denounced the Central government's proposal to drastically curtail its annual food-grain procurement and leaving it instead to the state governments to pick up the slack — the proposal had been outlined in the budget speech by Finance Minister Yashwant Sinha as a means to cut the losses of the Food Corporation of India (FCI).

The CMs' reactions came soon after Food Minister Shanta Kumar said that the Centre would save at least Rs 2,000 crore of its annual Rs 32,000 crore bill if foodgrains

procurement and storage was decentralised and undertaken by the states instead. Kumar was speaking at the Chief Ministers' Conference on WTO and Agriculture and Food Management.

"This amounts to the Centre avoiding its responsibility for ensuring food security to all people of India", is how Kerala chief minister A.K. Antony put it.

"Since the minimum support price was decided by the government, the responsibility of procurement should also rest on its shoulders," Andhra supreme Chandrababu Naidu added. And just when you actually began believing this, a less diplomatic Prakash Singh Badal from Punjab let out the real reason for the CMs' collective ire.

The proposal is, he said, "impracticable and inadvisable" as the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

States reject Centre's move to decentralise procurement

By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, MAY 21. The Centre today failed to have its way with the States on its proposal to decentralise procurement of foodgrains for the Public Distribution System. Almost all States rejected the proposal at the conference of Chief Ministers on the WTO agreement on agriculture and food management convened by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, here, saying it was the Centre's "social obligation" to procure and distribute foodgrains. The States did not have the resources and infrastructure to do so, they said.

The Chief Ministers also bemoaned the fact that the Centre had signed the World Trade Organisation agreement on the farm sector without consulting them despite agriculture being a State subject. They said the WTO did not provide a level playing field to marginal farmers.

The proposal on decentralisation is to restructure the Food Corporation of India to restrict its function to maintaining buffer stocks at strategic locations, open market intervention and export/import operations. "The food-stock in the Central pool at present is valued at over Rs. 50,000 crores. Instead of providing subsidised foodgrains, financial assistance will be provided to State Governments to enable them procure and distribute foodgrains to the poor at subsidised rates," Mr Vajpayee said.

On the WTO, Mr. Vajpayee assured the Chief Ministers that the

removal of Quantitative Restrictions (QRs) on farm commodities under the WTO regime had not adversely affected Indian agriculture which would continue to enjoy the present level of subsidy and support.

He said fears that lifting of QRs would hurt farmers had proved to be unfounded. Statistics showed that non-oil imports actually fell by 14.7 per cent in 2000-01. There were adequate provisions under the agreement to take effective steps in case of sudden surge in imports and India had not com-

mitted itself to providing minimum market access to other countries, he added.

Conspicuous by their absence at the conference were the three women Chief Ministers — Ms. Sheila Dixit of Delhi, Ms. Jayalalitha of Tamil Nadu and Ms. Rabri Devi of Bihar. The West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, was also a notable absentee. All of them were represented by the their Agriculture and Food Ministers.

See also Page 11

CMs panel on food management

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 21. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, today announced the setting up of a committee of Chief Ministers on food management and agriculture exports to look at enhancing the efficiency of procurement and reducing the cost of distribution of foodgrains under the Public Distribution System through decentralisation and the active involvement of States. States such as Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal had sought the formation of a such a committee to monitor the impact of the WTO deal on agriculture.

The committee will also review the list of commodities and control orders to ensure free movement of agriculture products and implementation of the food-for-work programme and the Grain bank Scheme. It will also look at the WTO agreement on agriculture — promotion of exports for agriculture products.

The Agriculture Minister will be the convener while the Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Orissa, Assam, Uttar Pradesh, Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, West Bengal, Kerala and Maharashtra will be members. The Union Ministers for Commerce and Industry, Finance, Food and Consumer Affairs, Rural Development and the deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission will also be members. It will be supported by a group comprising the Secretaries of the Department of Agriculture, Commerce, Expenditure, Food, Consumer Affairs and the Principal Adviser (Agriculture) in Planning Commission, as also the State Chief Secretaries.

THE HINDU

22 MAY

Centre mulls Article 356 in Manipur

BJP's bid to mollify Samata Party

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 21

AS AN antidote to the crisis triggered by the Samata's rebellion in the aftermath of the Kojiam ministry's fall in Manipur, the Centre is reportedly contemplating a brief spell of President's rule in the faction-ridden North-Eastern State.

This indication came after a 90-minute NDA conclave at the Prime Minister's 7, Race Course Road residence. The meeting was boycotted by Samata leader George Fernandes, who is also the convenor of the multi-party alliance, even as the PM despatched two emissaries, Sudheendra Kulkarni and Vijay Goel, to mollify him and his senior party colleagues.

Fernandes spurned the BJP's peace overtures despite being conveyed, in the middle of a parallel meeting of the Samata's national executive, that the BJP would not stake claim to form an alternative Government in Manipur.

But in sharp contrast to their day-long aggressive posturing — including threats to withdraw from coalitions at the Centre, in Jharkhand and various civic bodiless — the Samata leadership concluded their reportedly stormy discussions on a sombre note.

"The National Executive has unanimously authorised George-sahib to take the necessary decision with regard to our relations with the NDA," Samata spokesman Shambhu Srivastav told newsmen after the four-hour-long session. Speaking after the NDA conclave, BJP leader Baswant Singh termed the Manipur crisis as the ruling Alliance's "internal affair" caused by extreme factionalism

KOIJAM LOSES TRUST VOTE DESPITE BJP WHIP

THE 96-DAY-OLD Samata Party-led Radha Binod Kojiam ministry in Manipur lost the confidence vote in the State Assembly on Monday. The dissidents secured the support of 39 MLAs while Kojiam managed just 17 votes in the 60-member House. The lone Indian National Congress member, Rishang Keishing, abstained.

Soon after, dissident leader Rajkumar Dorendra Singh called on the Governor, Ved Prakash Marwah, at the Raj Bhavan and staked his claim to forming a new Government. The dissidents have formed a front called the Progressive Democratic Alliance (PDA) which has 41 legislators, including 25 from the BJP.

HTC, Imphal

in the Manipur Assembly.

Significantly, in response to a specific query, Singh did not rule out imposition of President's rule in the State.

"It is a possible interpretation to resolve the prevailing crisis," he remarked, claiming that the Manipur imbroglio did not come up for discussion at the NDA meeting.

But Singh's assertion that the BJP whip in the State Assembly was obeyed by "several legislators including the State unit president", fell flat in the face of reports that 24 out of 26 party MLAs opposed Kojiam's trust motion.

Even as the Samata Party dismissed the BJP assertions of a whip having been issued as "the final act of deceit," Singh maintained that his party would act against the errant MLAs after party chief Jana Krishna-murthi's return from Mussoorie tomorrow.

WTO is not to blame for farm sector's woes: govt.

By Priya Ranjan Dash
The Times of India News Service

NEW DELHI: The Vajpayee government seems to believe that the WTO is not to blame for the crisis in Indian agriculture and, therefore, withdrawing from the world trade body is a bad idea.

In a rear-guard action to prevent the "withdraw-from-WTO" call from turning strident at the meeting of chief ministers being held here on Monday, the Centre has circulated a 62-page note, arguing that the WTO-induced import liberalisation was not a threat but an opportunity for Indian agriculture. "The removal of QRs (licensing and quota curbs on imports) need not be seen as a threat since it provides an opportunity for our farm sector to become competitive which, in turn, should lead to increased exports," the note said.

