

VAJPAYEE TRIED IN VAIN TO MEET HER DEMANDS'

Who is the real Prime Minister, asks Mamata

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, July 30. — Smarting under the humiliation over the Eastern Railway division, Miss Mamata Banerjee today said the Prime Minister's Office had been hijacked. "Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee has been isolated," she said, while claiming that she was confused who the "real" Prime Minister was.

The comment comes on the heels of her talks with NDA convener Mr George Fernandes yesterday. Mr Fernandes called Miss Banerjee at 10.30 p.m. last night to say Mr Vajpayee had "tried his best to accommodate her demands but couldn't succeed".

Without naming Mr LK Advani, the Trinamul chief mouthed invectives, all of which added up to show how disgusted she was with the Deputy Prime Minister. She said her party was not consulted by the BJP on Mr Advani's elevation to the No. 2 slot, and that a "mere notification had paved the way for his accession".

Key decisions on her party's agitational programmes over the Eastern Railway division will be taken at tomorrow's meeting of the Trinamul working committee, she said. Party insiders said Miss Banerjee may announce a 72-hour bandh in the first week of August, though many of her

aides favour a 24-hour one.

Miss Banerjee today trained her guns not only on the NDA government, but also the Prime Minister. "We had reposed enough faith in him and expected he would do the needful. But things turned otherwise." Asked if she still had faith in Prime Minister, she said: "Till yesterday's Cabinet meeting we had...

At Buddha's feet?

KOLKATA, July 30. — Miss Mamata Banerjee today appealed to the chief minister to convene an all-party meeting on the ER division and urged all parties to launch a movement against it.

She said the issue involved Bengal's interests and hence all parties should join hands. She has given a day's time to the parties, saying that she would announce her party's programmes independently if they fail to offer one: "I appeal to the CM to convene an all-party meet for a consensus. If he doesn't, we'll go ahead with our programme."— SNS

we will take a collective decision tomorrow on what our party should do after the Centre's decision and of the Prime Minister's failure to do us justice. I want to know who is the real Prime Minister and who actually is running the show."

The Trinamul observed "Black Day" today, while its leader promised a "fitting reply" to the NDA. It was evident how shocked and dismayed Miss Banerjee was because of the

Prime Minister's "indifference".

"He should have kept in mind that he is the country's PM, not Bihar's. He was our last hope. It's unfortunate that a conspiracy, of greater dimension than the country's partition, had been hatched," Miss Banerjee said.

She was quite forthcoming on the extent of eagerness expressed by Mr Fernandes to make her a minister. Citing reasons for her refusal, Miss Banerjee said she would have been sidelined by eight Bihar ministers who want Eastern Railway to be divided. "I knew and hence declined. For me, a Cabinet berth is not even worth the price of my chappals."

From the economic viewpoint, Miss Banerjee questioned the Centre's move, asking about the source of funds at a time when PSUs such as Jessop, Tyre Corporation, MAMC and Cycle Corporation have been closed because of funds crunch.

In its response, the CPI-M today asked Miss Banerjee to "first explain" why her MLAs opted out of the state's all-party delegation to the railway minister before urging Mr Bhattacharjee to call an all-party meet over the proposed stir. Mr Anil Biswas said this in response to the Trinamul leader's appeal to Mr Bhattacharjee for a united movement.

More reports on page 6

Nitish's plan receives cabinet's green signal

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Union cabinet on Monday decided to stick to its earlier decision to re-organise railway zones, thereby categorically rejecting Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee's demand against the bifurcation of the Eastern Railway.

"It was decided that there was no need to change the decision as it was based on similar decisions taken in the past to increase the number of railway zones," I&B minister Sushma Swaraj said after the cabinet meeting. To a question if there was any dissenting voice at the meeting, she said, "The decision was unanimous." On the Prime Minister's response to Ms Banerjee's letter delivered to him earlier in the day, she said, "I am not supposed to disclose what happens inside the cabinet meeting. I can only tell you what I have been asked to communicate."

She also clarified that the bifurcation of railway zones was not based on any regional consideration. "It had nothing to do with any inter-state issue. One zone alone contains sev-

eral states." The Railways, she said, had also decided to give an option to the staff to take up postings of their choice close to their homes.

In Kolkata, Ms Banerjee described the decision as "shocking". "It is a gross injustice to West Bengal. I had confidence in the PM, but we know that some people have played a dirty game. It is a reward for Nitish Kumar," she said. Mr Kumar, she said, had been rewarded for "successfully suppressing the truth" about the Godhra carnage. While forensic reports confirmed that the fire in the Sabarmati Express had started inside the compartment, the railway minister had managed to keep it under wraps for several months, she claimed.

Asked if her party would continue to be in the NDA, she declined to comment, saying the party's working committee would meet on Wednesday to chalk out its future.

Meanwhile, the ruling Left Front in West Bengal offered to join hands with Ms Banerjee to unitedly protest the Union cabinet's decision. The rider, however, was that the Trinamul Congress must come out of the NDA.

