

Jogi meets PM after courting arrest

By Anita Joshua

9.87 Chhattisgarh

NEW DELHI, OCT. 4. Taking a cue from his Punjab counterpart, the Chhattisgarh Chief Minister, Ajit Jogi, took to the streets here today and courted arrest along with his entire Cabinet, senior party leaders, and Congress MPs and MLAs from the State to press for Central procurement of paddy from his State.

Though his pressure tactics helped Mr. Jogi get the 64-member delegation to meet the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, with the State's demand that the Centre instruct the Food Corporation of India to buy its entire paddy produce of the year, they returned dissatisfied as all they got was an assurance that their request would be examined.

Later briefing mediapersons, Mr. Jogi said that "when the market price is less, it is the responsibility of the Centre to procure the paddy."

Stating that the Prime Minister and the Agriculture Minister had not given a clear answer to the State's request, the Chief Minister said the State was also



The Chhattisgarh Chief Minister, Ajit Jogi, along with Congress leaders Ambika Soni, Motilal Vora and Shyama Charan Shukla, on a dharna at the Tughlak road police station after being arrested while marching towards the Prime Minister's residence in New Delhi on Friday.

— Photo: Sandeep Saxena

ready to work as an "agent" for the Centre and procure the paddy; provided the Government picked up the bill.

Mr. Jogi's scheduled meeting with the Prime Minister early

this afternoon was preceded by considerable "drama with the 64-member delegation being detained when they insisted on proceeding towards 7 Race Course Road despite permis-

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sion being granted only to the Chief Minister and a few others."

The contingent led by Mr. Jogi included the AICC general secretaries, Motilal Vora and Ambika Soni, seven Congress MPs, 28 Chhattisgarh Ministers, and 26 party MLAs from the State.

The delegation was detained for violating prohibitory orders when an hour ahead of the scheduled meeting, it began marching towards the Prime Minister's residence from Chhattisgarh Bhawan on Sardar Patel Marg. Prior to marching towards the Prime Minister's residence with his Cabinet and others in tow, the Chief Minister met the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi.

While Chhattisgarh had also demanded an increase in the procurement price of paddy, Mr. Jogi's contention is that even at the existing price of Rs. 550 a tonne, the Centre should buy the entire produce of the State as it had suffered a loss of Rs. 423 crores on this count last year.

Charge sheet filed against Vaiko, at last

By R.K. Radhakrishnan

CHENNAI, DEC. 30. The 'Q' Branch CID today filed a charge sheet against the MDMK general secretary, Vaiko, 172 days after he had been remanded to custody under the Prevention of Terrorism Act, for an alleged pro-LTTE speech he made at Tirunamgalam near Madurai. Eight other party leaders, Veera Ilavarasan, Bhoominathan, Madurai Ganesan, Alagu Sundaram, P.S. Manian, Pulavar Sivanthiappan, Ganesamurthy and Nagarajan, who were arrested earlier, were also named in the charge sheet.

The 'Q' Branch seeks to prosecute them under Sections 21 (2) (arranging, managing or assisting in arranging or managing a meeting with the knowledge that is for supporting a terrorist organisation and furthering its activities, or that it is to be addressed by a person who belongs or professes to belong to a terrorist organisation) and 21(3) (addressing a meeting for encouraging support for a terrorist organisation or to further its activities) of the POTA. (Mr. Vaiko has challenged Section 21 of the POTA in the Supreme Court, saying it is violative of Article 19 (freedom of speech)



The MDMK general secretary, Vaiko, who was produced in the POTA special court at Poonamallee, on Monday. —

Photo: K.V. Srinivasan

and Article 21 (right to life and liberty) of the Constitution.)

The 518-page charge sheet details Mr. Vaiko's open support to the LTTE since

1992, cites 115 witnesses and 154 statements of witnesses, and lists 106 documents, 43 individual exhibits and 23 material objects.

L. Rajendran, special judge for POTA cases, said he would need some time to go through the voluminous charge sheet. He could pass orders on the charge sheet by evening, but counsel for Mr. Vaiko, Devadas, said the court could post the case to another date. At this, Mr. Rajendran said that as Mr. Vaiko had to attend a case in another court tomorrow, he was posting it to January 2.

Later, talking to newsmen, Mr. Vaiko said the signature campaign launched by the party, condemning his arrest, evoked an overwhelming response. The MDMK was ascertaining whether the BJP State general secretary, H. Raja, had made a statement that the party would not sign the memorandum. If this constituted the official view of the State unit, despite the national leaders condemning his arrest under the POTA, the MDMK leadership would meet to decide on the future course, said Mr. Vaiko. Asked whether the DMK "model of snapping ties" with the State BJP was an option, he said he would not like to elaborate.

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THE HINDU

Anti-conversion Bill passed in T.N.

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, OCT. 31. Despite strong opposition, the controversial Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Bill was today passed by the Tamil Nadu Assembly with the AIADMK and the BJP outvoting the combined opposition of the DMK, the Congress, the Pattali Makkal Katchi and the Left parties.

Although the Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, maintained that the Bill was only intended to prevent forcible conversions, her arguments in the course of the three-hour debate were against conversion itself. "Conversions create resentment among several sections and also inflame religious passions, leading to communal clashes."

Invoking Mahatma Gandhi, Ms. Jayalalithaa sought to justify a ban on all conversions. Gandhiji, she said, had stated that conversions were harmful and that if he had the power to legislate, he would have stopped all proselytising activities. She claimed that conversions only led to the isolation of the converted.

Also, casteist feelings remained even after conversion.

At the end of the heated debate, the Opposition parties pressed for a division of votes, causing embarrassment to the minority members of the ruling party and its ally, the breakaway Tamil Maanila Congress (TMC) group. However, the Opposi-

tion lost the battle by 140 votes to 73.

Ms. Jayalalithaa, while claiming that the Bill was meant to prevent exploitation of the depressed classes, insisted that the ruling AIADMK would not move away from its Dravidian moorings.

In one of the fiercest and lengthiest debates in the Assembly yet, the Opposition members sparred with the Treasury benches, insisting that the Bill would create communal disharmony. Soon after the Congress floor leader, S.R. Balasubramaniam, moved the disapproval motion against the ordinance on forcible conversions, the DMK whip, E. Pugazhendhi, asked the Chief Minister to name the "anti-socials and vested interests trying to exploit the depressed classes" as mentioned in the explanatory note to the Bill. As the Bill banned conversions through the grant of "material benefits either monetary or otherwise", even the reservation and other benefits offered by the State Government to the Dalits, which ensured their continuance in Hinduism, could be construed as illegal and Ministers could be proceeded against.

When Anwar Rhazza (AIADMK) pointed out that similar laws existed in the Congress-ruled Madhya Pradesh as well, the Congress and the Treasury benches were locked in a heated wrangle. While Mr. Balasubramaniam retorted that not a single case had been filed under the law in Mad-

hya Pradesh, Ms. Jayalalithaa asked why the Congress regime had not repealed the Act yet.

The Congress member, K. Jayakumar, charged that the AIADMK regime's intention was only to "toe the Hindutva line and protect a particular community". By fixing a higher penalty for converting the Scheduled Castes and the Scheduled Tribes, the legislation demeaned the Dalit community, the CPI MLA, G. Palanichamy, alleged. But Ms. Jayalalithaa insisted that a higher penalty had been fixed only because the Dalits were a "vulnerable section".

When the CPI (M) woman member, Balabarathi, who mounted a severe attack on the Bill, referred to the inflammatory remarks made by Hindu outfit leaders in Madurai recently, the Speaker, K. Kalimuthu, expunged her remarks on the ground that it would affect communal harmony.

The Bill also triggered a face-off between the DMK and the BJP — both constituents of the NDA Government at the Centre — when the BJP member, H. Raja, criticised the perceived anti-Hindu remarks made recently by the DMK president, M. Karunanidhi.

The Assembly also adopted a Bill banning the ritual of burying drugged children alive and retrieving them a minute later to propitiate deities, practised in southern parts of the State.

10,000 Dalits will embrace Buddhism in Tamil Nadu

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TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: Even as the Tamil Nadu government's ordinance on religious conversions continues to be in force, about 10,000 Hindu Dalits will convert to Buddhism on Ambedkar's death anniversary on December 6, according to a group of Dalit outfits opposed to the state government's anti-conversion ordinance.

According to the group, people have the right to convert to a religion of their choice. The Tamil Nadu Dalit Lawyers' Forum and the Human Rights Forum for Dalit Liberation, which is preparing the ground for the mass conversion, have threatened to go ahead and test the controversial ordinance.

According to the activists, Dalits are being subjected to

inhuman treatment in Tamil Nadu.

Meanwhile, several groups have joined them and if their statements are believed at face value, then more than two crore Hindus would convert to other religions.

The ire, apparently stems from the AIADMK government's ordinance on religious conversions.

Dalit Panthers of India (DPI) has said that more than 25,000 of their partymen would embrace Christianity if the ordinance was not revoked. Their leader, Selvam said that the conversion would happen "voluntarily". Apparently because, if it is thrust upon, then the provisions of the controversial ordinance would get pressed which would entail a jail term of three years.

Jayalalithaa justifies ordinance on conversion

By J. Venkatesan

NEW DELHI, OCT. 18. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, today justified the promulgation of an ordinance banning forceful conversions stating that it was done in the interest of the State. Talking to reporters at the conclusion of the Chief Ministers' conference on fiscal reforms, she said, the aim was to prevent conversions by inducement.

Asked what was the sudden need for the ordinance, Ms. Jayalalithaa said that "what we have done is in the interest of the State. People were forced to convert through fraudulent means and inducements and offered Rs. 2,000 to Rs. 5,000 exploiting their dire poverty. They were doing so without knowing the consequences and the Government had to intervene to prevent this."

Asked whether her move was aimed at coming closer to the BJP at the Centre, she said: "It is a loaded question and totally irrelevant." She did not make any request to the Prime Minister on the Cauvery issue.

Asked about the CMs' conference, she said, "in my view, fiscal reforms and rapid development should go together." Most of the Chief Ministers were in broad agreement with

her viewpoint on many issues.

Regarding implementation of the revised pay scales and benefits to judicial officers as directed by the Supreme Court, Ms. Jayalalithaa said, "the States are not in a position to bear this burden. When the States are

trying to cut back even on the existing rates of compensation, it is impossible to entertain this new burden.