Meanwhile, the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) has also submitted a paper to all chief ministers lobbying against any move to withdraw from the WTO. "India has been a net gainer, though in a limited way, with its share in global trade increasing from 0.6 per cent to 0.65 per cent between 1995 and 2000," said the CII paper while arguing that "by withdrawing from the WTO, India will only jeopardise its national

interests and render itself absolutely vulnerable to the protectionist forces in many countries".

Several state governments are already feeling uneasy in the face of a full-blown crisis in Indian agriculture — manifesting itself in suicides of farmers, a crash of farm produce prices to a record low and the threat to domestic producers from cheap imports. The feeling that the WTO regime is responsible for much of Indian agriculture's woes has gained ground with some of the NDA constituents demanding India's withdrawal from the multilateral trade body.

"The post-Uruguay round experience has been a mixed one for agriculture trade in India. While exports have increased in certain cases, a decline has been registered in others. However, these cannot be attributed solely to the impact of the (WTO) agreement in agriculture," said the agenda note for the chief ministers' meeting.

The note sought to allay fears that the removal of qualitative restrictions would open the floodgates of imports. It argued that "these fears appear to be unfounded" going by empirical data which revealed that at the aggregate macro level, the import liberalisation had neither altered the overall rate of growth of imports nor their composition. The picture did not change if the data at the disaggregate micro level were looked at, it said.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

21 MAY 2001

10-10 SATURDAY, MAY 26, 2001

AN EVASIVE DIALOGUE

INDIAN AGRICULTURE, WITH all its inherited structural constraints, should continue to be insulated from the logic of market forces. This was one note of concordance which resonated at the Conference of Chief Ministers in New Delhi last Monday. The agenda for the conference turned on the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and its presumed catastrophic impact on the Indian farmer, apart from the largely politicised issues of food procurement and distribution. The Agreement on Agriculture (AOA) in the WTO dispensation, which was signed in 1994 by India and other member-countries, postulated a world-wide movement towards competitive markets. It was, by no means, a *carte blanche* for the developed countries, with vast agricultural surpluses, to exploit markets in the developing countries. The fact is that the AOA recognises that in many developing countries, agriculture is much more a way of life than a commercial occupation for the vast majority of the farmers. To this extent, the paradigm of competitive global free trade in agricultural commodities must remain subordinate to the paramount human concerns of food security and livelihood. But then the political establishment, at the State level, continues to harbour grave misapprehensions about the WTO being the sole source of the entire malaise of agriculture including glut in production, injudicious crop planning, the drastic fall in new public investment in agriculture (in research and irrigation besides post-harvest technologies and marketing infrastructure) and the long-continued official inability to empower the small and marginal farmers who constitute the predominant majority of cultivators.

On the decline in domestic prices of agricultural commodities such as copra, pepper, chillies, turmeric and ginger in recent times, is it all the sequel to the lifting of quantitative restrictions (QRs) on imports? Can it be denied that the slump in prices of such commodities has a great deal to do with both unplanned extension of the cropping area and deplorably inadequate mar-

keting support, not to ignore the vital factor of stagnant and even declining demand?

Obviously the country is not yet ready for the WTO regime, even six years after signing the AOA. The Centre is no doubt culpable in not generating even the minimum degree of awareness of what the WTO mandates and of how the broad contours of tariffed two-way trade would impact on Indian farming. Can the State Governments plead ignorance of the AOA as the justification for their own apathy towards structural deficiencies in the farming sector? Apart from pressuring the Centre for higher support prices and larger levels of procurement of foodgrain have the State Governments endeavoured to develop agriculture on the basis of improved productivity and infrastructural remediation?

The Vajpayee Government's proposal for decentralisation of procurement of foodgrain with the requisite funds being made available to the States has drawn a blank from the Chief Ministers. This is indeed a pity. For one thing, it indicates that the States have no willingness to realise that Central procurement, often under duress, leads to huge mountains of foodstocks being held by the Food Corporation of India (FCI), far in excess of the off-take for the Public Distribution System (PDS) and at enormous avoidable cost. Arguments about the States not having adequate infrastructure for handling procurement seem unconvincing. The truth perhaps is that the Chief Ministers know that their political vulnerability will only increase with their assuming responsibility for as sensitive an operation as purchasing foodgrain from the market through a bureaucratic process. In any case, is it not pragmatic to maintain the *status quo* and keep the Centre in the firing line? Not being able to grapple with the reforms needed in agriculture, the Conference predictably has passed the buck to a committee of Chief Ministers. Can the committee supply the political will for reforms, so pathetically lacking now?

THE HINDU

26 MAY 2001

Centre ignored us on Deendar ban: Andhra

HT Correspondent
Hyderabad, May 4

THE CENTRE'S ban on Deendar Anjuman has kicked up a row with Andhra Pradesh Home Minister T Devender Goud complaining that the State was not consulted.

Goud, who is close to the TDP leader and Chief Minister, told reporters in Visakhapatnam on Friday that the ban was a "unilateral" decision. The State Government had not sought the ban, and it had not been consulted, he said.

He felt that the ban would serve no purpose. "Imposing a ban on any organisation is no solution to the problem," he said, adding however that this was a "personal opinion".

His position contradicts a Union Home Ministry official's claim on Thursday that the ban was imposed only after consultations with the States concerned.

Representatives of the Union Government and of police forces of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Goa had met in Bangalore before the ban was slapped, the official said.

Participants at the meeting felt that the ISI was planning to foment communal disturbances by pitting one community against another in India.

Police, meanwhile, have initiated measures to enforce the ban on Deendar Anjuman with immediate effect. DGP H J Dora told reporters that police would seal the offices of the banned organisation and freeze its bank accounts.

The DGP said that about 40 Deendar activists were involved in criminal cases in the State.

The Crime Investigation Department (CID) had booked 21 cases against them, including a

conspiracy case, for bomb blasts, robberies and desecration of Ambedkar statues.

The accused were arrested and lodged in jails. They were undergoing trial for the offences.

Deendar Anjuman shot into limelight when its activists reportedly detonated or planted bombs at religious meetings and places of worship as part of its suspected plans to spark communal flare-ups across the country and turn the international Christian community against India.

The police said that Deendar activists had the backing of Pakistan's ISI and worked under the leadership of Khaliq-uz-Zaman, a Pakistan-trained activist from Nuzvid in Andhra Pradesh. Deendar, however, steadfastly denied any role in the violent incidents.

It claimed to be a sect practising and preaching Islam to bring together people of all faiths. Its followers even recited Sanskrit slokas from Hindu scriptures, it said.

The police charged the Deendar activists with involvement in 21 offences in the State, including seven explosions, one of them at a Christian congregation at Machilipatnam, and some others at churches at Vikarabad, Medak, Ongole and Tadepalligudem, a temple at Vijayawada and a mosque at Guntur.

Deendar was founded by Syed Siddique Hussain in 1924 at Gadag in Karnataka.

It later shifted its headquarters to Hyderabad.

The outfit was working with a "hidden agenda" to destabilise the country by creating chaos and communal discord.