Govt unveils package for drought-hit

State seeks Rs 205 cr aid

TIMES NEWS NETWORK AND
AGENCIES

New Delhi: Gearing up for the worst drought facing the country in 12 years, the Centre on Wednesday announced a seven-point action plan to mitigate the plight of the drought-hit people but said there was no need for alarm.

Speaking to the *Times of India* on Wednesday evening, some hours after having chaired a meeting of agriculture and relief minister from 12 states currently experiencing little or inadequate rainfall, Union agriculture minister Ajit Singh termed the situation "pretty bad".

"The country is facing the worst—and much more widespread—drought in the last 10-12 years. A total of 320 of the 524 districts in the states have been hit by scanty and deficient rainfall," he said.

However, he maintained that there was no cause for alarm. He expressed confidence that consumers would not suffer badly in view of the burgeoning stocks of foodgrains and other commodities, besides a comfortable foreign exchange position. He said price sentiments may, however, be affected by the situation to some extent.

Expressing concern over bleak crop prospects due to the erratic behaviour of the south-west monsoon, he said substantial damage had already been done to bajra, pulses and oilseeds. Paddy would also be affected to some extent, he said.

If it rained in the next few days, there were chances of retrieving the paddy crop, although the produce would be less, he said.

Announcing a "preliminary" relief package after

the meeting, Mr Singh said it included extension of the calamity relief fund (CRF) to all farmers in view of fears of extensive crop damage. While CRF monies with the states were yet to be exhausted, Central teams would have to be despatched to get data and other inputs for providing assistance under the national calamity relief fund (NCRF), he said.

Making it clear that states would have to declare their

- Consumers will not suffer badly, says Ajit Singh
- Sugar mills asked to pay outstanding dues to cane growers
- Nabard, other lenders asked to postpone recovery of debts

drought-affected districts in order to avail of central relief under CRF or NCRF, he said so far only Uttar Pradesh and Karnataka had declared 26 districts and about 150 talukas respectively as affected by drought.

As states presented their wishlists to face the situation, Maharashtra demanded Rs 205 crore, saying it was facing a drought for the third year in a row, and this time, there had been a dry spell for 17 days, which had delayed sowing in many areas.

Mr Singh said sugar mills had been asked to pay the Rs 1,000 crore outstanding to cane growers. "Nabard and cooperative financing bodies will be asked to postpone recovery of debts from states and other borrowers," he said, adding that the last date under the National Agricultural Insurance Scheme would be relaxed on a case-to-case basis.

Advani for early polls, TDP differs

Vajpayee skips debate on Gujarat

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 23

THE GLOVES are finally off. Deputy Prime Minister LK Advani today said in Parliament that not only was the dissolution of the Gujarat Assembly "within the ambit of the Constitution", but its Chief Minister Narendra Modi would also "get the certificate of the people".

But Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee chose to stay away from the stormy debate on Gujarat in Parliament -- as well as a BJP Parliamentary Party meeting -- giving rise to speculation on whether he was sending out a message.

PMO sources, however, ruled out any rift between Advani and Vajpayee and said the PM had so far not spoken on Gujarat because he has left the matter to be handled by Advani.

As the Opposition put the Government on the mat in both Houses of Parliament, demanding President's rule in Gujarat, Vajpayee was busy meeting the Governors of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka at his residence.

The Government was put in the dock by the Opposition for pressing for elections when relief and rehabilitation of riot victims were yet to be completed.

Even NDA ally Telugu Desam said elections in Gujarat cannot be an "overriding priority" at this stage. "The ball is in the EC's

HOUSE ON FIRE



LK Advani

- Advani stands by Modi, says early polls within the ambit of the Constitution
- Opposition walks out in protest
- Desam toes Opposition line, says there's no pressing need for early polls
- Vajpayee stays away from Gujarat debate

court. We should not pressure it," Desam leader K Yerran Naidu said in the Lok Sabha.

However, the BJP stuck to its aggressive stand on early polls in Gujarat. Angry over Advani's remarks, the Opposition staged a walkout at the end of his statement.

Replying to an over seven-hour debate in the Lok Sabha on relief and rehabilitation in post-riots Gujarat, Advani refused to go into the steps taken by the Modi regime or

the Centre during and after the violence. Focusing, instead, on the political developments consequent to the dissolution of the Assembly, Advani said, pointing towards the Opposition benches: "You have forced him (Modi) to go to the people. He needs the certificate of the people of Gujarat which he is going to get."

The Deputy PM is also likely to take the floor in the Rajya Sabha tomorrow where members debated the same subject today in the context of the House's earlier resolution asking for Central intervention in Gujarat under Article 355 of the Constitution.

Opposition leaders like CPI(M)'s Basudev Acharya, who initiated the debate, and Somnath Chatterjee, Congress' Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and Kamal Nath and Rashtriya Janata Dal's Raghuvansh Prasad Singh questioned the justification of the Modi regime's decision to recommend dissolution of the Assembly and demanded that Article 356 be invoked in Gujarat before polls are held there.

But, coming to the defence of Modi, Advani said the CM had volunteered his resignation during the BJP's Goa national executive and it was "baseless to say that the riots were sponsored by the State Government, even though the police and civil administrations may have been at fault in some instances".