The Centre has to take the lead in resolving this impasse and take up the issue with the Supreme Court."

Christian groups to observe 'prayer day'

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, OCT. 18. The Tamil Nadu ordinance to check forced conversions had its echo in Andhra Pradesh today. In a rare show of unity, Christian groups and organisations, belonging to both the Catholic and the Protestant sects, came together to fight the ordinance.

A hectic campaign is on by these groups to mobilise the Christian public for participation in demonstrations planned at the Tamil Nadu Secretariat and the Assembly at Chennai on October 24. All churches in Andhra Pradesh, Catholic and Protestant, will observe Sunday (October 20) as "prayer day" for resolving the issue, said Jatti A. Oliver, chairman of the joint commission of the Andhra Pradesh Council of Churches and the A.P. Catholic Bishops' Council after a meeting of the highest policy-making bodies of the two sects here today. The meeting demanded withdrawal of the "draconian law", describing it as a blatant intrusion by the State into personal domain and an attempt to intimidate dalits and the poor who were struggling to free themselves from the caste system and its ill-effects.

As part of the agitation, a number of organisations, including the All-India Christian Council, have sent telegrams and letters to the Tamil Nadu Governor, P. S. Ramamohan Rao, demanding repeal of the ordinance.

Dubious courtship

Jayalalitha tries fundamentalist approach

Think of any autocratic measure, and it will find favour with Jayalalitha; she can even cook up one herself. The latest Ordinance by her government, passed to curry favour with the ruling BJP dispensation at the Centre, belongs to the latter category. The ordinance is loosely phrased and can be used to persecute anybody associated with religious conversions. According to the ordinance, conversion through "force, allurement or fraud" will be subjected to draconian punishment, up to four years in prison and a fine of Rs 1 lakh. The formulation is itself fraudulent, as allurement or fraud in context is extremely subjective — how can administrations and courts pronounce on what is "fraud" in a theological sense, unless this is the first move towards a theocratic state? For upholders of a particular religion, any case of conversion away from it will appear vitiated by allurement or fraud rather than what it may well be, an exercise of one's personal choice. Since what is at issue is mostly the conversion of Dalits to Christianity, Islam or Buddhism, if a destitute Dalit should choose to better his material conditions of existence and free himself from the discrimination and hostility he often encounters in the Hindu fold by converting, does that count as "allurement"? Isn't this the modern world, where we are all supposed to try to improve our existence? Doubly insulting is the provision which increases the penalty for those converting women of scheduled castes. Are these categories of human beings and castes deemed to be of feeble mind, less able to decide their religious affiliation and more in need of "protection"? That surely goes against another constitutional guarantee, that of equality of all citizens before the law.

It may be more interesting to speculate on reasons for Jayalalitha's timing. Having ditched the NDA before, she is now desperate for a patch-up, and is sending a series of signals designed to warm the cockles of Hindutva hearts, a recent one being when she slammed Sonia Gandhi's foreign origins. She pointedly refused to join other chief ministers in condemning Narendra Modi for sponsoring riots in Gujarat. Her government has also started serving midday meals to temple devotees, which violates the secularism enshrined in the Constitution. It could also, incidentally, constitute "allurement" — if the logic of the ordinance is followed, she ought to be put away herself. That, of course, will not happen — the yoke of the ordinance will fall exclusively on minorities, which proves how faulty it is. There ought to be a rash of court cases against the ordinance whose thrust is against Article 25 of the constitution guaranteeing freedom of religion. And the NDA must make up its mind whether it will allow itself to be fooled once again by Jayalalitha's transparent charms.



The Karnataka Chief Minister, S.M. Krishna, leading a 'padayatra' to the KRS Reservoir from Bangalore on Monday to demonstrate his solidarity with the agitating farmers. — Photo: Sampath Kumar G.P.

T.N. calls general strike

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, OCT. 7. In a show of solidarity on the Cauvery issue, an all-party meeting here today decided to observe a dawn-to-dusk general strike on Wednesday protesting the refusal of the Karnataka Government to release water as per the directives of the Supreme Court and the Cauvery River Authority.

The Chief Minister, Jayalithaa, told reporters that all the parties had unanimously endorsed the strike call. Although the main Opposition party, the DMK, boycotted the meeting, it announced support for the strike call.

Ms. Jayalithaa accused the Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, and the Union Law Minister, J. Na Krishnamurthy, of abdicating the Centre's responsibility to ensure Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu. Although the State Government knew the general strike would not yield water, the

meeting wanted to impress upon the Centre and the Karnataka Government that Tamil Nadu was united on the issue.

"We expected to get justice from the Supreme Court," she said. While the Union Law Minister had stated that it was for the two States to resolve the issue, and that the Centre could not intervene, the Prime Minister had remarked that the issue was before the Supreme Court. The Centre had thus washed its hands of the matter.

The State Government would be filing the second contempt petition in the Supreme Court tomorrow. The Centre should issue directives to the Karnataka Government under Articles 256 and 365, and if Karnataka failed to comply, the Krishna Government should be dismissed, she said. Karnataka's defiance of Constitutional authorities would lead to Constitutional anarchy in the country, she added.

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THE HINDU

Tamil Nadu bans religious conversions

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TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: The state government on Saturday night promulgated an ordinance banning religious conversions by "force, allurements or fraudulent means". Tamil Nadu is the first state to have such an order in place.

"No person shall convert or attempt to convert either directly or otherwise any person from one religion to another either by use of force or by allurements or by any fraudulent means," the Tamil Nadu Prohibition of Forcible Conversion of Religion Ordinance, issued by governor P.S. Ramamohan Rao, said.

Just a month ago, the conversion of Harijans to Christianity in Madurai had made the headlines. Although it was claimed to be a voluntary exercise, there were reports of force and exploitation.

The state government said the ordinance had been promulgated to deter people from exploiting those from depressed classes. "It may also be useful in nipping in the bud the attempts of religious fundamentalists and subversive forces to create communal tension under the garb of conversion," the notification said. It also entailed that conversions should be reported to district magistrates.

Those violating the ordinance will be imprisoned for up to three years and fined up to Rs 50,000. The jail term could extend to five years and the fine to Rs 1 lakh if the convert happened to be a minor, a woman or a member of an SC/ST.

Hailing the ordinance, Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi has called for a similar law covering the entire country. "This law will help foster peace, harmony and unity in our society," he said.

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PRO-LTTE SPEECH TAPES SEIZED

Vaiko's premises raided

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Statesman News Service

CHENNAI/NEW DELHI, Aug. 8. — Police today searched the premises of MDMK leader Mr Vaiko and eight other party workers. They were arrested last month under Pota for speaking in support of the LTTE at a rally in Thirumangalam on 29 June.

Police have reportedly sought permission to search the New Delhi house of Mr Vaiko, who is a Rajya Sabha member and whose party is an NDA partner. A Tamil Nadu police team visited the Lodhi Garden house this evening.

Mr Vaiko's personal secretary, Mr AS Pandya, said in Delhi: "We've a tip-off that a Tamil Nadu police team left Chennai for New Delhi in the evening. They're likely to conduct a raid here at 6 a.m. tomorrow."

The searches were conducted by the 'Q' branch police, which handles cases related to extremist outfits.

Police raided Mr Vaiko's houses in the city and his native Kalingapatti village in Tirunelveli district around 7 a.m. Among the premises raided were the MDMK headquarters in the city and the party's office in Sivakasi.

Mr Vaiko's lawyers said police had seized a copy of the speech made by the leader in Geneva recently. A few video- and audio-

cassettes containing Mr Vaiko's speeches and a few pamphlets on the LTTE movement, too, were confiscated. Partymen at the headquarters protested when police insisted on seizing some papers relating to income tax returns. A police officer said: "Whatever has been seized will be placed before the Pota court."

Mr Vaiko's friend and lawyer, Mr RG James, said though the state police team was reportedly carrying a search warrant, it wouldn't be allowed to search the premises unless it's accompanied by Delhi Police. "As far as we know, the local police haven't been informed. We know how to deal with Jayalalitha's puppets."

An officer said Delhi Police had no information about any proposed raid by TN police at the Lodhi Garden house.

BJP reaction: The BJP today said there was no reason to raid places Mr Vaiko had visited. The government's action shouldn't look like "political vendetta", party spokesman Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra said. The BJP and NDA are "fully with Mr Vaiko", he said.

Plea: Mr Vaiko, lodged in Vellore prison, has filed a petition in Madras High Court, seeking order to TN police to allow him to go to Delhi to take part in the vice-presidential election scheduled on Monday, PTI adds.

MINISTERIAL IMPROPRIETY

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MS. JAYALALITHAA'S ANTI-LTTE drive — which has resulted in a slew of arrests under POTA over the last three weeks — has assumed a new significant dimension. Her demand that the MDMK leader, M. Kannappan, be dropped from the Union Council of Ministers transports the support-for-LTTE issue squarely into the lap of the Vajpayee Government. In her letter to the Prime Minister, Ms. Jayalalithaa makes two points simply and forcefully. First, that Mr. Vajpayee's Minister of State for Non-Conventional Energy is an open supporter of the LTTE, a banned organisation. Second, that his speeches at various public meetings in recent times constitute an offence under Section 21 of POTA, the very provision which has been invoked to arrest other LTTE sympathisers such as the MDMK leader Vaiko, and the Tamil Nationalist Movement leader, P. Nedumaran.

In a strictly formal sense, Ms. Jayalalithaa's demand for the ouster of Mr. Kannappan may not have a legal or constitutional basis. But the grounds on which such a demand is raised cannot be dismissed lightly. Union Ministers are expected to lay down and enforce the law. They are not expected to express their support or sympathy for organisations that have been specifically outlawed, particularly one as dangerous and odious as the LTTE. Mr. Kannappan appears to have missed this point completely when he clarified that his and his party's support for the LTTE is only in the nature of "moral support". As a Union Minister, he ought to have understood that any kind of support for a banned organisation is not permissible. Moreover, that he cannot allow his ideology (warped as it is on issues such as the LTTE and Tamil nationalism) to take precedence over the law of the land.