The incriminating literature claimed the outfit would pave the way for invasion of India by 900,000-strong force of Pathans.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 5 MAY 2001

CMs' meet on WTO impact put off

By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, APRIL 21. The crucial meeting convened by the Centre with State Chief Ministers on the World Trade Organisation and its impact on agriculture scheduled for April 23, has been postponed. The meeting, organised by the Union Agriculture Ministry, was to be chaired by the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee.

The reason given for postponement was the Assembly elections in five States because of which some of the Chief Ministers were unable to attend.

The meeting, which was meant to rebut the charges levelled against the Government of being anti-farmer, would now be held on May 21, the Agriculture Minister, Mr. Nitish Kumar, told *The Hindu* here.

A similar conference with State Agriculture Ministers scheduled to be held last month was cancelled after it was decided that it should be convened along with

the Chief Ministers' meeting.

The Centre feels there is a pressing need to explain to the Chief Ministers its position on agriculture at the WTO and its proposals for the Agreement on Agriculture during the special session which asserts the aspect of food security and livelihood. The impact of lifting of the quantitative restrictions (QRs) and the steps taken by the Government to safeguard the interests of farmers and traders would also be emphasised.

During the talks held in the last week of March in Geneva, India said the negotiations centred around the issues of market access, domestic support and export competition with non-trade concerns and special and differential treatment dovetailed with some flexibility to discuss any other item of interest to members.

The Government, during the meeting, will explain the move to decentralise the Food Corpora-

tion of India and the plan to meet local requirements locally. Already Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and West Bengal meet their requirements locally. The issue about higher than market minimum support price of foodgrains, the problem of plenty and of storages will also be discussed.

Strategies for enhancing productivity, diversification, sustainability, reduction of regional imbalances, land use policy, extension, exports, globalisation and commercialisation, food quality and safety, information technology, marketing and investment will also be debated.

Issues of agriculture labour, migration, diversification, marketing and related aspects will be taken up. "The idea is to have a better understanding with States and for the Chief Ministers to sensitise farmers to the new policies and strategies they need to adapt and adopt under the WTO regime," Mr. Kumar said.

THE HINDU

APR 21 2001

Centre declares ceasefire with NSCN(K)

HR-7
28/9

Kohima, April 28

THE CENTRE today announced ceasefire with the Khaplang faction of National Socialist Council of Nagaland with immediate effect in Nagaland.

"It has been jointly agreed between the Centre and NSCN(K) to announce a formal ceasefire declaration for a period of one year with effect from April 28," said a Government press release quoting Home Minister L K Advani.

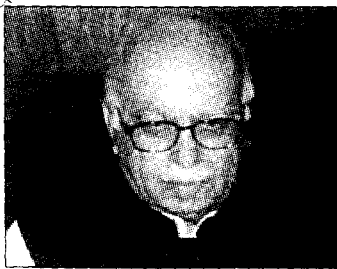
Announcing that the text of "ceasefire ground rules" have been agreed upon between the Centre and NSCN(K), he hoped that the ceasefire would enlarge the area of peace in Nagaland. This would also meet the long-standing demands of the people of Nagaland.

Advani appealed to all militant groups in the North-east to shun violence and to come forward for talks to sort out any issue that may be there between them and the Central and State Governments.

Congratulating the Centre for the decision, Nagaland Chief Minister S C Jamir appealed to other groups such as NNC/federal group to follow suit in strengthening the peace initiative. The ceasefire with the other Naga group NSCN(I-M), which has been in force since August 1997, expires in July. There have been persistent demands from the people, NGOs, church leaders and the State Government that a formal ceasefire should be entered into with other militant Naga groups.

During his last visit to Nagaland in February, Advani said he had received a number of representations that the Centre should enter into a formal ceasefire with the Khaplang group. A final request to enter into a formal ceasefire was also received from that faction.

Early this month, representatives of the Centre led by P D Shenoy, additional secretary, home, and representatives of NSCN led by Tongmeth Wangnau Konyak held discussions in



Delhi. Jamir in his statement said it was high time people of Nagaland irrespective of their political affiliations or ideologies should stand as one to bring about peace and unity among all sections of the Naga community.

"We are indeed grateful to the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister for their earnest efforts to ensure peace in Nagaland as well as their deep concern for settling the Naga political issue," he said.

"The steps taken so far by the Centre are a clear expression of their commitment and determination to resolve the problem in the larger interest of the people of Nagaland. Let us pray and trust that the coming days would usher in an era of peace, harmony and reconciliation in our society and among our people," Jamir said. He said following the ceasefire with NSCN(I-M) in 1997 this was another positive and significant step forward in consolidation of the peace process. It brings renewed hope and optimism to the people and the whole state is genuinely happy that NSCN(K) leadership has responded affirmatively to the prayers and aspirations of all the people of Nagaland.

Jamir said the maturity and political wisdom displayed by both NSCN(I-M) and NSCN(K) in entering into ceasefire agreements with the Government of India will indisputably pave the way for permanent peace and an appropriate political solution to the Naga problem. "On our part, my Government and I shall do all that is within our powers to further reinforce and secure the present climate of peace in the State," Jamir said.

PTI



The BALCO plant at Korba in Chhattisgarh. No smoke is coming out of its chimney due to the indefinite strike by its employees against the disinvestment of the plant. — PTI

Jogi warns BJP against 'undemocratic steps'

By Aarti Dhar

*Centre State
H.D. 9*

RAIPUR, MARCH 9. The Chhattisgarh Chief Minister, Mr. Ajit Jogi, today said any undemocratic move against his Government in the wake of the BALCO controversy that had virtually snowball into a direct Centre-State confrontation, would spell disaster for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), which would be totally wiped off from the State.

Highly critical of the manner in which the deal was signed followed by "packs of white lies" being churned out by the Union Disinvestment Minister, Mr. Arun Shourie, the Chief Minister said at a press conference here today that the Centre has broken the tradition of a harmonious Centre-State relationship, which is the basis of a federal system, by taking refuge in the Supreme Court. If at all anyone had to move the court was the new owner of BALCO and not the Central Government, he said.

Referring to the veiled threats to him from the Central Government on the stand taken by him on the BALCO issue, Mr. Jogi said he was aware of the 'options' be-

ing considered by the Centre over his stance. But, the BJP must realise it would lose all the 90 Assembly seats if any unjustified move was made.

The Congress(I) in Chhattisgarh has fully backed the just demands of the workers of BALCO, but the State was duty-bound to preserve law and order. "Apart from the issue of Centre-State relations, vital issues relating to the powers available to the local governments are equally important. Gram sabhas and Panchayats are empowered to the extent that they cannot be overlooked by the Governments at the Centre and States. Several concessions have been granted to BALCO, it being a public sector undertaking, but these can be reviewed by the State Government as well as the local government," he warned.

The Chief Minister also took exception to the way in which the BJP spokesperson had said that he had taken up the cause as a union leader. It amounts to belittling trade unionism.

Releasing copies of letters written to his officials by the Central Government regarding the deal, Mr. Jogi said all these were just

10/3

meant to inform him about the sale and did not amount to any consultations. It is unfortunate that Mr. Shourie is misleading Parliament as well as the Apex Court, he alleged. He called upon Mr. Shourie and the owner of Sterlite, Mr. Anil Aggarwal, to come out openly with the names of those involved in this controversial deal.