BJP's Gujarat gambit stalls both houses

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Both Houses of Parliament were adjourned without transacting much business on Monday as the opposition strongly protested plans to hold early elections in Gujarat.

Turmoil erupted in the Lok Sabha as soon as the House met, as the Congress-led opposition demanded that question hour be suspended to allow for a discussion on the situation arising from the Gujarat assembly being dissolved and the Modi government recommending elections.

Congress and RJD members rushed to the well of the House shouting slogans against Mr Modi. They demanded that the state be placed under President's rule and that Mr Modi be dismissed. Congress leaders Jaipal Reddy and P.R. Dasmunshi said that Mr Modi's decision to recommend elections when the situation was far from normal was a defiance of democratic norms.

However, speaker Manohar Joshi refused to accede to the opposition demand, insisting that question hour could be dispensed with only with the consent of both the ruling side and the opposition.

The treasury benches made it clear that they had no intention of obliging the

opposition. "You have expressed your sentiments, let the House be conducted in an orderly manner," Mr Joshi said, promising to allow a discussion later in the day.

Mr Reddy replied that when the constitution had been violated in Gujarat, House proprieties need not stand in the way of a discussion. With no signs of the protests petering out, the speaker finally adjourned the House.

In the Rajya Sabha, trouble erupted as soon as the House met in the morning. The opposition demanded that President's rule be imposed in Gujarat. This first led to the House being adjourned for an hour, and later for the day without any business being transacted.

When the House convened, opposition members demanded that question hour be suspended and that political developments in Gujarat be discussed.

With the din continuing, the chairman adjourned the House for an hour barely 20 minutes after it had convened. Once it reconvened, there was uproar once again, leading to its adjournment for the day.

During the short duration that the House met, Manmohan Singh, leader of the opposition, held the Centre responsible for dissolving the Gujarat assembly.

EC receives request for elections

TIMES NEWS NETWORK AND AGENCIES

New Delhi: The Election Commission has not yet decided on the date for a full meeting to take up the Gujarat government's request for early elections in the state. However, the EC confirmed on Monday that it had received an official communication from the state government in this regard.

According to EC officials, "The commission feels that it should form an opinion before holding the meeting. Right now, all we can say is that the situation is tricky. We are evaluating the views of both sides." Meanwhile, the Congress on Monday demanded President's rule in Gujarat, dismissed as "fallacious" the BJP's argument for holding assembly polls by October and maintained that elections were "not a priority" for the violence-hit state.

ER: PM staves off Didi threat for now

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, JULY 22

AS THE dividing lines over the move to bifurcate Eastern Railway became sharper, Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee announced today that a decision on issue would be taken at the next Cabinet meeting, prompting the Trinamool Congress to keep its proposed 72-hour Kolkata bandh in "abeyance".

"At the next meeting of the Cabinet, these reactions will be considered and an appropriate decision taken," a statement issued by the PM said. But another announcement went unnoticed. It said the Cabinet will not meet tomorrow, an indicator of the tough task ahead.

"The government needs a little time to work out a mutually agreeable deal which would neither alienate Bengal nor Bihar," a source said, adding that Mamata has the

backing of the BJP young turks.

By getting the BJP's Bihar MP Kriti Azad to attend the Trinamool rally yesterday, Mamata pulled a coup of sorts.

Azad went to attend the rally under the direction of new BJP chief Venkaiah Naidu. BJP spokesperson Arun Jaitley, who had a tough time explaining Azad's presence in the rally, said that in a coalition members have to adjust to each other's viewpoint.

In Kolkata, Mamata welcomed the Prime Minister's assurance saying: "We've faith in

Prime Minister and his assurance. We can keep our proposed bandh at abeyance." Samata Party MP, Pabhunath Singh, however, said, "If the matter is reconsidered by the Cabinet, I feel it is an insult to Bihar. It is not just a single party issue, it is a question of Bihar's pride. The people Bihar have already taken to the streets."



Sushma spikes guns of FDI sceptics

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 17: Union information and broadcasting minister Sushma Swaraj today effectively demolished the Opposition's onslaught against the entry of foreign direct investment (FDI) in the print media with the help of sound arguments, statistics and wit.

Rejecting the demand from the Opposition and some NDA allies to reconsider the government decision to allow FDI in print media, Sushma told the Lok Sabha that it was a logical step in the changing economic scenario. Much of the Opposition's criticism was based on misconceptions, ignorance and lack of factual accuracy, she said.

Sushma said the government's decision was taken after addressing all the security and national concerns expressed by the parliamentary standing committee under Somnath Chatterjee.

Short of counter-arguments, the Left, the Samajwadi Party and the RJD staged a walkout, while the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party maintained a stoic silence.

Giving a point by point rebuttal, Sushma punctured the Samajwadi Party's criticism, producing a letter written on December 7, 2000, by Mulayam Singh Yadav to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, pleading for the entry of FDI in small and regional language newspapers.

"I have been accused of doublespeak. But what do you say about the conduct of your own leader," Sushma asked Samajwadi Party MPs. Mulayam was not present in the House. Earlier, the Samajwadi chief had made a fiery speech opposing FDI in print.