The basic truth of this completely overrides and remains unaffected by the other issues which Ms. Jayalalithaa's anti-LTTE drive has raised. These include reservations about the use of POTA — a

piece of legislation which undoubtedly contains a number of harsh provisions which are liable to misuse. They also include opposition allegations about the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's motives for launching such a high-profile anti-LTTE drive — the point here being that actions deserve to be judged on their merit, not examined purely in terms of possible motive. Mr. Vajpayee's Government may choose to ignore Ms. Jayalalithaa's misgiving, but the chances are that this is not the last it will be hearing on this issue. One part of the Tamil Nadu's Chief Minister's charge against Mr. Kannappan is explicit and clear-cut (namely, that he has allegedly committed an offence under POTA for making specific utterances) and therefore is unlikely to be forgotten or overlooked.

But there is a larger issue here — one that goes beyond the issue of letters, arrests, chargesheets, allegations and counter-allegations. One facet of this is the extremely disturbing fact that the LTTE — the organisation which carried out Rajiv Gandhi's assassination and which continues to pose a subversive threat — continues to enjoy the support of some political parties within Tamil Nadu. The other — and arguably just as important aspect — is the legitimacy which organisations which blatantly support the LTTE have come to enjoy within the political mainstream. The fact that parties such as the MDMK and the PMK have been able to strike political alliances and be accommodated cosily into coalition Governments is a reflection on the narrow and self-serving concerns of almost every section of the political class. As for the Vajpayee Government, it has been less than serious — despite its attempt to project a tough face against certain kinds of terrorism — about containing the LTTE and its influence within India. If the recent happenings in Tamil Nadu set off a debate about how the LTTE and its sympathisers should be isolated and contained, then they would have served a very worthwhile purpose indeed.

TUESDAY, JULY 23, 2002

DANGEROUS AND DESTRUCTIVE

THE DEMAND FOR the bifurcation of Tamil Nadu mooted by the PMK, with the Vanniyar-dominated districts making up a new State, is patently provocative and incendiary. For all its seeming innocuousness, the proposition as canvassed by the casteist party is not just totally unwarranted but extremely dangerous on counts more than one. To begin with, such demands for a bifurcation/trifurcation of States have almost invariably been impelled by narrow partisan and divisive considerations although they are sought to be justified on the basis of presumed grievances such as the neglect of development needs and denial of a 'fair' share in political power, employment opportunities and so on. In fact, as a general rule, the experience of smaller States has hardly been such as to vindicate the 'regional development' line of argument trotted out for bifurcation. If anything, the negative fallout in terms of fuelling fissiparous tendencies has been so overwhelming that the national need is for a reversing of the process. Viewed in this perspective, the recent creation of Chhattisgarh, Uttaranchal and Jharkhand was undoubtedly ill-advised and regressive.

What makes the PMK's demand much more reprehensible than, for instance, the one for Telengana (Andhra Pradesh) — or, for that matter, the three newly-formed States (cited by the PMK supremo, S. Ramadoss, in support of his case) — is the perniciously divisive character of its defining criterion, namely 'caste'. Already, the socio-political class of Tamil Nadu has to contend with 'active' tectonic fault lines of caste, thanks to the cynical game played by the rival caste leaders — the likes of Dr. Ramadoss — in the name of political mobilisation and the aggressively provocative ways they adopted to gain their ends. One dreads to visualise the damage potential of a caste-based bifurcation of the State, the repercussions of which will certainly not be confined to Tamil Nadu but extend to other parts of the country as well.

Lending a vicious and sinister dimension to the

PMK's call for bifurcation is, above all, the immediate political context in which it has been made. It has to be seen against the backdrop of the party's obsessive support to the cause of 'Tamil Eelam' and unconcealed admiration for the outlawed LTTE and its supremo, Velupillai Prabhakaran, a proclaimed offender in the Rajiv Gandhi assassination case. In the face of the Jayalalithaa Government's recent crackdown on pro-LTTE elements, the high point of which was the arrest of the MDMK leader, Vaiko, under the special anti-terror law (POTA), Dr. Ramadoss struck a note of defiance by reiterating his pro-Eelam stance and sympathies for the LTTE. Clearly discernible is a concerted effort by the pro-LTTE political elements and the various extremist Tamil chauvinist and subnationalist groups (most of them draw inspiration and encouragement from the LTTE) to join forces and redraw their strategy for carrying on their insidious campaign by subtle and not-so-subtle means. A case in point is the Chennai conclave of the 'World Tamil Federation' — the ostensible objective of which is to "restore" the linguistic, cultural and ethnic glory of the Tamils and ultimately to "retrieve" the land of Tamils — where the forum was used for singing paens to the LTTE and Mr. Prabhakaran. And this, in spite of a specific injunction by the High Court.

Obviously a ploy cast in this overall mould, the 'bifurcation' demand of the PMK is nothing but a scarcely veiled attempt to promote the Tamil separatist campaign, with Mr. Prabhakaran as the icon, and it has therefore to be summarily rejected by every segment of political opinion. More important, however, is that the ruling establishment at the Centre view its coalition partners, the MDMK and the PMK, for what they really are and be more aware of their sinister 'ideological' planks — as evidenced by their unabashed and obdurately overt pro-LTTE stance. The Vajpayee administration will have to take a categorical stand against this clear threat to national unity.

THE HINDU

23 JUL 2002

Speakers hail LTTE at Tamil meet

HT Correspondent
Chennai, July 21

JAYALALITHAA MAY have to file a slew of Pota cases after a two-day conference of the World Tamil Confederation turned out to be a forum for pro-LTTE delegates to drum up covert and overt support for the LTTE and its leader V Prabhakaran.

Contrary to the assurance given to the Madras High Court, the organisers closed their eyes to speakers who hailed the LTTE and Prabhakaran as the only saviours of Sri Lankan Tamils. As the conference came to an end this evening, a section of the audience became defiant and shouted: "Aadhirippom, aadhirippom, puligalai aadhirippom (We'll support the Tigers)".

The crowd apparently got inspired by the speech of P Nedumaran, leader of the Tamil Nationalist Movement, who declared he had no qualms in ex-

pressing his support to the LTTE and the Tamil cause.

"I have been supporting the LTTE for the past 20 years. There is no secrecy about that. My main concern is the welfare of the Tamils. And this conference was not organised to talk only about the LTTE."

Unlike Saturday when a Sri Lankan Tamil minister wanted Tamil Nadu to produce "a 1,000 Vaikos to take up the Kelam cause", today's speeches were less inflammatory though there were many indirect laudatory references to the LTTE, Prabhakaran and Vaiko. Some poets played around with Tamil words to express their support for the LTTE's struggle for a Tamil homeland and praised Prabhakaran as "Vellum Pillai" which meant the triumphant son of Tamil.

However, one Tamil leader — PMK founder Dr Ramadoss — chose to play it safe by skipping the meeting though he was to



J Jayalithaa
Time to take action

deliver the concluding speech.

A senior police officer said they had videotaped all the speeches and the crowd reaction and would take appropriate action based on the evidence.

Ramadoss division plan annoys Jaya

HT Correspondent
Chennai, July 21

PMK LEADER Dr S Ramadoss' sudden demand for bifurcation of Tamil Nadu has infuriated Chief Minister Jayalithaa who called it "dangerous and yet another example of his divisive and separatist politics", which her party and Government would resist.

She said the PMK leader had come up with the new proposal because a larger agenda — to carve out a pan-Tamil nation by seceding from India and joining hands with the Eelam — mullied by him, DMK president M Karunanidhi and MDMK Chief Vaiko had been foiled

by the firm steps taken by her Government.

Dr Ramadoss had now proposed the division of the State on caste lines since his earlier plan had not taken off, she said. "This only shows how casteist Ramadoss is. Those who believe in India's unity and integrity should strongly condemn his separatist speech," she added.

Ramadoss's proposal had been debunked by other major parties like the Congress, the CPM and the CPI as well. He had sought the creation of a State consisting of the northern districts of Tamil Nadu where the Vanniyaars formed the single largest caste block.

Pota action against Vaiko not justified, says George

By Swati Das
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: The Tamil Nadu government's action under Pota against MDMK chief Vaiko for his pro-LTTE speech was not justified, defence minister and National Democratic Alliance convenor George Fernandes said on Friday.

Mr Fernandes, who met Mr Vaiko at the Vellore Central Prison on Friday, said, "Pota was enacted to deal with terrorism in our country. What has happened (in Vaiko's case) does not come within the ambit of Pota. He should not have been imprisoned."

The defence minister said he had listened to a tape of Mr Vaiko's speech supporting the LTTE on June 29 at Thirumangalam, and found "nothing in it to warrant his arrest under Pota".

Mr Fernandes said the Centre had no proposal to intervene in securing Mr Vaiko's release. "He is a revolutionary. He does not need our support," said Mr Fernandes, a one-time supporter of the

LTTE's fight for the Tamil cause and known to have attended some significant conferences organised by the supporters of the banned group in India. Mr Fernandes, who is the first NDA leader and Union minister to meet Mr Vaiko after his arrest, also ruled out any action by the Centre against the state government.

Later in the day, he cancelled his appointments with Tamil Nadu chief minister J. Jayalalithaa and former chief minister and DMK chief M. Karunanidhi. Ms Jayalalithaa told mediapersons that Mr Fernandes had cancelled the appointment saying that he had received urgent summons from the Prime Minister.

The MDMK has been a loyal partner of the NDA and Mr Vaiko was one of the supporters of the Pota bill. However, after Mr Vaiko was arrested and the home ministry received the video clipping of the speech made by him, the Centre remained silent on the issue. Not willing to embarrass the Centre further, Mr Vaiko, too, had decided to fight the battle on his own.

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

BJP, Cong. dilemma over Vaiko arrest

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 12. The dilemma before the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Congress is that while one was the author of the Prevention of Terrorism Act but has described the MDMK leader, Vaiko's arrest under it as "undesirable and unjustified", the other opposed the legislation but is clearly not unhappy that the pro-LTTE leader has been put behind the bars.

And a new twist to the story has been given by the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, declaring today her intention to try and ban the party itself.

"The arrest has sent a wrong signal about the very purpose of the legislation," the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, said but added cautiously that "law will take its own course". The BJP spokesperson, Arun Jaitley, however, added that the State Govern-

ment had "no powers to ban a political party".

The BJP denied that it had been more "active" when the DMK leaders had been arrested last year, pointing out that at that time the situation was different, the Centre had to act, as the Jayalalithaa government had arrested two Central Ministers.