A profit-making PSU, estimated to be worth more than Rs. 5,000 crores, has been squandered away for less than one-tenth of its value in a sleazy deal where the "needle of suspicion" points to the highest and the mightiest of the day, he said though refusing to divulge the names of those believed to have taken kick-backs in the deal, Mr. Jogi repeated that he would reveal the names of the accused before a Joint Parliamentary Committee, a judicial committee or any other appropriate forum set up to look into the deal. BALCO's privatisation is not just another exercise in economic reforms. It is bad economic, and worse still, it is bad politics. It is a conspiracy against both national well being and local sentiments, he said.

THE HINDU

10 MAR 2001

10 MAR 2001

10 MAR 2001

Mahanta doing fine, but alliance can wait: Advani

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
GUWAHATI/NEW DELHI, FEB 6

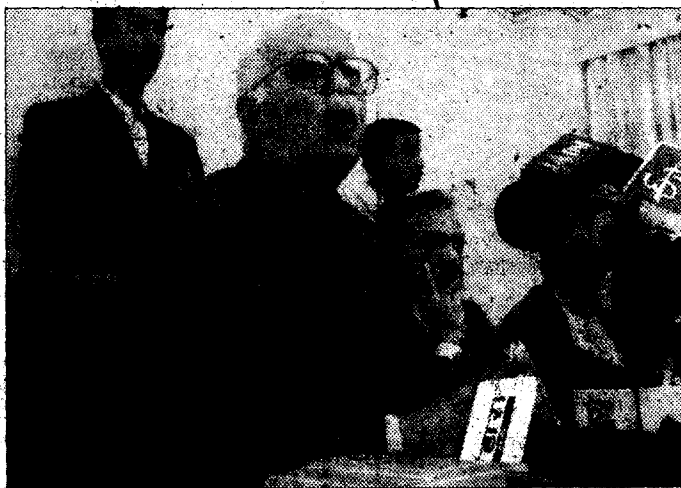
UNION Home Minister L.K. Advani today not only lauded the efforts made by Asom Gana Parishad-led government in the state to bring the insurgency situation under control but also gave enough indications that the BJP may enter into an alliance with the AGP in view of the forthcoming Assembly elections.

"The level of violence has come down in Assam except for the recent spate of killing of Hindi-speaking people," Advani said at a press conference at the end of his two-day visit to Assam. He also made a reference to the four-pronged strategy adopted by the state government in dealing with insurgency that had yielded "substantial results".

Regarding the possibility of an electoral alliance between the BJP and the AGP, Advani said the question was still open. "Our party president Bangaru Laxman will sit with the high command and leaders from Assam to discuss the issue and only then we will decide on the issue," Advani said.

He said that the simultaneous offer for talks while dealing firmly with the militants had borne fruit during the past two years.

The BJP, facing bleak electoral



Home Minister L.K. Advani with Additional Home Secretary P.D. Shenoy in Guwahati on Monday — PTI photo

prospects in all the five northeastern states going for Assembly elections, has been contemplating a tie-up with the AGP. But prospects of the possible alliance generating a negative impact due to anti-incumbency factor, is reportedly acting as a deterrent.

The party has already lost its Karnataka seat by entering into a similar tie-up with the then Chief Minister J.H. Patel's Janata Dal (U), despite strong opposition from the rank and file of the party.

The BJP leaders have been toying with the idea of having a tacit understanding — may be

seat adjustment — with the AGP for the polls.

As per BJP's own estimates, in a house of 126, the party is unlikely to win more than 35-40 seats if it contests alone and has therefore no chance to grab power.

Talking about a spate of killings of the Hindi-speaking people that has rocked Assam since Diwali last year, Advani said: "In the assessment of the Central Government, the militants chose to kill these soft targets to make their presence felt, since there has been a serious erosion in their support base."

INDIAN EXPRESS

7 FEB 2001

Centre for talks with N-E ultras

Tinsukia, February 4

UNION HOME Minister L K Advani on Sunday said the Centre was ready to hold talks with any militant outfit to bring about lasting peace and development in the country.

"We are ready to hold negotiations with the ultras on any issue and grievance except matters concerning nationality and sovereignty," Advani told a huge public rally here.

Without referring to the Ulfa or any militant outfit of the region, the Home Minister said the Central Government was ready to hold talk with the ultras, willing to give up violence and return to the mainstream.

Referring to the recent killings of

innocent people in the State, he said these incidents would "defame" the image of the State and aggravate its problems.

Advani accused Pakistan of creating trouble on the border and alleged that it was "jealous" of the rich democratic tradition of India.

"Pakistan was creating problem as it was not able to tolerate the democratic set up of the country," Advani said.

The Centre, he said, would not tolerate Pakistani design to destabilise the country.

Referring to militants of the State as "our own people", he

said the need of the hour was to ensure that they returned to the mainstream.

Earlier, Advani met the affected Hindi-speaking people at Kakojan and Sadiya.

Assam bandh

LIFE in Assam ground to a halt following the 12-hour bandh call by Ulfa and NDFB to protest Union Home Minister L K Advani's visit on Sunday. Shops remained closed, with traffic off the road. Trains and flights from Guwahati were unaffected.

(PTI)

(PTI)

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

5 FEB 2001

Buddhadeb warns Centre on President's Rule in W. Bengal

BY AKSHYA KUMAR SAHOO

Bhubaneswar, Jan. 21: West Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee on Sunday warned the NDA government of serious consequences if it imposed President's Rule on the state.

Mr Bhattacharjee, who is currently in the city to attend the party central committee meeting, said the NDA government would be taught a lesson by the people of West Bengal if it promulgated Article 356 in the state with a political motive.

"Since Independence, Article 356 has been rampantly misused and promulgated several times in different states. If the Centre dares to repeat such a mistake in my

state, it will not be tolerated," Mr Bhattacharjee said.

He described West Bengal as one of the peaceful states in the country and said a few political leaders were trying to disturb peace and tranquillity there. While admitting that the Trinamul Congress was the main Opposition in the state, the chief minister said the party was not in a position to restrict the Left Front to regain power. "Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee is still vacillating on if she would join the Congress and the BJP. But we have consolidated our position to improve our performance in the coming elections," he added.

He said the CPI(M) would never join hands with the Congress to

counter the BJP as his party had fundamental differences with the Congress on economic policies. However, if we have to choose between these two, we will support the Congress, he said.

Refuting allegations that West Bengal is a trouble-torn state, Mr Bhattacharjee said the allegations were aimed at maligning the image of the Left Front government.

"West Bengal is a peaceful state," he said. He also described as "unwanted" the visit of the national human rights team to Chhoto Angrya village to probe the alleged carnage there. "I do not know why they went and what they were doing there. It was unfair of their part not to take the state commission into confidence," he said.

THE HINDU

22 JAN 2001

NHRC annoys state panel

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MINISTER QUESTIONS RIGHT TO PROBE

KOLKATA, Jan. 19. — The state law minister, Mr Nisith Adhikari, today contended that the National Human Rights Commission did not have the jurisdiction to probe the Chhota Anguria incident or seek a clarification on the chief minister's comment on police firing. Both of these were already under the consideration of the state human rights commission.

The West Bengal Human Rights Commission passed a resolution expressing its displeasure about the NHRC team's visit to Garbeta. The NHRC

DG, MR YN Srivastava, today visited Chhota Anguria with the ADG, Mr Shivaji Singh.

The WBHRC will communicate its displeasure to the secretary general, NHRC officially.