She read out portions from Mulayam's letter that said FDI in print media would protect lan-



Sushma

guage newspapers, specially those in Hindi, from the "monopoly" of "big" newspapers. "We have not taken the decision under pressure from anyone but have taken it on the plea made by your leader," she told a sheepish Akhilesh Singh of the Samajwadi Party.

Sushma then turned her guns on the Congress, wondering how the main Opposition party could accuse her of tinkering with the 1955 Cabinet resolution. "It is factually incorrect to say that (the) 1955 resolution was not discussed before," she said, giving a chronology of events.

The I&B minister said the government had appointed a committee of secretaries to discuss the issue in 1989. During the Narasimha Rao regime, the issue came up for discussion for times — October 1992, July 1993, September 1993 and February 1995.

"The Congress governments, too, discussed it. Perhaps they lacked courage or decisive action that a decision was not taken," she said, asking the Opposition why it did not protest when the broadcasting sector was opened up in 1993.

Sushma referred to several surveys and studies that underlined the potency of the visual medium to counter the Opposition argument that FDI would amount to cultural invasion. She created a flutter when she pointed at some bikini-clad models displayed prominently in leading national dailies. "Look at these! Do we need to talk about adverse cultural influence?" she asked, pointing out that these dailies were opposing FDI entry.

She urged the Opposition leaders to inquire why some leading newspapers were opposing FDI in print media while advocating opening up of all other sectors. "This is a very intriguing question. Why should they have a touch-me-not attitude?" she asked.

Sushma contested Sharad Pawar's claim that the Indian Newspaper Society was against FDI. She said a poll of INS members showed that 38 members favoured it, while 48 opposed it, and the latter included several editions of a single newspaper.

The I&B minister mocked the Opposition's claim that the Vajpayee regime allowed FDI because of the adverse media coverage on Gujarat.

She wondered how some of the leading national dailies and magazines supporting FDI had taken a lead in indicting the government on the Gujarat riots.

Listing the safeguards, Sushma said investor credentials would be scrutinised by the home ministry and 26 per cent equity would not be allowed to become controlling stake. She also assured her critics that the government would not allow a change in the share-holding pattern.

Prior permission and clearance from the home ministry would be needed. Editorial and management control will remain in the hands of "resident Indians", which will not apply to even to NRIs, she said.

Atal names Bhairon for Kant post

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 17: The NDA today chose senior BJP leader Bhairon Singh Shekhawat as its vice-presidential candidate. If the former Rajasthan chief minister comes out on top in the August 12 polls, a BJP leader will occupy the second-highest constitutional post in the country for the first time.

A contest is inevitable with the Opposition planning to put up a nominee. But Shekhawat's success seems a certainty as the NDA commands a majority in the electoral college.

The decision to field the 79-year-old Shekhawat was taken by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who was authorised by the NDA on Sunday to finalise the alliance's nominee.

Shekhawat will file his nomination papers tomorrow. K. Yerran Naidu of the Telugu Desam Party, Rashid Alvi of the Bahujan Samaj Party and the ADMK's P.H. Pandian are some of the non-NDA leaders who would sign his nomination papers.

Announcing Shekhawat's candidature, NDA convener George Fernandes told reporters that barring the Congress, most parties in both Houses of Parliament have conveyed to Vajpayee their support for Shekhawat, a three-time chief minister.

Vajpayee had spoken to Congress president Sonia Gandhi on phone yesterday, soliciting her party's backing for Shekhawat. But she conveyed her regrets, saying the Congress would like

to see a contest, parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan said.

The Prime Minister also spoke to CPM general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet and Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav. Surjeet, sources said, told Vajpayee that his party will make its stand clear tomorrow but Mulayam expressed reservations about supporting a BJP candidate.

Mahajan had contacted NCP leader Sharad Pawar, who preferred waiting for the outcome of the Opposition move.

Fernandes said Jayalithaa assured the ADMK's support for Shekhawat when deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani called her.

Talking of Shekhawat's prospects, Mahajan said the ruling alliance had a comfortable majority of more than 110 votes in the Lok Sabha, but was short by about 25 in the Rajya Sabha. "Therefore, this gives the NDA a lead of about 85 votes," he added.

Speaking to reporters at Rajasthan House here after his candidature was announced, Shekhawat said unanimous election of the President and Vice-President would have sent out a good signal.

Emphasising his humble origins, the BJP veteran said he had not even nursed hopes of becoming a village *sarpanch*. "The family I came from, I had little hope of even becoming a *sarpanch*..." he said. Born on October 23, 1923, Shekhawat did not manage to clear high school, but has been walking tall in Rajasthan politics for five decades.

THE TELEGRAPH

18 JUL 2002

Govt. in a fix over Vaiko arrest

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 17. The Vajpayee Government today found itself in a rather tight corner with the Opposition vehemently criticising the use of POTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) against the MDMK leader, Vaiko, who is in jail for having made a speech in support of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. The Opposition wanted to know if the Vaiko arrest was legal, then how could the MDMK members be part of the Vajpayee Council of Ministers.