The Congress was a little wary, not wanting to comment on "wire reports" that an attempt was being made to ban the MDMK. The party spokesperson, Anand Sharma, said that as far as the principle was concerned every organisation, including political parties, had to function within the ambit of the Constitution and the law of the country.

The BJP, on the other hand, is of the view that banning political parties was itself a dangerous thing. After all, in the system of parliamentary democracy the attempt is al-

ways to bring even fringe groups within the ambit of the legitimate political process. This happened in the case of the Akalis (despite the illegal Anandpur resolution), this was also true of some naxalite groups. As far as the Election Commission is concerned, the BJP view is that the Commission could not be allowed to function as an ideological ombudsman. While taking different positions, there is agreement between the BJP and the Congress on one point — whether POTA was applicable to Mr. Vaiko and his partymen would depend on the "evidence" against them. The BJP, though, is inclined to think that by this action the AIADMK has already forced the MDMK to give a written explanation on its support to the LTTE, saying it is limited to supporting the cause of Sri Lankan Tamils. That is a political victory for the AIADMK, and the BJP view is that matters should have been left there.

We'll take steps to ban MDMK, says Jayalalithaa

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, JULY 12. Accusing the MDMK of continuing to proclaim support for the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, today announced that the State Government would take necessary steps to ban the party.

"I think the MDMK deserves to be banned because in their executive committee meeting, they have passed a resolution that the very purpose of the existence of the party, the very purpose of their participation in the Central Government is only in order to support the Tamils in Eelam. It shows they are not here to do anything for India or for Tamil Nadu or for Tamils in India," she told reporters.

"When they are so vocal in their support for a banned organisation, and when they go on obstinately proclaiming that they will not change their stand, and that they will continue to support the LTTE, I think that it is something very dangerous which cannot be tolerated. We are going to initiate steps to

MDMK Minister throws a challenge

COIMBATORE, JULY 12. The MDMK treasurer and Union Minister of State for Non-Conventional Energy Sources, M. Kannappan, today dared the Tamil Nadu Government to ban his party. "We have done nothing to warrant such action", he said, adding that the State had no powers to ban a political party.

have the MDMK banned," she said.

Asked if the State Government would demand the resignation of the MDMK Ministers from the Centre, she said she could not give a "blow by blow" account "like a cricket commentary" of what her Government intended to do on the Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam.

To a question whether the State would ban the MDMK under its own laws, she said the State could not ban an organisation throughout the country. The State Government would take steps as and when necessary. "I cannot give statements just in order to provide sensational headlines for you."

Denying that the AIADMK Government had any "political motive" in arresting Mr. Vaiko, she said she did not consider Mr. Vaiko a competitor. "I do not consider Mr. Vaiko as a rival at all. He never has been a competition to me, he never will be," she said. The arrest situation was not of the Government's choosing. "Left to me, I would rather not have taken this action," she added.

Asked why police had sought non-bailable warrants when these were not necessary under POTA, she said they felt that these were necessary.

Asked about the use of POTA against other parties such as the PMK, the DPI and the DK, which are also supportive of the LTTE, she said the statements of the leaders of these outfits were "carefully worded" and did not attract the provisions of POTA. But if they supported the LTTE openly in the manner of Mr. Vaiko, the Government would take action against them too.

Asked about the BJP's description of the arrest as "unwarranted", Ms. Jayalalithaa said the statement of the BJP spokesman, Arun Jaitley, was made out of "political compulsions." The arrest of Mr. Vaiko would not give "new strength" to Tamil nationalist groups. The Government would put down the activities of such groups with an "iron hand."

If people like Mr. Vaiko, who glorified a terrorist and criminal like Prabhakaran, were allowed to make statements in support of the LTTE, it would corrupt the mind of a whole generation. The LTTE was a terrorist organisation and its leader, Prabhakaran, was a proclaimed offender in the Rajiv assassination case.

Answering a question, she said she was not involved in any way in the Sri Lankan peace process, but she had warned the Sri Lankan Prime Minister, Ranil Wickremesinghe, in her capacity as a good friend that the LTTE was "unreliable." Groups such as the TNLA and the TNRF gained a new life because of the support of the LTTE, which had links with the ULFA and the PWG.

Court allows Vaiko to vote

By Our Staff Reporter

CHENNAI, JULY 12. The Madras High Court has directed the State authorities to enable the MDMK general secretary, Vaiko, arrested under the POTA and lodged in the Vellore Central Prison, to cast his vote at Chennai in the Presidential election to be held on July 15.

Vaiko jailed, loyalists hail LTTE

Statesman News Service

CHENNAI, July 12. — Mr Vaiko was shifted to the Vellore central jail today even as protests by his partymen against his arrest continued. Some MDMK supporters were seen holding posters of LTTE leader V Pirabhakaran and raising slogans in his favour outside the Chennai collectorate this morning.

They were immediately bundled into police vans and whisked away. Last night, six MDMK workers were arrested for burning the effigy of Tamil Nadu chief minister Miss Jayalalitha in Madurai. Throughout the day, police rounded up around 7,000 partymen, including about 80 women, from all over the state, for blocking roads and assembling in front of taluk and district headquarters to begin their agitation. In Pondicherry, 100 MDMK supporters were taken into custody but freed later.

More than 2,500 MDMK loyalists were picked up

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from Tirunelveli, Mr Vaiko's home district, Coimbatore, Erode and Virudhunagar. Partymen tried to block roads in Sivakasi, Mr Vaiko's constituency.

Calling it preventive arrests, the DGP, Mr BP Nailwal, said all the MDMK volunteers picked up in the state were released.

Mr Vaiko, who was produced before a judicial magistrate of Madurai, Mrs Vanitha, at her residence early today, was remanded in judicial custody till 7 August. He was taken to Madurai after he was picked up by the special police team from Thirumangalam at the airport here last evening.

However, anticipating problems from partymen if he was lodged at the Madurai central prison, he was taken to Vellore.

Jaya for ban on MDMK: Miss Jayalalitha has said she will initiate steps to get the MDMK banned.

Another report on page 6

Vaiko held, vows to oust Jaya

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Chennai: MDMK general secretary V. Gopalasamy, popularly known as Vaiko, was arrested here on Thursday evening for his recent speech supporting the Lankan terrorist outfit, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam.

A special police team from Madurai executed the non-bailable arrest warrant against Mr Vaiko as he emerged from the arrival lounge at Meenambakkam airport from Mumbai, where he had stopped over on his return from Chicago in the early hours of Thursday.

Mr Vaiko, who represents the Sivakasi Lok Sabha constituency, became the first member of parliament to be arrested under the prevention of terrorism act (Pota), which he had stoutly supported during its enactment in parliament earlier this year.

His arrest follows a case registered against him under Pota for his speech at an MDMK rally in Thirumangalam on June 29 expressing support for the LTTE. Eight of his party leaders have already been arrested under Pota on similar charges.

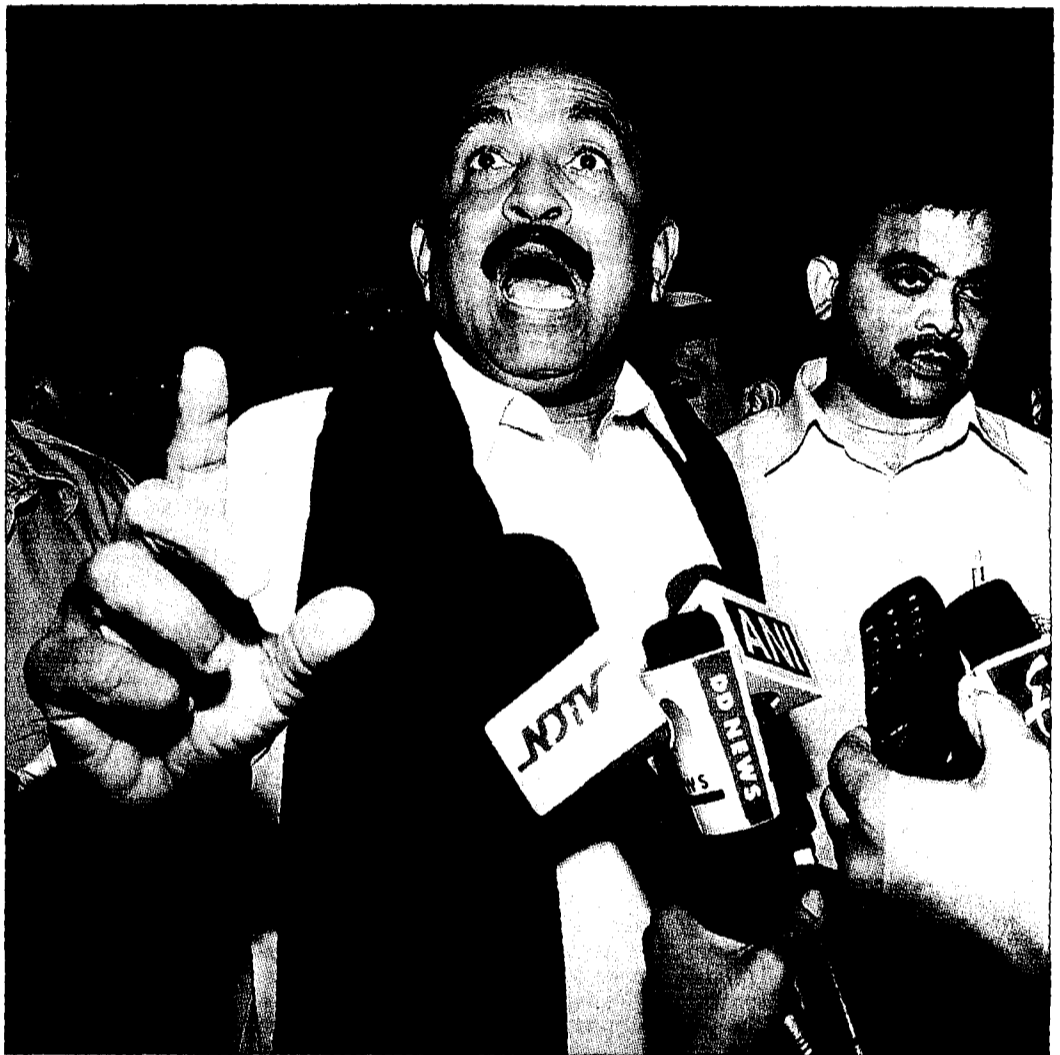
The Jet Airways flight from Mumbai landed in Chennai at 4.20 p.m. after which the MDMK leader, well aware that he would be arrested the minute he stepped out of the airport, took his time to freshen up and meet his family inside the VIP lounge. As soon as he came out of the Kamaraj domestic terminal, he was served the non-bailable warrant by investigating officer DSP Karnan and Madurai rural SP Ayushman Tiwari and taken into custody.