The minister questioned their right to submit a report on the incident in the absence of jurisdiction as this would amount to the commission taking cognizance of it. "Any order without jurisdiction is null and void", he said.

Stating that the state government would not stand in the way of the NHRC, the minister said legal opinion

would be sought on whether the state was bound to reply to the NHRC's queries on the two matters it was inquiring into.

The five-member commission, headed by Mr Justice Mukul Gopal Mukherjee, mentioned in the resolution that the chairperson of NHRC must see that there is no overlapping of jurisdiction.

NHRC team visits Chhota Anguria: People might have been murdered at Chhota Anguria village, Mr YN Srivastava, director general (investigation) of NHRC, said after visiting the spot today. He

said investigation would reveal whether anyone had been murdered and if so how many.

A senior CID official today admitted that preliminary investigations indicated that five or six people had been killed. But, the ADG, CID, Mr K K Mandal, said CID officials were yet to trace enough evidence from which it could be concluded that people were actually murdered.

Reacting to Mr Srivastava's statement, Mr Mandal said: "How can he say that people were murdered at Chhota Anguria just by visiting the spot?"

Mr Srivastava today went to the Garbeta police station and collected necessary documents from the OC, Garbeta and the Circle Inspector. He also took a copy of the seizure list from the local police. He later said that his observation was different from that of the local police.

There is discrepancy between the version of the district police and the villagers, Mr Srivastava said.

He met Kulsoom Bibi, mother of Mr Abdul Rehman Mondal, the prime witness of the massacre. The NHRC team arrived in the city tonight and would be meeting Mondal in the nursing home.

THE STATESMAN

20 JAN 2001

NHRC's Midnapore visit raises State body hackles

Gautam Chaudhuri
Kolkata, January 19

THE WEST Bengal Human Rights Commission (WBHRC) is hardly amused at the decision of the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) to send a high-power team to violence-scarred Garbata and Keshpur on its own, keeping the State Commission in the dark.

For the sake of propriety and to avoid any controversy, WBHRC members prefer to keep their grievances under wraps, but they are visibly upset. The "unwarranted interference" into State affairs in their opinion has only undermined the State Commission.

WBHRC officials point out that relevant rules make it clear that the

NHRC cannot take up probes on issues already pending before the State Commission. They say that the Centre for Protection of Democratic Rights, a rights body, had earlier sought the WBHRC's intervention into the continuing violence in Garbata and Midnapore and made the DM and SP of Midnapore primarily responsible. "As two senior officials were charged, we asked the Home Secretary for official explanations. We are awaiting the report, while the NHRC takes up the same issue without our knowledge."

Given this background, they describe the NHRC visit to Garbata as "improper and unethical". "The NHRC can claim that it has sent its team on the basis of a complaint made before it by a separate organisation and that it did not know that

the State Commission is also dealing with the issue. But what stopped them from taking us into confidence?" argued agitated officials.

They also questioned the rationale behind the visit since the issue pertains to law and order and remains outside the purview of any human rights commission. "Again there is a thin dividing line. It can always be claimed that as human rights were violated in such incidents, the NHRC can step in. But the NHRC should have stayed away from it when it is common knowledge that the issue is political in nature."

The WBHRC Chairman Justice Mukul Gopal Mukherji refused to comment on the affair. "It won't be proper for me to say anything on the issue", was all that Justice Mukherjee told *The Hindustan Times* today.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

20 JAN 1991

Mamata, NDA team meet PM

By Our Special Correspondent

Centre's Govt *119-1*
NEW DELHI, JAN. 16. The Railway Minister and Trinamool Congress leader, Ms. Mamata Banerjee, met the Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, this evening, and presented to him "evidence" of a "massacre" in Midnapore district. However, she failed to get any "commitment" from the Prime Minister as to what would be the Centre's response, if any, to her party's persistent demand that West Bengal ought to be brought under President's rule.

Ms. Banerjee was accompanied by her party MPs, as well as by the TDP leader, Mr. Yerran Naidu, and Mr. Vijay Goel, BJP MP who headed the NDA "fact-finding team" to Midnapore. The Prime Minister, on his part, asked the Union Home Secretary, Mr. Kamal Pande, who was asked to be present, to have the "evidence" examined.

Today's meeting is seen as part of the continuing war of nerves Ms. Banerjee is waging against the Left Front Government, in preparation towards the Assembly poll scheduled in a few months. There is distinct disinclination to take Ms. Banerjee's account of the "massacre" with any degree of seriousness.

The Centre is proceeding on the assumption that President's rule was not an option open to the NDA Government; the government simply did not have

the numbers to have a proclamation under Article 356 ratified by the Rajya Sabha.

The BJP central leadership is rather wary of Ms. Banerjee's political calculations and would not be surprised if she resigns, once again, from the Vajpayee Government on the eve of the assembly elections.

However, the BJP leadership would not want to give Ms. Banerjee the provocation to leave the Cabinet and to portray herself as a "martyr"; hence, today's prime ministerial audience was part of an overall desire to keep her in good humour as long as she does not cause any major embarrassment to the Vajpayee Government.

PTI reports

The Trinamool leader, Mr. Sudip Bandopadhyay, told mediapersons after their 40-minute meeting with Mr. Vajpayee that the Prime Minister "is well aware of the situation and has expressed serious concern We hope he would react at an appropriate time." However, Mr. Yerran Naidu said, "my party is disturbed over the West Bengal situation and has urged the Centre to ensure safety of lives and property and also a free and fair election."

"You know my party's stand on Article 356," Mr. Yerran Naidu said when asked whether his party supported the Trinamool-BJP demand. The TDP had consistently opposed imposition of Central rule.

THE HINDU

17 JAN 2001

Bengal issue: EC is NDA's last refuge

Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, January 10

NOTWITHSTANDING the sabre-rattling against the Marxist Government over killings in West Bengal, the NDA's last refuge is going to be the Election Commission and not President's rule before Assembly polls in May.

Even though Chief Election Commissioner M S Gill was today quick to point out to a team of NDA leaders, who sought his intervention that the panel did not come into picture until a formal announcement of polls, both BJP and Trinamool leaders believe that its writ is a potent weapon against the Marxist "designs."

NDA leaders underscore the significance of the special powers granted recently to the Election Commission by the Centre after an eight-year legal wrangle before the Supreme Court.

With the Congress sure not to come to the aid of the BJP to obtain mandatory parliamentary approval to invoke Article 356 against the CPI(M), the BJP

brass has decided that the "independent authority" of the Election Commission is the best bet to rein in a belligerent administration in the run-up to the polls.

The Election Commission now has the power to transfer, suspend and recommend dismissal government employees accused of taking sides and other irregularities while on poll duty.

As NDA team head Vijay Goel, who met Dr Gill today, put it, the alliance wants the Election Commission to expand the scope of intervention -- even before the poll announcement -- by identifying Bengal officials, who because of their alleged allegiance to the CPI(M), are already at work to rig the polls.

Secondly, the Election Commission can direct West Bengal to re-issue voter-identity cards, which the State administration claims were lost in the recent floods.

Polls in May

ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Assam, West Bengal and the Union Territory of Pondicherry will be held simultaneously in the third week of May. Announcing this today, Chief Election Commissioner M. S. Gill said simultaneous polls were being held to ensure that the results in one state did not affect those in others. He informed newsmen that the Assemblies in these four States and the Union Territory should be constituted two weeks before their current terms end. The term of the Tamil Nadu Assembly expires on May 21, Kerala Assembly on May 28, West Bengal and Pondicherry on June 9 and Assam on June 11.