The matter was raised during zero hour by the MDMK member, C. Krishna, who termed the arrest "politically-motivated." The Congress and the AIADMK supported the arrest, while the Opposition and sections of the ruling National Democratic Alliance were critical of the Tamil Nadu Government's invocation of the anti-terror law.

The Opposition benches did not miss the chance to point out the irony of Mr. Vaiko's

vocal support for the POTA and now the same law being used by the Tamil Nadu Government against him.

The CPI(M) leader, Somnath Chatterjee, wanted to know why the NDA was disapproving of Mr. Vaiko's arrest; if the arrest was warranted under POTA, then there was no justification for Mr. Vaiko's colleagues remaining in the Union Cabinet. During the POTA debate, Mr. Vaiko had gone to the extent of calling the critics of the anti-terror law "anti-national".

Mr. Chatterjee found an enthusiastic supporter in the Samajwadi Party leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, who minced no words in asserting that the Jayalithaa Government was "misusing" POTA against a political rival.

He reminded the Chief Minister that even so powerful a political leader like Indira Gandhi had to pay a heavy price for invoking Emergency, and that a similar fate awaited Ms. Jayalithaa.

On the other hand, the Congress mem-

ber, Mani Shankar Aiyar, stoutly defended the arrest. He pointed out that Mr. Vaiko had attracted the provisions of POTA when he addressed a public meeting in support of the LTTE, an organisation banned under POTA. He asserted that a statute could not be amended just to save a parliamentarian.

Predictably, a strong defence of the Tamil Nadu Government was put up by the AIADMK leader, P.H. Pandian, who justified the arrest in terms of Section 21(3) of POTA, and argued that no one could be deemed to be above the law. "It is for the courts to decide the case and a trial cannot be carried out by the House."

The NDA allies such as the DMK and the Telugu Desam Party lamented that a law which was meant to be used against terrorists was now being invoked against political rivals. There was no statement from the Government side, but the Opposition did have the satisfaction of pointing out to the treasury benches the folly of ignoring its warnings against possible misuse of POTA.

THE HINDU

7 JUL 2002

Jaitley is Delhi's point man for Kashmir talks

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 16 JULY

THE Centre on Tuesday appointed former law minister Arun Jaitley as its emissary for Kashmir talks. Mr Jaitley's selection was made from a field of four including retired chief justice A.S. Anand, former Karnataka chief minister R.K. Hegde and Congressman K.C. Pant, who is currently handling the responsibility.

Having taken the first step, the Centre now has to finalise the brief for Mr Jaitley. Though it cannot be spectacular, the Centre will still be required to walk a tight rope. The former law minister who has been offered a Cabinet rank, has to make his exercise look a sincere effort to address the grievances of J&K, particularly the population in the valley, but without appearing to be excessively sympathetic to the grand notion of autonomy that the National Conference has trained its sights on. In addition, the BJP general secretary in his new role will also be required to be mindful to the sentiments of Jammu and Ladakh regions.

So far as the National Confer-



JAITLEY: NEW INNINGS

task may boil down to finding all possible avenues of granting more administrative and financial powers. The parameters of what he could consider looked clear when Mr Advani told the Lok Sabha that while the government was committed to devolution of greater powers to the states, it was opposed to restoration of pre-1953 status in J&K as this will deprive the people of the state of the rights that were given to them under the Constitution after 1953.

The government managers have made it clear, time and

J&K will be in keeping with the Constitution, and will merely involve granting of more financial powers to the state as recommended by the Sarkaria Commission. While discussions on grant of more powers to the states takes place in the Inter-State Council, J&K is being taken up as a special case in keeping with its strategic importance and special status granted to it by the Constitution under Article 370.

Mr Jaitley will also talk with the representatives from Ladakh and Jammu regions on the additional powers desired by them. While the government has rejected the RSS demand for bifurcating Jammu and Kashmir, the Centre realises that some measures are needed for Jammu and Ladakh regions as well, considering that the valley has been the major beneficiary of its economic initiatives for J&K. Something on the lines of Development Boards, set up in the backward Rayalseema region of Andhra Pradesh, is one of the options that the government may be inclined to offer the region.

The feeling in New Delhi is that grievances of Jammu and Ladakh are genuine and must be

17 JUL 2002

The Economic Times

Govt. to face adjournment move

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JULY 15. The Opposition is planning to move an adjournment motion on the Jammu massacre tomorrow in the Lok Sabha and take the Government to task for failing to protect innocent lives. It is indicated that the Government will not resist the move as it is confident of being able to defeat the motion.

The Government's strategy seems to be to take the bull by the horns rather than allow the issue to linger and lead to daily disruptions of the House. It was also conceded that the massacre, admittedly the most ghastly after Kaluchak, was indeed a fit case for the Opposition to take up as an adjournment motion which

calls for all business to be set aside so that the matter could be taken up urgently.

As a result, there will be no statement in the Lok Sabha on the massacre from the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, as promised earlier — Mr. Advani or the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, would reply to the motion — and a statement could be made in the Rajya Sabha.

The motion is expected to be taken up immediately after question hour and under the rules, the debate will be completed and voting upon same day.