"We will not fear the repression let loose by the fascist Jayalalithaa government. We will fight this fascist regime with the people's force until it is thrown out. If Jayalalithaa really wanted peace in the state, she would not have instigated this. Eight thousand of my people have been arrested," the 59-year-old firebrand BJP ally told the hordes of mediapersons clamouring to get his reaction.

Shouting to be heard above the din of the media, Mr Vaiko said, "When Jayalalithaa was convicted in a corruption case, she instigated her supporters to burn buses...three girls were burnt alive. But we will not disturb the people. We will not disturb the peace. We will not burn buses. We will neither shut down shops nor stone them. We will not seek the Centre's help, instead we will use the people's force."

Hot Pota now served on Chicago-Chennai Express

Hemant Shirodkar



THE LONG ARM OF AMMA: MDMK chief Vaiko talks to the press at Sahar airport in Mumbai early Thursday morning after arriving from Chicago en route to Chennai, where he was arrested by the Jayalalithaa government.

Only a handful of MDMK members turned up to welcome Mr Vaiko at the airport. A solitary party flag could be seen fluttering outside as the MP was escorted into one of the two white police vans. Police sources expect Mr Vaiko to be produced before the seventh judicial magistrate (Madurai) on Friday morning when the court opens.

Earlier on Thursday, at a press conference in Mumbai, Mr Vaiko justified his 'offending' speech, saying no solution to the ethnic Tamil problem in Sri Lanka was possible without a reference to the Tigers.

Expressing solidarity with the suffering of the Tamil people in Sri Lanka, Mr Vaiko said that the

LTTE was the only organisation spearheading their cause. "I am a supporter of the LTTE. I have expressed my views (on the issue) in parliament and I am consistent about it," he said.

"Can you speak of Palestinians without referring to the Palestine Liberation Organisation? Can you speak of Northern Ireland without referring to the Irish Republican Army?" he asked. Similarly, he said, it was not possible to refer to the problem of Eelam Tamils without mentioning the role of the LTTE.

Throughout the world people had resorted to armed struggle for liberation, he replied when asked about the use of violent means by the LTTE. Mr Vaiko also pointed

out that his party did not support violence and was not engaged in violence and underground activities in the state.

Terming the Jayalalithaa government anti-people and not interested in welfare and peace, he said it was bent on destroying civil liberties and strangulating the media.

Earlier on Thursday, all action in Chennai was concentrated around Meenambakkam airport. There was heavy security bandobust within a three km radius as the Swift Action Force lined up along the arterial Grand South Trunk Road.

Police and media personnel dominated the Anna International terminal from 11 a.m.

Vaiko arrested, stands by LTTE

Statesman News Service

CHENNAI, July 11. — The Tamil Nadu government today arrested MDMK leader Mr Vaiko under Pota after he landed at Chennai airport. Mr Vaiko was served the arrest warrant outside the terminal by a police team from Thirumangalam in Madurai, where he had made a pro-LTTE speech on 29 June.

Earlier in the day in Mumbai, anticipating his arrest, a belligerent MDMK chief vowed to take on Tamil Nadu's "fascist" chief minister Miss J Jayalalitha, who, he said, had let loose a "repressive regime" against her political opponents. He said he was "sup-

12/7
porting the LTTE's struggle" in Sri Lanka and was not fomenting violence in Tamil Nadu.

Mr Vaiko will be produced before the judicial magistrate at Thirumangalam tomorrow morning, the state DGP, Mr BP Nailwal, said. He is likely to be remanded in judicial custody for 30 days like his eight other party colleagues and may be lodged in Madurai Central prison.

Mr Vaiko arrived in Mumbai from Chicago at 2.00 a.m. on Thursday and later flew to Chennai in the afternoon.

The *puratchi puyal* (revolutionary storm) — as Mr Vaiko is referred to by his partymen — appeared bewildered as the police

contingent surrounded the terminal as he came out of the Jet Airways craft at 4.30 p.m.. But he regained his composure and talked to his wife, Mrs Renuka Devi, and other family members, for about half-an-hour in the lounge. As he came out of the airport complex, Thirumangalam police served him with the arrest warrant. He was then whisked away to Thirumangalam.

The Marumalarchi Dravid Munnetra Kazaghams chief was allowed to speak to the media briefly before he was taken into custody. Picking up from where he had left in Mumbai, Mr Vaiko said: "The MDMK will not fear the repression let loose by the

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fascist Jayalalitha regime. We will fight it till the end... we will not seek the Centre's assistance. But we will use people's force to throw this fascist regime out of power."

More than 3,000 MDMK partymen were taken into preventive custody from last night while MDMK supporters were flushed out of the airport. RAF and CISF jawans were deployed along with state policemen in and around the terminal. Miss Jayalalitha, however, remained incommunicado.

In Mumbai, the MDMK chief said: "I have always supported the LTTE and even said so in Parliament".

Reports, photograph on page 6

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Cops on toes on Vaiko return-eve

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

Chennai, July 10: Tamil Nadu police are treading with caution on Vaiko's arrest in an effort to avoid a repeat of the Karunanidhi bungle, which drew allegations of human rights violations and left the administration red-faced.

The MDMK leader, an ally of the Vajpayee government, is facing arrest under the Prevention of Terrorism Act for speaking out in support of the LTTE. A non-bailable warrant was issued against him in Madurai late last night.

Eight party activists charged under the Act, including former MP Ganeshamurthy, were arrested last evening and sent to Madurai central prison. They had organised a rally at Thirumangalam in support of the banned militant organisation.

Late tonight, senior leader L. Ganesan and 15 MDMK activists were held in Thanjavur.

But the police are being cautious in the case of Vaiko, who is expected to arrive here tomorrow afternoon from the US.

The city was rife with speculation that a special police team, led by Thirumangalam DSP Karan, might take Vaiko into custody in Mumbai, where the Air-India Chicago-London-Mumbai-Chennai flight is scheduled to land around midnight.

The expectation of a "midnight drama" at Mumbai airport gained ground after Ganesan called upon workers to come to the airport in large numbers to greet Vaiko, raising the spectre of a possible law and order problem that the police would want to avoid.

However, state director-general of police B.P. Nailwal said there was "no possibility" of taking Vaiko in custody in Mumbai. "We have no control over these rumours," he said after a high-level meeting with top officials, including home secretary Naresh Gupta. Tamil Nadu police will have to obtain a "transit warrant" and clearance from civil aviation authorities to arrest Vaiko in Mumbai, before he takes the connecting flight to Chennai. The police may not have the time for such things now.

For strategic reasons, the police are keeping the arrest plan under wraps. Asked about Vaiko's arrest being "imminent" now that a warrant had been issued, the DGP said: "I cannot say anything right now." He parried another query on whether Vaiko would be taken straight to Madurai for remand.

"Should a large crowd turn up at the Chennai airport, we will tackle the crowd and we don't expect any trouble," the officer said, adding that preventive arrests of MDMK workers could begin tonight. Security in the city has already been beefed up.

Ganesan, in a statement from Thanjavur, said Vaiko had not opposed the anti-terror law. "We continue to support that law.... We only oppose wrongly invoking the Act against Vaiko."

The ban on the LTTE existed even before the anti-terror law was enacted, Ganesan said. He pointed out that even the RSS was once an outlawed outfit, but the ban was later lifted. The ban on the LTTE could be similarly revoked, he said. Therefore, to link Vaiko's action to an "offence under the anti-terror Act" was misguided, Ganesan argued.

THE TELEGRAPH

1 JUL 2002

Jaya cracks Pota whip on MDMK

HT Correspondent
Chennai, July 9

The Jayalalithaa Government today arrested six of the eight MDMK functionaries who had been booked under Pota for speaking in support of the LTTE at a public meeting on June 29.

The MDMK leader, Vaiko, who had been booked too, is in Chicago.

An undaunted Vaiko, against whom a magistrate declined to issue a non-bailable warrant, announced that he would return to Chennai as scheduled, on July 11.

In a statement from Chicago, Vaiko asked his party men to maintain calm.

He described the arrests as a "repressive measure" against the Opposition. The MDMK leader said that it was now clear that Jayalalithaa was out to wreak political vendetta and throttle democracy by misusing the Pota.

The arrests of the MDMK members removed any doubt that the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister might go slow in arresting Vaiko.

It is now certain that the MDMK leader will also be put behind bars when he returns here from the United States of America on Thursday afternoon.

After procuring arrest warrants from the judicial magistrate of Thirumangalam late on Monday night, police teams arrested four of the accused at Madurai and one each at Erode and Kariakudi on Tuesday morning.

All the arrested, including former MP A Ganesamurthy, were produced before the Thirumangalam magistrate.

The police are searching for two other accused though MDMK sources said they had not gone underground and were very much present at their homes.



J Jayalalithaa
Unfazed by criticism

Thirumangalam magistrate Venkatachalapathy balked at issuing an arrest warrant against Vaiko on Monday.

Instead, he chose to consult the district sessions judge whether such a move would lead to legal complications as MDMK leader Vaiko is a member of Parliament.

However, the sessions judge advised him that he was well within his rights to issue such a warrant.

Now, an arrest warrant against the firebrand MDMK leader Vaiko is likely to be issued soon.

The accused have been arrested under section 13(1) of Prevention of Unlawful Activities Act, 1967, sections 21(2) and (3) of Pota and 109 and 120 B of Indian Penal Code.

Though there was no need, since a case under Pota is a cognizable offence, the State Government chose to play it safe and cover its tracks by getting arrest warrants from a court before effecting the arrests.