HTC, New Delhi

The BJP and the NDA are beginning to be proactive on the Bengal front because they are keen to keep the recalcitrant Trinamool Congress within their fold.

As soon as Railway Minister and Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee raised an outcry over the killings near Garbeta, the BJP leadership promptly organised a NDA team's visit to the affected village.

After initially ruling out the possibility of imposing President's rule in the absence of support from the Congress, the

Centre had yesterday again spoken about the possibility of a Central action, largely to please the cadres of non-Left parties in Bengal.

Meanwhile, West Bengal Pradesh Congress Committee president Pranab Mukherjee has wondered as to why the BJP was looking askance at his party for imposition of President's rule in the Left-ruled State.

Impose Central rule: NDA team

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Jan. 10. — The NDA team, which visited West Bengal on a fact-finding mission after the alleged massacre at Chhota Anguria in Midnapore, today formally demanded that President's rule be imposed on the state.

It also demanded a CBI inquiry into the "killings", dismissing as meaningless the CID probe instituted by the state government.

The team apprehended that free and fair election was not possible in the state in view of "state-sponsored terrorism and political violence" and appealed to the Election Commission to deploy impartial personnel to man the election exercise.

The Election Commissioner, Mr TS Krishnamurthy, will visit West Bengal tomorrow to

take stock of election-related work. The term of the present assembly will end on 9 June. Assembly elections in five states are likely to be over by the third week of May.

Releasing the findings, the team convener, Mr Vijay Goel, said the Centre was likely to apply its mind on the Bengal situation after the Prime Minister returned from his foreign tour.

He said the NDA hoped that the Congress leader, Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi, would stick to his stand that the situation warranted imposition of President's rule.

Mr Goel alleged that the law and order machinery had collapsed in the state and he saw a nexus among the administration, police and Left cadres. He demanded that the officials trying to cover up the "massacre" be punished.

THE STATESMAN

11 JAN 2001

Decision on Bengal after PM returns

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, Jan. 9. — The Centre will wait for the return of Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee before deciding on the NDA team's suggestion of imposition of President's rule in West Bengal, Mr LK Advani said in Delhi today.

"The government as a whole will have to take a decision. We are waiting for Miss Mamata Banerjee. The NDA convener, Mr George Fernandes, is also away and the Prime Minister will return after a few days," the home minister said when asked whether he had ruled out President's rule.

"The Centre will consider all aspects before deciding on the demand for imposition of President's rule in the wake of alleged killing of Trinamul Congress supporters by CPI-M activists," he said.

His comments came after the five-member NDA team, which visited the violence-affected areas of Midnapore district, met him and recommended Central rule for the state.

"The description given to me by the NDA team on what they saw in Garbeta confirms that a heinous incident has occurred. The situation is serious. What the Centre will do has to be decided in totality..." Mr Advani said.

He dismissed as "meaningless" the CID probe instituted by the state government, saying CID was part of the establishment.

Rejecting the demand by the NDA and the Congress for a CBI probe into the Chhota Anguria "massacre", Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya said in Kolkata today that the CID would be as impartial as the CBI.

Mr Advani said the recent violence was "not an isolated incident. There has been a spate of such incidents and people have fled their villages. These incidents seemed to be related to the ensuing Assembly

elections."

Earlier, the NDA team said West Bengal was a "fit case" for Central rule and charged the Left Front with trying to hush up the Chhota Anguria incident. They said they would meet the chief election commissioner tomorrow to brief him on the "growing incidents of political violence."

The delegation — comprising Mr Vijay Goel (BJP), Mr Inder Singh (INLD), Mr Sanjay Nirupam (Shiv Sena) and Mr Prabhat Samantray (BJD) — showed bullets, axes and blood-stained clothes which they claimed to have recovered from the site of alleged massacre.

Mr Bhattacharya said the CID would submit its report soon. The investigation is being conducted by the DIG, Mr Chayan Mukherjee.

The chief minister said the demand for President's rule was a manifestation of "tremendous political frustration." The demand was unrealistic and the law-and-order situation didn't warrant Central rule.

On whether the Congress would support President's rule, he said: "They have to do so or else they will loose their base in the state."

On the Naxalites' demand that their members were killed in the alleged massacre, the chief minister said it would be looked into. But the FIR filed at Garbeta police station would be the basis for the inquiry, he said.

Trinamul-BJP: The Garbeta incident seems to be consolidating the Trinamul-BJP alliance. Mr Asim Ghosh, state BJP president, today spent about two hours at a Trinamul dharna in front of the Gandhi statue in the Maidan. Mr Ghosh said Miss Mamata Banerjee had suggested that leaders of both the parties take part in each other's programmes.

■ More reports on pages 3 and 4

LF plans to 'expose' Trinamul

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Jan. 9. — The Left Front will start a week-long campaign on 19 January to mobilise public opinion against what it calls a fresh spurt in violence by the Trinamul Congress, it was decided at an emergency meeting today.

The meeting was called in view of "the renewed attempt by the Trinamul to plunge the state into lawlessness and violence taking advantage of the disturbances in Midnapore," a Left Front spokesman said.

The timing of last week's violence at Garbeta is intriguing since it happened when peace was returning to Midnapore, the Left Front said.

Mr Jyoti Basu told reporters that for the sake of peace Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee should try to "take action against Miss Mamata Banerjee rather than threaten action against the Left Front government."

Dr Nirmal Maji, convener of the Trinamul medical cell, charged the state government with criminal negligence for taking long time to send a team of forensic experts and cordon off the scene of "carnage" at Midnapore.

The CPI-ML (Liberation) decided to send its team tomorrow to Chhota Anguria village to ascertain the truth about the alleged massacre.

The People's War has claimed that most of the alleged victims were its activists.

Mr Kartick Pal, CPI-ML (Liberation) secretary, said the Trinamul-BJP combine was playing with the lives of poor peasants for political gain.



The faithful offer prayers at the confluence of the Ganga, Jamuna and Saraswati rivers on Tuesday, when the Mahakumbh festival began. — PTI (Report on page 8)

Dacoits strike again at Diamond Harbour

DEBASHIS KONAR
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHAUSA (South 24-Parganas), Jan. 9. — A gang of about 50 armed men struck in this village in the Diamond Harbour area last evening, killed a youth, looted four houses and left four villagers severely injured.

This is the second dacoity in Diamond Harbour in a week. The chief minister had visited Mullickpara where 40 houses were looted last Tuesday.

Chausa is about 10 km from Mullickpara. Most villagers said they fear further attacks. Police have started a murder and a rioting case. Nobody has been arrested.

The villagers said such incidents had been occurring for the last few months and were intensified after they lynched a dacoit, Ismail Sardar, last September.

The Diamond Harbour O-C, Mr Mukul Ray, said Sardar was a member of the gang led by Matal Jamadar and yesterday's attack was also conducted by the same gang. The gang had been operating in the area for the past few months, he said. The village is about 20 km away from the

■ See DACOITY: page 4

There might have been a clash: state Centre wants independent probe in Garbeta

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, Jan. 8. — The Centre tonight advised the West Bengal government to conduct an "independent inquiry" into the Chhota Anguria massacre. Miss Mamata Banerjee's demand for a CBI probe, however, was turned down with the Union home minister pointing to a lack of "concrete information" on the case.