It is learnt that the issue came up at a meeting of party leaders called by the Speaker, Manohar Joshi, this afternoon. Several Opposition leaders — Shivraj Patil and Priya Ranjan Dasmun-

shi of the Congress and Somnath Chatterjee of the CPI(M) — said they were planning to move an adjournment motion. The idea perhaps was to test the Government reaction. The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, is believed to have consulted Mr. Advani on telephone before indicating that the Government would not resist the move. Several notices for the adjournment motion are expected to be in before 10 a.m. tomorrow.

This morning, there was a meeting between the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi and the CPI(M) parliamentary party leader, Mr. Chatterjee, where it was agreed that the two parties would cooperate and coordinate their moves in Parliament. It is learnt that Mr. Chatterjee was in touch with the Samajwadi party leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, who would also coordinate with the Opposition parties.

During the debate on the adjournment motion tomorrow, the Opposition will ask the Government inconvenient questions. Why are such incidents taking place despite the mobilisation of troops on the border? Has the Government relied too much on Western powers to pressure Pakistan to end terrorist acts?

Has the Government not failed to meet its constitutional responsibility to safeguard the lives of its citizens?

Today, the Congress spokesperson, Anand Sharma, indicated that the party expected credible answers as the Opposition had given full support to the Government on all the steps it had decided to take to deal with the menace from across the border.



The VHP leader, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, with Muslim leaders at a meeting of the National Commission for Minorities in New Delhi on Monday. — PTI
(Report on Page 12)

THE HINDU

16 JUL 2002

Delhi brainstorm to douse Jammu flames

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 14

THE KASIM Nagar massacre last night sent the country's leaders into a huddle today, but they put off till tomorrow making a statement on the attack that Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani described as the "most naked form of terrorism".

After facing a hostile crowd at Kasim Nagar in the afternoon, Advani was back in Delhi in the evening where he met Vajpayee and Defence Minister George Fernandes.

Earlier in the day, Advani attended a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security chaired by Vajpayee which decided to "take a view after a detailed assessment of the situation".

The Government did not name Islamabad, but Foreign Minister Yashwant Sinha said attacks like this were taking place at Pakistan's behest.

Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Farooq Abdullah accompanied Advani to Jammu where the impression gathered

ATTACK FALLOUT

- CCS takes stock of situation; statement expected in Parliament today
- Security beefed up along route of Amarnath yatra
- British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw says he is rushing to India
- Sinha hints at Pak involvement; police suspect role of Lashkar-e-Tayyeba

was that the Kasim Nagar massacre, like the May 14 Kaluchak killings, was carried out by the banned Lashkar-e-Tayyeba. There was no official word on the current level of infiltration from across the Line of Control (LoC).

Advani later briefed a meeting of NDA leaders. NDA convener Fernandes said the Deputy PM would make a statement in both Houses of Parliament soon.

Today's CCS was scheduled to discuss the political process and the

continuing military presence in J&K. But the Kasim Nagar massacre appears to have put the clock back. The massacre is bound to cast its shadow on the Amarnath Yatra which will begin from Monday.

A meeting of senior Home Ministry officials today reviewed the security preparation along the yatra route and decided to strengthen security for the pilgrims. The State Government has been advised to tighten security of all sensitive buildings and installations both in Jammu and the Valley.

There was international condemnation of the brutal killings. The US, Britain and France condemned the terrorist strike. British Foreign Secretary Jack Straw and French Foreign Minister Dominique Willipin spoke to Sinha over the phone and expressed "horror and shock" at the "attack on innocent civilians". Straw is expected to arrive in New Delhi on July 19.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

15 JUL 2002

Cabinet or ER: Mamata gets 2 days to choose

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 13. — The Prime Minister tonight gave Miss Mamata Banerjee two days to decide if she would like to join the Cabinet and debate the Eastern Railways division or leave the floor to Mr Nitish Kumar.

NDA convener Mr George Fernandes is likely to contact Miss Banerjee in the coming days.

A high-level meeting chaired by Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee tonight decided to refer the ER division to the Cabinet. The meeting was attended by Mr LK Advani, Mr Fernandes and Mr Nitish Kumar. Mr Fernandes said a final collective decision on the matter would be taken at the Cabinet meeting scheduled for Tuesday.

Will the Cabinet "review" the matter? Mr Fernandes said: "Review is too big a word." He refused to elaborate. Mr Kumar reportedly made a detailed presentation at the meeting and stuck to his decision.

Nobody present at the meeting disagreed with the railway minister's logic, sources said. The move to refer the matter to the Cabinet is seen by many as a way to make it "a collective decision".

Over the last two days, Mr Fernandes and Mr Advani have been repeatedly saying that the decision on the new railway zones was "the Cabinet's decision and not taken by any individual".

Significantly, the meeting was held on the eve of the NDA meeting to discuss the Parliament agenda in the monsoon session. If Miss Banerjee agrees to lower her

Advani to link party, govt

NEW DELHI, July 13. — Mr LK Advani today said he would act as a link between the party and the government through regular interaction between party president Mr M Venkaiah Naidu and office-bearers. — SNS

■ Details on page 10

guns, she could argue at least for a face-saver, sources pointed out.