Party chairman L Ganesan asked the cadres to protest by conducting picketing and court-ing arrest on July 12

Another hot Pota-to

Vaiko, this unfortunately is the law, this is why it was seen as draconian

JAYALALITHAA could well be playing her own power games. But in invoking certain sections of the draconian Prevention of Terrorism Act (Pota) against MDMK leader Vaiko for his Tirumangalam speech, in which he extended support to the LTTE, she was acting strictly within the law. The LTTE was already declared as a terrorist organisation under Pota and is held responsible for the murder of one of its prime ministers, which is why its supremo, V. Prabhakaran, is still a wanted man in this country. By stating in his June 29 speech that "yesterday I supported the LTTE, even today I am supporting the LTTE and tomorrow I will continue to support the LTTE" Vaiko was seen to have fallen foul of Section 21 (2) and Section 21 (3) of Pota, as this newspaper has already pointed out.

The BJP, of course, finds itself in a quandary over this one. On the one hand, Vaiko has proved to be a loyal supporter of the NDA government, even embracing Narendra Modi at a public rally in Gujarat despite the BJP's other allies having condemned the chief minister unequivocally. On the other hand, the BJP had almost single-handedly, in the face of a fierce resistance from the Opposition and civil liberties activists, pushed Pota through. Not surprisingly, therefore, the Centre has chosen to keep away from the current controversy, treating it as matter concerning the

state. But this stance may not work — Jayalalithaa is not likely to allow it the luxury of remaining aloof for too long. She has already fired off letters to New Delhi explaining her stand. Knowing this, the BJP party has in the meanwhile hinted that the action against Vaiko was unwarranted, and that there are enough safeguards in the law to prevent its misuse by political opponents.

But that precisely is the problem. There are not enough safeguards in Pota to prevent its abuse — an aspect that the Centre has used in its favour when it has suited it, and especially against the minority community. Look at how Section 21 (3) is worded: "A person commits an offence if he addresses a meeting for the purpose of encouraging support for a terrorist organisation or to further its activities". In any case, any safeguards in this law come into force only when the court comes into the picture — in the meanwhile, those booked under the law stand to lose over six months of their lives in the cooler. Ironically, Vaiko had enthusiastically supported the passage of this Bill in Parliament although, to grant him his due, he had suggested some safeguards, including a reconsideration of the definition of a "meeting" arranged in support of a terrorist organisation, under Section 21 (2) and (3) — the precise sections under which he is currently booked. Call it intimations of incarceration or plain nemesis!

INDIAN EXPRESS

INDIAN EXPRESS

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Case registered against Vaiko

By S. Vijay Kumar

MADURAI, JULY 4. The Tirumangalam police here today registered a case against the Sivakasi MP and MDMK general secretary, Vaiko, and eight others, under various sections of the Prevention Of Terrorist Act (POTA), the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967 and the IPC. This is the first time that the provisions under POTA are being invoked in Tamil Nadu.

The others charged in the case include Veera Ilavarasan, Bhoominathan (Madurai urban district secretary), Ganesamoorthy (Erode district secretary of the party), Sivanthiappan (Sivaganga district secretary) and four others.

Mr. Vaiko and the others are charged with making pro-LTTE speeches at a meeting organised by Mr. Ilavarasan in Tiru-

mangalam on June 29. "The speech of the above said persons instigates the public, that it is not wrong to support an organisation which has been banned and exhorts the public to go against the law by supporting an outlawed organisation," says a police report to the Government which adds that "the speeches are likely to endanger the nation's security and integrity as per the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967".

Police sources said the case was registered based on a specific complaint preferred by the Tirumangalam Inspector, N. Thangavelu, that "the speech of the MDMK cadre had created a panic among the people who were wondering why the Government was not invoking POTA despite introducing it".

The allegations are that Mr. Vaiko has

said in his speech that "he was, is and will continue to be a supporter of the LTTE". He is also said to have claimed that the LTTE was not promoting terrorism and its sole cause was the liberation of 'Eelam'. The cases have been registered under Section 21(2)(3) of the POTA, Section 13 (1)(a) of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act, 1967, and Sections 109 (abetment) and 120(B) (sedition) of IPC against the accused. The police also claimed that Mr. Ilavarasan presented a memento resembling a tiger cub to Mr. Vaiko.

The issue sparked tension almost instantly in parts of the Sivakasi Lok Sabha constituency in Virudhunagar district. Suspected MDMK cadre pasted posters condemning the Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa. Three persons were arrested.

Advani calls for report: Page 11

1 JUL 2002

THE HINDU

Vaiko rebuffs Jaya threat, reaffirms support for LTTE

T.N.GOPALAN
CHENNAI, JULY 3

96-5/17

IN A statement faxed from Chicago, USA, MDMK leader Vaiko has unequivocally reaffirmed his support to the LTTE's struggle for a better life for the Sri Lankan Tamils. He recalled how he had made a similar statement on the floor of the Lok Sabha during the debate on POTA.

Asserting that Jayalalithaa was seeking to misuse the Act to persecute her political adversaries, he said he would not be cowed down by any show of force on the part of the state government.

At the same time, he also took care to call upon his followers to stick to the path of peace and noted that his party had "never encouraged violence in the state."

This is not the first time since the AIADMK's return to power in June last that Vaiko has made such statements. In fact, right after the enactment of POTA a few months ago, Vaiko had dared her while speaking at a public meeting in Chennai. But no action was taken then. Vaiko has indeed been revelling in the role of a cham-

98/1/17

panion of the Tigers.

First, he travelled incognito to Jaffna at the height of the IPKF-LTTE confrontation, met Prabhakaran and expressed his solidarity with him, but when DMK chief Karunanidhi suspended him, he chose to lie low and got himself rehabilitated subsequently. Again when the LTTE was banned in the wake of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, he contented himself with some symbolic protests.

While sharing political platforms with the AIADMK, the DMK or the BJP, he would neatly skirt the LTTE issue altogether, reserving his hosannas for Prabhakaran to solo performances.

In the early nineties, LTTE hailed Vaiko as one of its most valued supporters. In POTA, Jayalalithaa has found a useful weapon to corner him. Possibly Vaiko, who projects himself as the most loyal of BJP allies in the state, might still be able to get away this time, thanks to the Centre's patronage. Meanwhile, the state police has arrested Pavanar, a platform speaker of the Dravidar Kazhagam (DK), another pro-LTTE party.



We will arrest Vaiko, says Jayalalithaa

HP 1 By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, JULY 2. While asking the Centre to take action against the MDMK leader, Vaiko, for his pro-LTTE speeches, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, today declared her Government's intention to arrest him.

In a letter to the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, the Chief Minister referred to Mr. Vaiko's speech at Thirumangalam in Madurai district on June 29 and said it attracted the provisions of the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and the Prevention of Terrorism Act. "We have no other option but to proceed against the individual both under POTA and under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act and to arrest the individual who has blatantly spoken in support of the terrorist outfit in total disregard and defiance of the laws of the land," she said. Noting that Mr. Vaiko was a sitting member of Parliament and leader of a political party which was a constituent of the ruling NDA at the Centre, Ms. Jayalalithaa said that ignoring Mr. Vaiko's speech would make a mockery of the Centre's efforts to take serious and deterrent action against terrorist organisations.

Mr. Vaiko had stated that he was a supporter of the LTTE and that he would continue to be a supporter of that organisation, she said. Unless such "provocative outbursts" were dealt with

firmly, supporters of fundamentalist organisations such as SIMI and Al-Qaeda would get emboldened. "This will be a very dangerous trend, which will be difficult to arrest if not contained now, even if such condemnable tendencies of taking the law of the nation and the government for granted are exhibited by the so-called allies of the Central Government," she added.

(Mr. Vaiko is at present in the United States.)

TNLA, TNRT banned under POTA

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 2. Three more organisations, the Tamil Nadu Liberation Army (TNLA), Tamil National Retrieval Troops (TNRT) and the Akhil Bharat Nepali Ekta Samaj (ABNES) have been declared unlawful under the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), 2002.

According to a release from the Home Ministry, the three organisations were found to be involved in terrorist activities and the ban slapped on them would be effective immediately. With this as many as 32 organisations have been declared unlawful under the POTA.

1 10-7-02

THE HINDU

Karunanidhi puts BJP on notice: where's the alliance in the state?

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, MARCH 24

DMK president M Karunanidhi today virtually put the NDA government on notice by questioning the very existence of any such alliance with the BJP in the state. Annoyed with the state BJP for cosying up to the AIADMK, particularly since J Jayalithaa's comeback as Chief Minister, Karunanidhi said from now on there won't be any floor coordination with the BJP in the assembly.

Speaking to reporters after the party's general council meeting, he declared he had no intention of urging the BJP high command to rein in the state unit which had started gushing over Jayalithaa day in and day out.

He, however, added that the DMK was continuing in the NDA at the national level and he



would not even think of applying any pressure on the Vajpayee government like the TDP or the Trinamool Congress. Karunanidhi stressed that Prime Minister A B Vajpayee was an honest man and there was no doubt about that.

Karunanidhi complained that he was not being respected as head of the party that led the NDA in the state and charged the BJP's state leadership with being Janus-faced, trying to maintain links with both the

DMK and the AIADMK.

"As far as I am concerned, there is no meaning to state that the NDA existed in Tamil Nadu. At the same time I will not use the word that the NDA in the state has collapsed," he observed. It was the state BJP which was responsible for the impasse and not the DMK, he added.

Asked whether the DMK would have an electoral alliance with the BJP in the ensuing by-elections, he said "it is for them (BJP) to decide."

Speaking at the council meeting earlier, Karunanidhi warned the state BJP unit not to forget what had happened in the past when they had ties with the AIADMK. He recalled how some AIADMK leaders had burnt Vajpayee's effigies when the Supreme Court

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

INDIAN EXPRESS

15 MAR 2002

Jaya's third term as Tamil Nadu chief minister

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, March 2. — The AIADMK general secretary, Miss Jayalalitha, was today sworn in as the new chief minister of Tamil Nadu. In a glittering function held at the centenary auditorium of Madras University across the Marina Beach, the Governor, Mr P S Ramamohan Rao, administered the oath of office and secrecy to Miss Jayalalitha.

Even as Miss Jayalalitha and her 26 Cabinet colleagues took the oath, AIADMK workers who had crowded into the massive hall, raised slogans hailing her as the 'permanent' chief minister.

Besides AIADMK senior leaders and partymen, the auditorium was packed with senior bureaucrats, leaders from various political parties and several film stars.