Mr LK Advani said the Centre had picked some discrepancies in the police report, evidence collected so far and the statements by Trinamul Congress leaders. So, Mr Advani said, "we are sending a letter to the state government tonight advising it to conduct an independent inquiry to ascertain the real picture."

Meanwhile, the state government today finally admitted that there might have been a clash in Chhota Anguria on Thursday night. But not a single body had been found. A CID inquiry has been ordered into the incident, and the help of police dogs sought.

The NDA team that visited Chhota Anguria today has confirmed the Trinamul Congress's allegation of a massacre in the village on Thursday night, and hinted that it might recommend President's rule. In Mysore, Mr George Fernandes too supported Miss Banerjee's demand for President's rule. But the BJP's Mr Jana Krishnamurthy lobbed the ball to the Congress. The government would not "think twice" before imposing Article 356 in the state if the Congress backed the demand, he said in Delhi.

But the Congress high command flatly refused to play along. Although it is "concerned about the killings", it will not demand President's

rule. "The Centre has all the Intelligence agencies at its disposal. It should decide what to do rather than try to use our shoulder," the AICC general secretary, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, said at a press conference in Delhi.

He also "clarified" Mr Priya Ranjan Das Munshi's statement demanding President's rule in the state. Mr Azad said Mr Das Munshi had told him that he had only asked for an inquiry by an independent agency like the CBI.

Police in Garbeta have found cartridge cases, bullet heads,

CPM challenge

KOLKATA, Jan. 8. — The CPI-M today dared the NDA government to impose President's Rule in the state and "face the consequences of the autocratic step". In response to the NDA team's observation that West Bengal was a fit case for Article 356, CPI-M state secretary Mr Anil Biswas said the people of the state "will not tolerate such an undemocratic act". — SNS

(Details on page 4)

pipe bombs, remnants of improvised firearms, a blood-stained muffler. A forensic investigation on a sample of the blood-stained earth collected from the site would help establish if it is human blood.

Mr Advani said, "Neither the government nor the Trinamul Congress are sure about the number of people killed. The state government's one-page report sent to the ministry yesterday did not mention any loss of life." Mr Das Munshi, who met him today, with some skulls and bullets he had

picked up at Chhota Anguria, too was confused on the number of casualties.

"We can't direct the CBI to investigate on our own. Either the state makes a request to the Centre or the High Court takes suo motu action directing the state government to hand over the case to the agency," Mr Advani said.

Ministry sources, however, said that after the bitter experience in Bihar, the Centre won't initiate any action of its own."

Asked whether the Trinamul was exaggerating and trying to pressure the Centre to initiate action, Mr Advani would only say: "We are awaiting the report of the NDA team."

The NDA team leader, Mr Vijay Goel, too called for a CBI probe. Police, he was sure, were trying to cover up the crime, and pass it off as arson.

None of the CPI-M members named in the FIR have been arrested. "There were discrepancies in the statements of the Midnapore DM and the SP. It was clear they were trying to suppress the matter," Mr Goel said.

The team members called on Miss Banerjee this evening. Mr Goel told her that a detailed report would be sent to Mr Fernandes in a few days.

He said he had spoken to the few villagers who could be found, and went round Salboni, Chandrakona Road, Garbeta town, Dhadika and Fulberia, where people complained about Marxist terror and police discrimination. Abdul Rahman, whose house was torched on 4 January, fainted while narrating his tale of horror.

The chief minister, he said, was suffering guilt pangs, which had kept him from visiting the village.

■ See PROBE: page 4

9 JAN 2001

Centre's advisory to Bengal on independent probe

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 8. The Centre tonight sent an advisory to the West Bengal Government, suggesting that an independent inquiry be held into the violence that rocked Chotoangra massacre.

The Union Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, told presspersons here that the Centre would like to hear from the State Government why an independent inquiry should not be held.

"Prima facie it appears from the reports and versions of those who have met me that an incident took place and a house was set on fire in the village," he said.

The Home Ministry's advisory pointed out that violent incidents and clashes had taken place in Garbeta but a clear picture had not emerged in absence of any concrete evidence or recovery of bodies. The State Government, in its report to the Home Ministry on Saturday, had admitted that a house had been set on fire but did not make any mention of casualties.

Mr. Advani said, "we will see what can be done under the given framework. We will wait for all reports to come as well as the report of the NDA team sent to the State."

Earlier the Union Home Secretary, Mr. Kamal Pande, had also spoken to the State Chief Secretary, Mr. Manish Gupta, over phone and conveyed the Centre's concern over the incident and clashes.

Senior Congress leader and MP, Mr. Priyaranjan Dasmunshi, met the Home Minister and showed him the exhibits of the alleged "massacre" at Chotoangara. Mr.

CID inquiry ordered

KOLKATA, JAN. 8. Giving in to pressure by the Trinamool Congress-led Opposition, the State Left Front Government today ordered a CID probe into the alleged massacre of 11 people at Garbeta in Midnapore district. Announcing the CID probe, the West Bengal Chief Minister, Mr. Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, told presspersons here that the police had recovered a number of empty cartridges, bullet heads, pipe bombs, remnants of improvised firearms, one bloodstained muffler and found blood-stains on the soil.

He said a clash in the area could not be ruled out and added that sniffer dogs and forensic experts had gone to the village.

The Opposition parties' allegation was being seriously looked into but "none of the 11 persons alleged to be missing/dead could be found either in their houses or elsewhere. It was found during inquiry that all the 11 have been absconding for the last seven months as they were wanted in several criminal cases."

"It was an incident of arson in a house, whose owner and family members are alright and no body has been found as yet", Mr. Bhattacharjee said.

"What I told earlier, I am telling it still now. When Opposition parties are continuing with their allegations, we have to give much importance to the matter." Mr. Bhattacharjee ruled out a CBI inquiry saying "I do not think CBI inquiry is at all required, since I have full trust on my police who have been asked to investigate the whole matter". — PTI

BJP backs Mamata demand: Page 13

Dasmunshi, who had visited the village, said he showed bullet shells, which included some of .303 bore used by the police, to the Home Minister.

He demanded entrusting the inquiry to the CBI and holding an all-party meeting in New Delhi.

'Passports for some Hurriyat leaders'

NEW DELHI, JAN. 8. The Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, today said some of the Hurriyat leaders will be given passports to travel to Pakistan.

He said this even as the Hurri-

yat leaders expressed apprehension that their Pakistan visit on January 15 may not materialise because of the Government's "dilly-dallying tactics."

Mr. Advani told presspersons at North Block tonight that the entire seven-member Hurriyat team would not be given travel documents. "Some of them will be given passports", he said without specifying the number.

Earlier, the Hurriyat chairman, Prof. Abdul Gani Khan, said "I am not sure we will get the passports before January 15." — UNI

Pak. gears up for visit: Page 13

NDA team raps administration on Garbeta

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

MIDNAPORE, Jan. 7. — The NDA fact-finding team, that reached Midnapore this evening, has slammed the state government for its poor handling of investigations into the alleged massacre of Trinamul Congress workers at Garbeta's Chhota Anguria village.