There was, however, no indication in the NDA on whether the Cabinet meeting would review its earlier decision and take a view that would satisfy Miss Banerjee's demand. The commitment made was merely for a reconsideration of the decision taken by the United Front government in 1996.

The NDA face-saver, even if perfunctory, has been given to allow Miss Banerjee a last chance to rethink on the matter, sources said. This would at least help the NDA even if she continued the "hard line." Till now the commitment made was merely for a discussion.

"Whatever is under dispute will be placed before the Cabinet at its next meeting. The Cabinet will take a decision on the matter," Mr Fernandes told reporters. He refused to divulge Mr Kumar's stand at the meeting. The railway minister said he had put forth his views and "it is up to the Cabinet to take the decision".

■ Trinamul steps up heat on ER, page 3

'ETHICAL DEFICIT' IN BUSINESSES DECRIED

PM calls for consensus on labour reforms

By Sushma Ramchandran

NEW DELHI, JULY 10. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today appealed to all major political parties to arrive at a consensus on labour reforms even as he looked forward to a 6 per cent growth rate in the economy this year. Speaking a few days before the start of the monsoon session of Parliament, he sought from them support in passing the agenda of crucial economic legislation.

Addressing a meeting of the Trade and Advisory Council, he declared that the Cabinet had decided to "vigorously pursue" labour reforms. With the report of the second National Labour Commission having been received, he urged political parties to arrive at a consensus so that appropriate legislation could be passed. "Above all, these long-delayed labour reforms will create more employment opportunities, thus fulfilling our shared objective of achieving growth with jobs".

He sought support for pass-



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, with the Union Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, at the Advisory Council meeting on Trade and Industries in New Delhi on Wednesday. — Photo: V.V. Krishnan

ing a host of bills apart from the Electricity Bill 2002 and the Petroleum Regulatory Board Bill 2002 considered by the Council at today's meeting. These included the Convergence Bill for Telecom and IT, the Competition Bill, the Patents Bill, the amendments to the Civil Procedure Code, the ordinance for securitisation and reconstruction of financial assets and enforce-

ment of security interests.

He told the Council, which includes corporate leaders like Ratan Tata, Kumaramangalam Birla, Sanjiv Goenka, Shashi Ruia and A.C. Muthaiah, that there had been a significant improvement in the economic situation over the past year. The GDP grew at 5.4 per cent last year and was expected to rise over 6 per cent this year. He

stressed on the "unprecedented price stability" with inflation at a low of two per cent. Forex reserves had risen to \$58 billion, which provided over 13 months of import cover, the highest for any country except China.

Mr. Vajpayee expressed confidence that the economy would further prosper in the "able hands" of the new Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, and assured industry that the Government would respond to its concerns. Despite the situation on the borders, neither the pace of economic reforms nor implementation of key infrastructure projects had slowed in any way.

On the role of corporates, he said industry and the economy must rise to their full potential. It was not enough for the Government to carry out reforms. "Businesses too must reform themselves". The principle of good corporate governance was the touchstone of industry's commitment to reforms.

Referring to the accounting scandals unfolding in other parts of the world in companies like Enron, Worldcom and Xerox, he said people were beginning to worry about the bombshells hidden in the boomtime economy. People's faith in economic liberalisation should not be shaken by those who did business with an "ethical deficit", he said.

PSU disinvestment

Outlining the Government's future agenda, he said the disinvestment of Public Sector Undertakings would be further accelerated barring strategic sectors as the returns had exceeded the most optimistic expectations and appreciably increased the value of PSU equities. Fears on security of employment after disinvestment had been shown to be without foundation, he said.

On the infrastructure sector, he said a big initiative would soon be launched to modernise the Railways just as the highway network was being rapidly changed.

At the outset, Mr. Vajpayee made a reference to the demise of Dhirubhai Ambani, an "outstanding entrepreneur" who inspired many Indians to translate their dreams into reality.

No interim budget: Jaswant

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 10. In the backdrop of speculation over possible tax sops being extended to the salaried class, the Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, today ruled out the prospect of an interim budget. At the same time, he said "some proposals" would be made to cheer the consumer and expand the economy. "Unless the consumer consumes, how can the economy expand," he said.

Speaking after a meeting of the Trade and Industry Advisory Council, Mr. Singh hinted at steps to boost consumer spending, but these may not necessarily mean a review of budgetary measures which had reduced the scope of tax concessions. Rising revenue collections and the new Finance Minister's comments about the need to put more money in the consumers' hands on taking charge of his portfolio had fuelled expectations about such moves.

He responded positively, however, to industry's demand for a review of the ordinance to deal with the huge non-performing assets of banks and financial institutions. The ordinance had been criticised by leading chambers like the Confederation of Indian Industry and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry, which felt that it went against the norms of natural justice by not distinguishing between wilful and non-wilful defaulters.

He said a 'relook' would be taken at the ordinance as the Government's intention was not "expropriatory." The aim was that the borrower

should honour his borrowings and the lenders' dues should go back to the lender. The ordinance would not be revoked but changes could be made while converting it into a bill, he said.