Miss Jayalalitha's close friend, Mrs Sasikala, and her relatives were present. "I am unable to express my feelings at this time," a beaming Miss Jayalalitha told reporters at the end of the hour-long ceremony. "I feel an immense sense of gratitude towards the people of Tamil Nadu who have supported me and stood by me, helping me cross all the hurdles," she added. Later in the evening, the chief minister addressed a formal press conference at her office in Fort St George.

For Miss Jayalalitha, this is the third time that she is assuming office as chief minister. Her first term, from 1991-96, was marked with controversies and ended with her facing a slew of corruption cases. Her party and she saw disastrous defeat in the 1996 Assembly polls. In the May 2001 Assembly election, the AIADMK-led front put up a spectacular show.

But, Miss Jayalalitha herself was disqualified from contesting the election following three convictions by a special court in corruption



Miss Jayalalitha being sworn in as Tamil Nadu chief minister by the Governor, Mr PS Ramamohan Rao, on Saturday. — PTI

cases. Nevertheless, she was sworn in as chief minister by the then Governor, Miss Fathima M Beevi, at a simple function at Raj Bhavan. However, she had to step down in September last after the Supreme Court invalidated her appointment. The hurdles were finally cleared for her return to office after the Madras High Court set aside the Special Court rulings last December. She then contested the Andipatti by-election caused by the resignation of her partymen to facilitate her comeback, and won the seat by 41,000 votes.

The surroundings of the Centenary auditorium where Miss Jayalalitha was sworn in this morning, wore a festive look as a large number of AIADMK partymen and women lined the Marina beach to catch a glimpse of Miss Jayalalitha as she arrived at the venue at 10.50 am. A massive screen was set up at the nearby Chepauk stadium for a live telecast of the swearing-in ceremony and enable thousands of people who could not be accommodated

in the hall to view the proceedings.

The outgoing chief minister, Mr O Panneerselvam, was rewarded with the number two position and given the hefty public works portfolio. Seniors leaders like Mr C Ponnaiyan (finance), Mr M Thambidurai (education) and Mr D Jayakumar (law) have been retained, with some shuffling of their portfolios.

Apart from Miss Jayalalitha, there is only one woman in the new Cabinet — Mrs P Valarmathi, who has been given the social welfare portfolio. Ten ministers were dropped and 12 new ones brought in.

Soon after the ceremony, Miss Jayalalitha was seen smilingly greet her guests, including her rivals, the leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Mr K Anbazhagan, and the Chennai mayor, Mr MK Stalin, both from the DMK. Former PCC (I) president, Mr KV Thangabalu, known to be a staunch supporter of Miss Jayalalitha, was also present.

The BJP was represented by its state president, Dr Kripanidhi.

THE STATESMAN

Amarinder new Punjab CM

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Statesman News Service

CHANDIGARH, Feb. 26. — Captain Amarinder Singh, scion of the royal family of Patiala, will be the new chief minister of Punjab.

The Congress legislative party today unanimously elected Captain Amarinder Singh as its leader. He will be administered the oath of office and secrecy tomorrow at Punjab Raj Bhavan here.

Significantly, the opposition to Captain Singh's leadership — in the till recently-fractured Punjab Congress — had been effectively neutralised right at the time of distribution of tickets. Though much ruckus was then created by dissident camps led by the former chief minister,

Mrs Rajinder Kaur Bhattal and Faridkot MP Mr Jagmeet Singh Brar, with very few MLAs of dissident camp being returned, the CLP leadership decision today was taken unanimously. Individual MLAs were consulted by four party observers — Mr ML Vora, Mr Hari Prasad, Ms Ambika Soni and Mr Ahmed Patel.

After almost two hours of discussions amid an overcrowded Congress Bhavan here, it was given out that the opinion of MLAs had been conveyed to the Congress president who had placed her stamp of approval over the same. Mrs Bhattal, who had made it known earlier that she wouldn't accept anything short of the chief ministerial berth, also seemed placated and it was conveyed that she had also

accepted the decision of Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

She is likely to be the president of Pradesh Congress Committee, since Captain Singh has already announced that the party will abide by 'one man one post' principle, wherein he will now be required to relinquish state Congress chief's position. The other prominent dissident, Faridkot MP Mr Jagmeet Singh Brar, was conspicuous by his absence, though other parliamentarians of the party were present.

Captain Amarinder Singh has expressed his dissatisfaction with the result in terms of 62 seats bagged by the Congress. He alleged that in almost every constituency, 5,000 to 10,000 voters of his party had been deleted from electoral rolls.



Captain Amarinder Singh

THE STATESMAN

A divided home let down the Akalis

VIPIN PUBBY

CHANDIGARH, FEBRUARY 24

VOTERS in Punjab are usually very decisive, ensuring a comfortable victory for one or the other party, but this time the divide was sharper. The Shiromani Akali Dal has been left way behind, while the Congress has attained a clear majority.

The results indicate that Akalis continue to have a significant following and that the Panthic Morcha, which had launched a virulent attack on Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal's government, may have made the difference.

"A united Akali Dal would have won hands down," said former SGPC chief Gurcharan Singh Tohra reacting to the verdict. "But it would have been possible only sans Badal," he said.

Given the close contests in some of the seats, it can be safely said that the Akalis would have certainly fared better if they had not contested against each other. Even a different outcome in a dozen constituencies could have decisively tilted the scales.

However, the issue of corruption emerged as the dominant factor and the Badal government has paid for its belligerence and couldn't-care-less attitude on the issue.

Another significant aspect of the outcome is the drubbing received by SAD's ruling partner BJP. While the BJP had won 18 of the 23 seats contested by it in the previous elections, its tally is reduced to two while the BSP, led by



Contenders to CM's post may give Congress' Amarinder Singh a tough time. *Express photo*

chief Kanshi Ram, failed to open its accounts.

Badal and his partymen may not have had the last laugh at the exit polls, the wide variations projected by three leading "pollsters" may actually sound death knell for the concept of exit polls in the country. Not that these had not gone wrong elsewhere in the past, the fact that the first such projections at a wider scale in this region had gone awry, has considerably dented the credibility of such exit polls.

Any such polls would surely be taken with a pinch of salt in future polls.

Yamunanagar win boosts INLD

■ CHANDIGARH: The Yamunanagar bypoll result comes as a shot in the arm for the ruling Indian National Lok Dal (INLD). All eyes were on the outcome as the polls followed parting of ways between alliance partners INLD and BJP.

Now that INLD's Malik Chand Gambhir has won, the outcome indicates the party's presence in urban areas, banishing the belief it is confined to rural pockets and needed BJP support. Haryana CM Om Prakash Chautala had thrown the party hat into the poll ring despite the fact that the BJP had already fielded its candidate for the seat as a matter of right.

In the last Assembly polls, the BJP had bagged Yamunanagar under a seat arrangement with INLD. Taking the tie-up for granted, the BJP declared Ghanshyam Das as its candidate. But irked by the BJP's rejection of his party in UP, Chautala fielded his candidate.

Chautala put his legislator son Abhey Singh Chautala in charge of Yamunanagar and won over Congress stalwart Rajesh Sharma. With Sharma's exit, the Congress — that wrested the seat from the BJP the last time — has finished a poor third in the polls.

The INLD along with the Haryana Vikas Party (HVP) ate into the Congress share. The BJP however, suffered the most. Denying Kamla Verma, who was a Bansi Lal Cabinet minister, the ticket, BJP chose Ghanshyam Das. The party has forfeited its security deposit.

MUKESH BHARDWAJ

For Congress chief Capt Amarinder Singh, the problems may have just begun. Given the fact that he was virtually projected as the chief minister by the Congress and his known proximity to party chief Sonia Gandhi, it would be only a miracle if he is pipped to the post by anyone.

But the next few months could prove crucial for him. In the event of a comfortable majority, he would have dictated the terms but the other contenders, Rajinder Kaur Bhattal and Jagmit Brar, are not likely to sit idle given

their known disposition towards him.

Much would depend on the kind of people he depends upon. As it is, the public perception is that he is not easily accessible. He has already declared that he would not trust *chamchas*. His lack of administrative experience and perceived lack of contact at the grassroots is likely to hamper his functioning. And it shall not be long before sharks mount an attack on him and his government. What would add to the problems is the shattered economy he is expected to inherit.

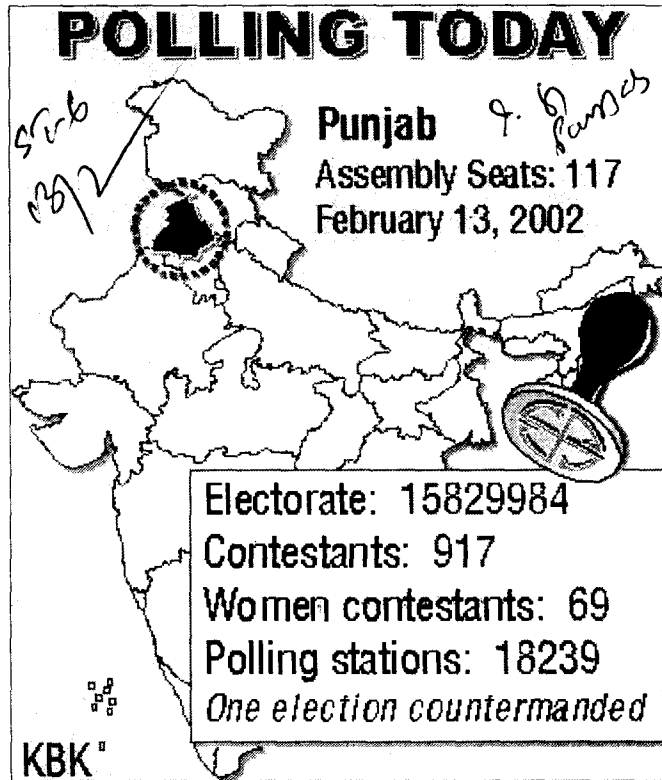
Curtains on campaign

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 12. — The curtains came down this evening on the poll campaign in Uttaranchal, Manipur and parts of Uttar Pradesh, scheduled to hold polls on Thursday, as Punjab prepared to go to the polls tomorrow. The campaigning ended yesterday in Punjab and arrangements were "in place" for peaceful polls. Electronic voting machines (EVMs) are to be used for the first time in the state's 116 of 117 Assembly seats. Polling had been countermanded in Malout (Reserved) constituency following the death of the SAD-BJP alliance candidate, Sujan Singh.