Team leader Mr Vijay Goel said the Buddhadev Bhattacharya government would have to answer why, even three days after the "mayhem", a CID probe had not been ordered and why no sniffer dog was used. The district administration had wasted no time in rubbishing the Trinamul's allegations; then why couldn't they trace the missing persons?

(Meanwhile, The CPI-ML (Liberation) added a new twist to the story, claiming that the alleged victims were PWG supporters. The Liberation state committee president Mr Kartik Pal said CPI-M cadres burnt alive the PWG men for refusing to attend Mr Anil Biswas's rally on 2 January, adds PTI. Mr Pal called for a judicial inquiry into the "killings".)

Mr Goel said the Centre was closely watching the situation in the state, and "if the Left Front does not restrain its cadres right now, the inevitable

Buddha unmoved

PURULIA, Jan. 7. — Chief minister Mr Buddhadev Bhattacharya today said the government was not bothered by the NDA team's visit. "Let them send as many teams as they want. Nothing will come out of it. We are not bothered." The Trinamul-BJP combine was spreading terror in the state, he said. "People will not forgive them." — SNS

■ Photograph, more reports on page 4

will happen," hinting at the possibility of President's Rule. "But it is the last weapon."

About 100 Trinamul and BJP workers — driven out of their village by CPI-M cadres seven months ago — stopped the NDA team just outside Midnapore town, demanding imposition of Article 356 in the state.

Asked if the team would recommend President's Rule, Mr Goel said a report would be submitted to Mr George Fernandes and Mr LK Advani within three days of visiting the village.

The team will visit Chhota Anguria tomorrow. Today, it met the DM, Mr MV Rao and

SP Mr Gourab Dutta.

The administration, Mr Goel said, had failed in its duties. After coming to the state, the team members heard that 18 Trinamul workers had been killed by CPI-M cadres in Garbeta, he said. But police were yet to find the bodies, nor could arrest the guilty.

"We learnt from the state government that one house was burnt. But, who burnt it and why? It is surprising that no sniffer dog was used despite having blood-stained clothes and burnt human bones strewn around the charred house," the BJP MP said.

He alleged that police had not searched the nearby jungles. The IG (western range), Mr JR Bhagat, told **The Statesman** that police were still searching for the bodies.

District BJP president Mr Ramaprasad Tiwari handed over some spent cartridges collected from the charred house at the village to the team members. The team also met 20 Trinamul and BJP workers who had their hands and legs cut off allegedly by CPI-M cadres during the past few months.

Mr Goel was happy that Mr PR Das Munshi had backed the Trinamul's demand for imposition of Article 356 in the state.

THE STATESMAN

8 JAN 2001

PANJA UNABLE TO PROVIDE PROOF

Centre sceptical of Trinamool's claim

By Our Special Correspondent

HD-1
7/1
NEW DELHI, JAN. 6. The Centre finds itself constrained to take a rather sceptical view of the Trinamool Congress' claim that CPI(M) activists had torched more than a dozen people to death in Chotoangra village of West Bengal. The Union Government has not been able to get any confirmation of the deaths.

The Trinamool leader and Minister of State for External Affairs, Mr. Ajit Panja, met Mr. L. K. Advani, Home Minister, and other officials of the Ministry today. Despite repeated queries Mr. Panja was unable to provide any evidence of deaths; all that he managed to do was to cite newspaper reports that 18 Trinamool supporters had been torched to death, allegedly by CPI(M) activists.

The general impression is that Ms. Mamata Banerjee and her supporters have overreacted to unconfirmed reports, creating a laughable situation. The central leadership is trying to cut its losses, and consequently the visit by an NDA team to the troubled spot, scheduled for today, stands deferred.

Even the BJP, which found itself constrained to be seen as standing by Ms. Banerjee, could offer only tepid support to the Trinamool. Commenting on the violence and conflicting reports of casualties, the BJP vice-president, Mr. Jana Krishnamurthy, made a novel formulation. He suggested that the truth must lie somewhere between the Trinamool claim of 18 deaths and the State Government's assertion that there were no deaths.

2.
Centre State
He said it appeared the State Government had lost control over the situation and the party over the cadres. He charged that the law and order machinery had failed to control the situation. The party did not favour imposition of President's rule and preferred that the "people of the State teach a lesson" when the Assembly elections were held this year.

Mr. Krishnamurthy criticised the Congress for not taking into account the situation in the State and said it kept silent just as it had done in Manipur and Bihar earlier on imposition of President's rule.

"If the Congress, which is in opposition is alive to the situation it does not mean helping the govern-

Mamata visits site: Page 7

ment but to maintain law and order. It is its responsibility as a recognised opposition party." He said the party seemed to be engrossed more in its internal elections than anything else.

On whether the BJP felt that it was helpless in bringing West Bengal under Central rule in the wake of the violence, Mr. Krishnamurthy said maybe the Constitutional Review Commission should apply its mind to the matter and suggest some measures giving some contingency powers to the Centre. This was necessary in the wake of the Supreme Court judgment, the Sarkaria Commission recommendations and the fact that the ruling combine did not have a majority in the Rajya Sabha.

THE HINDU

7 JAN 2001

Centre pulls up Manipur for rise in militancy

14-153
37/

NEW DELHI, JAN. 2. The Centre today reprimanded the Manipur Government for escalated militancy and acute financial mismanagement and decided to prepare a comprehensive action plan to put the State administration back on the rails.

The Home Minister, Mr. L.K. Advani, expressed his shock and dismay at the lack of control of the State Government over militancy when a three-member delegation led by the Chief Minister, Mr. Nipamacha Singh, called on him to take stock of the situation in the State.

Mr. Advani told them that there was urgent need to control militancy by taking a series of proactive and coordinated measures. He also referred to reports that some of the militant outfits were getting active support from the political set-up and the administration.

The Home Minister stressed the need for taking action against those aiding and abetting militants from within the administration. Referring to the financial

crisis, Mr. Advani pointed out that the salaries of employees have not been paid for the last two months.

The meeting decided to prepare an action plan to control militancy, restore normality and improve the administrative and financial discipline in the State.

The action plan is likely to be finalised tomorrow when the Chief Minister and his two colleagues — the Deputy Chief Minister, Mr. L. Chandramani Singh, and the Irrigation Minister, Mr. Biren — meet the Home Minister again. The Home Secretary, Mr. Kamal Pandey, and top officials were present at the meeting.

The Manipur Governor, Mr. Ved Marwah, had met Mr. Advani on December 21 amid speculations about imposition of President's rule in the State which has been witnessing political crisis coupled with heightened militancy.

Talks with ULFA

The Centre reiterated its commitment to hold talks with the ULFA provided the militant outfit abjured violence and assisted in

economic development of the State.

A Home Ministry official said the Government had stated that the ULFA should first abjure violence and come to the legal fold before any talks could be held. The Prime Minister, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, had in July 1998 made the Government's stand very clear, the official said. Peace dialogue was on with the Bodo Liberation Tigers and even a ceasefire has been extended with the NSCN. On the reported offer of talks by the ULFA chief, Mr. Paresh Barua, who is reported to be in hiding in Chittagong, to hold "meaningful and scientific" truce talks with the Government without surrendering, the official said "the Government cannot go by whatever somebody said in some interview or as reported by some newspapers".

He declined comment when asked whether the Government would respond if a formal offer for talks came from Mr. Barua. — PTL, UNI

THE HINDU

3 JAN 2001