Paramilitary forces staged a flag march at a few places in Punjab today, including Batala, where Congress and BJP workers clashed a day ahead of the poll, leaving 14 persons injured. The paramilitary forces staged flag marches in Moga and Baghapurana also. The Election Commission has designated one-third of the Punjab polling centres as "sensitive", which translated into numbers add up to 3,628 out of the total 10,525 centres. The EC ordered the deployment of Central forces at many places in Tarn Taran, Patli, Naushehra Panuan, Lambi and Muktsar, adds PTI from Chandigarh.

The EC today expressed satisfaction with the law and order situation and other arrangements for the polls in Punjab. The EC spokesman, Mr AN Jha said that "adequate security forces" have been deployed. Some 15.6 million people (8.25 million men and 7.39 million women) will exercise their



franchise in Punjab which has 917 candidates in the fray.

In Uttar Pradesh, 12,925 centres have been identified as "sensitive" out of 28,437. Polls will be held in three phases in Uttar Pradesh, on 14, 18 and 21 February. Elections will be held in Manipur in two phases, on 14 and 21 February and in Uttaranchal on 14 February. About 22 million people will cast their ballots in UP in over 26 polling stations on 14 February. Over 34 million people will vote in 45 polling stations on 18 February and the rest, over 41 million people, will vote in over 48 polling stations on 21 February.

In Manipur, several polling stations have been marked as "sensitive" but the EC had received no complaints of the NSCN (IM) threatening voters, Mr Jha said. "The state administration is geared up to deal with the situation. Any threat to hinder the elections would be taken care of," he added. Manipur will see 8.51 lakh voters cast their votes in the first phase at 1,152 polling stations. Some 5.58 lakh more voters would exercise their rights at 849 polling stations in the final phase. In Uttaranchal, 5 million voters will exercise their franchise across 6,753 polling stations.

Politics as usual

Issue grabbing in Punjab

It is clear that Prakash Singh Badal has not been a brilliant chief minister nor, given the context, was he expected to be. His main contribution seems to have been to give free power to farmers, get the minimum support price for wheat hiked by a substantial margin every year and force the Centre to procure every kilo of the stuff brought to the mandis, even when there was a record surplus. That is probably all it takes to be a chief minister of that state, given the clout the farmer lobby enjoy there. Despite this, his prospects are not said to be bright. There are widespread allegations of corruption and the Congress is going to town about the property owned by the Badals in Australia and in Delhi. The Congress manifesto also gives a list of scandals that include bogus recruitment into the handicapped category and the sale of government rest houses well below market price. The party promises to appoint a judicial commission to probe these allegations if and when in power. Badal's ideas, if they can be called such, are mundane this time around, having mostly to do with the supply of power to domestic consumers and usual sops to farmers.

But a Supreme Court order that Punjab build forthwith its portion of the Sutlej Yamuna Link Canal so that Haryana gets its 3.83 million acre feet of water from the Ravi and the Beas, has given him a classic Akali chauvinist poll issue. The canal was proposed under Indira Gandhi; it is a Congress idea and the water sharing agreement was ratified by Rajiv Gandhi and Sant Longowal in their famous accord. The Congress squirms at this, but quickly recovers to say that Badal has in fact a secret understanding with fellow BJP ally Om Prakash Chautala and deliberately arranged to lose the case. Badal counters by saying he'd rather fill jails than allow a single drop of water to flow into Haryana. The Congress does not shine by comparison on corruption either: its list of nominees has at least three people, including former chief minister Rajinder Kaur Bhattal, against whom cases are pending. To be fair to the Congress, it doesn't go overboard with sops although it espouses the other big Punjabi cause — Chandigarh. On the face of it, one doesn't see whether there is a choice in Punjab, except that Amarinder Singh is the "maharaja" of Patiala, has a few ideas on industry, isn't an old fogey like Badal. Given that both the Akalis and the Congress have relatively stable and clearly demarcated constituencies, the election may hinge upon the amount of disaffection that has accumulated against Badal over the last five years and the amount of damage rebel candidates on both sides can inflict on official ones.

THE STATESMAN

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Sop for sop

The real issues get sidetracked again in Punjab

WITH Sukhbir Singh Badal, son of Chief Minister Parkash Singh Badal, filing a criminal complaint against Punjab Congress president Amarinder Singh for defamation, can it be said that political campaigning in Punjab has touched a new low? Badal Jr is reacting to advertisements in the Congress media blitzkrieg that suggest — in a forthright sort of a way — that Badal (Sr) has mortgaged the SYL waters and thereby the future of the Punjab farmer, for personal gain. Should his complaint not be addressed, Sukhbir has even threatened to take the Election Commission to court. As spectacular as this sparring is, and though many will undoubtedly hold their breath till the verdict on the defamation suit comes in, surely this cannot be the dominant question in the Punjab polls. Surely, what must draw more attention, and concern, than the depths that Campaign 2002 may have plumbed in the run-up to elections, is its sheer poverty of breadth. It is an extremely narrow electoral campaign that the main political parties have been running so far in Punjab.

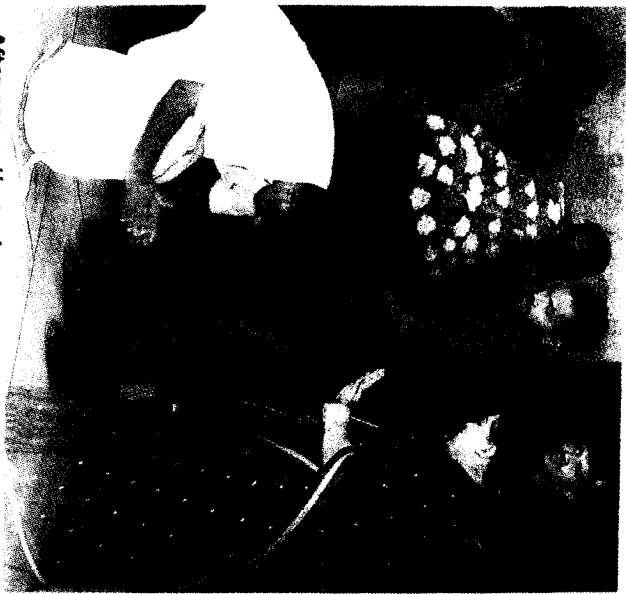
While corruption is an enormous and continuing challenge in Punjab as it is elsewhere, the Akali-Congress personalised attacks on this score are beginning to look suspiciously like a smokescreen. All the noise made on corruption, it seems, is designed to drown out the deafening silence on the other issues. In retrospect, after terrorism mercifully waned in the state, no other

issue has been able to step into the vacuum in the political agenda. The failure of many of the so-called Panthic issues to make the grade is entirely welcome — it is reassuring, for instance, that the bir-burning controversy which erupted a few months ago failed to keep the embers glowing till election time. But the inability of development issues to occupy centrestage is a sad comment on the major political players and their priorities. Even the matter of the SYL canal, one that vitally affects many in the state, has been thrust upon the campaign by the Supreme Court verdict. Both the Akali Dal and the Congress had no choice but to reiterate their positions on the long-festering dispute. Both have done so in the most recklessly emotive, most irresponsible way possible. As rhetoric of “not a drop of water...” and “...rivers of blood” makes daily headlines, SAD chief and Chief Minister Badal has brandished his readiness to defy the court. A petition seeking initiation of contempt proceedings against him is slated for hearing in the Supreme Court on Friday.

So what is the election about this time in Punjab? Is it down to the competitive sop-offering by both the main contenders for power? While the SAD has improved upon the largesse it offered in its manifesto in 1997, the Congress valiantly attempts to match it, sop for populist sop. Or will the cynical voter just flip a coin? Or is there room, still, to hope that some real issues will step into this campaign?

Best birthday gift: Jayalalithaa

By Suresh Nambath



After presenting a bouquet to greet his leader, Jayalalitha, on her victory, the outgoing Chief Minister, O. Panneerselvam, seeks her blessings at her Poes Garden residence. — Photo: V. Ganesan

CHENNAI, FEB. 24. In Ms. Jayalalitha's own words, it was the "best birthday present I've ever received in my life." And AIADMK partymen, as also senior IAS and IPS officials, who queued up at her Poes Garden residence with bouquets and shawls, greeted her twice-over. There was no trouble with this double: the 54th birthday, and the birthday gift in the form of the victory in Andipatti. The last few years, Ms. Jayalalitha has been spending her birthday quietly at home. Partymen would mark the day outside, on their own — distributing sweets at the AIADMK headquarters and offering prayers in temples.

Today, of course, was different. The centre of celebrations was Poes Garden itself. As soon as she established a comfortable lead over DMK's Vaigai Sekhar, Ms. Jayalalitha walked out of the front door and received cheering partymen. Many of them had already expressed their joy loud and clear with firecrackers.

Even as she kept monitoring the "lead situation" in Andipatti, Ms. Jayalalitha received each and every worker and official with a smile. And, after an hour, at 12 noon, she was ready to announce the final result. "I've been declared elected with a margin of 41,200," she said setting off another round of celebrations.

Most AIADMK workers insisted on touching the ground near her feet. Security personnel had to pull away those who kneeled down a little longer. But everytime someone actually touched her feet, Ms. Jayalalitha would step back with a look of rebuke. For an important few, she paused and posed for photographs.

While talking to reporters later, Ms. Jayalalitha was at her best. For the benefit of television cameras she would repeat in Tamil what she said in English, and vice-versa. One reporter asked her to repeat her oft-repeated line: "People's verdict is God's verdict." And she obliged.

Ms. Jayalalitha took the opportunity to reiterate her promise that she would make Tamil Nadu the No. 1 State in the country in every sphere, and Andipatti the No. 1 constituency in the State. "I will not rest until I've achieved this goal," she said.

Expressing her "sincere and heartfelt gratitude" to the voters of Andipatti, Ms. Jayalalitha said she would fulfill all the promises she made during the election campaign.

Ms. Jayalalitha attributed her victory to the "unstinted support" of party cadres, who, she said, had remained "united and disciplined" through a trying period. The AIADMK legislature party met in the afternoon and unanimously elected her the leader. Immediately thereafter, the Chief Minister, O. Panneerselvam, submitted his resignation. The Governor, P.S. Ramamohan Rao, asked him to continue till alternative arrangements were made.