The meeting, attended by leading industrialists, was largely meant to consider the two critical legislation in the electricity and petroleum sector on which presentations were made by the Petroleum Minister, Ram Naik, and the Power Minister, Suresh Prabhu. The Electricity Bill 2002 aims to restructure the power sector to make it commercially viable, while the Petroleum Regulatory Board Bill 2002 is to enable the creation of a regulator for the petroleum sector after dismantling of the administered pricing mechanism.

While promising more steps to promote better corporate governance in the light of major financial scandals like those of Enron, Worldcom and Xerox, he noted that the job of the Finance Minister was that of a facilitator rather than a policeman. Speaking to the media after the meeting, Mr. Prabhu said the Electricity Bill would allow the generator to sell power directly to the bulk consumer. He clarified that the bill would be discussed in depth by the Cabinet after being considered by the parliamentary standing committee. Mr. Naik said the common carrier pipeline had been an issue of concern in which the owner had the first preference and the surplus capacity would be allowed to be given to others. The rates would be decided by the proposed Petroleum Regulatory Board to be set up under the bill, he said.

Advani set to secure more powers

Aloke Tikku in New Delhi

July 8. — The Centre is planning to bring the National Security Council under Mr LK Advani. The Deputy Prime Minister was reportedly keen to take charge of the Council, as it would allow him to take an overall view of the security situation.

Mr Advani held a discussion on the proposed transfer of the NSC with Cabinet secretary Mr TSR Prasad last week, a home ministry official said. There was no word, however, on whether there would be a change of guard in the council if Mr Advani takes charge. The principal secretary to the Prime Minister, Mr Brajesh Mishra, holds additional charge as the national security adviser. The Kargil Review Committee is opposed to Mr Mishra holding two posts and suggests this could only be an "interim arrangement".

The NSC originally functioned under the Cabinet Secretariat but was attached to the Prime Minister's Office about four months ago. The transfer followed arguments that since the council was basically servicing the national security adviser, it would be fitting to bring it under the PMO.

Bringing the NSC under the Deputy Prime Minister, who also holds charge of the home ministry, could make some difference in

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ADVANI

(Continued from page 1)

the council's role, specially in chalking out the strategy to deal with the proxy war in J&K, security of the region and increasing terror threats. As it is, the home ministry is strengthening the Intelligence set-up.

"The committee believes that there must be a full time national security adviser and it would suggest that a second line of personnel be inducted into the system as early as possible and groomed for higher responsibility," the report had said.

It is not clear if Mr Mishra would like to continue holding the post of the national security adviser and, if the proposed transfer comes through, Mr Advani would like him to continue. If the proposed transfer is not scuttled half way through, that possibility exists.

The VP Singh and Narasimha Rao governments tried to constitute the NSC as an effective instrument of security decision-making, but plans were scuttled by the bureaucracy

9 JUL 2002

THE STATESMAN

Nitish may quit if PM gives in to Mamata

Devesh Kumar

NEW DELHI 7 JULY

THE controversy over the readjustment of territorial jurisdiction of the Eastern Railway looks set to deepen amid indications that the railway minister, Nitish Kumar, may prefer to quit if the Centre gives in to pressure from West Bengal for a review of the decision on new rail zones.

Indications that the railway minister may quit came from sources close to him even as West Bengal politicians stepped up their pressure on the Centre for a rollback of the Railway Board's decision on zones. West Bengal chief minister, Buddhadev Bhattacharya, had on Saturday met deputy PM L.K. Advani, to demand that the matter be referred to a panel of experts. Mr Advani, it is learnt,



MAMATA: RAIL RALLY

conveyed the demand to Mr Kumar. Though what emerged is not known, the subsequent comments of Mr Kumar were enough of a hint that he is in no mood for a review or, for that matter, any intervention that

may curb his scheme.

Mr Kumar, who was at Jaipur, made two points. First, that the decision was taken by the members of the Railway Board whose expertise cannot be rivalled by the experts that

Mr Bhattacharya may have in his mind.

Secondly, he said, referring the matter to any panel after it was cleared by the Railway Board will be like putting the bogies before the engine. Besides, political fallout of the review should also be a strong consideration with Mr Kumar. The issue has galvanised public opinion in Bihar with political parties buying their differences to come together on a common platform. Mr Kumar must be worried about the consequences that any backtracking will have.

A few days ago, the Bihar Legislative Council followed the state Assembly to pass a unanimous resolution lauding the minister and warning the Centre against any back-peddling on merging the Dhanbad and Mughalsarai divisions into the East Central Railway.

JUL 2002

THE STATESMAN

Advani will take up ER bifurcation issue with PM

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: In an attempt to resolve the impasse between West Bengal political parties and the railway ministry over the eastern railway bifurcation issue, home minister L.K. Advani has decided to discuss the issue with Prime Minister Vajpayee.

Both the CPM and Trinamul Congress—bitter opponents in Bengal politics—have opposed railway minister Nitish Kumar's decision to create five new railway zones which they feel will affect the state's interests.

Bengal chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharya on Saturday met Mr Advani and requested him for the appointment of an expert committee to re-examine the bifurcation issue. He felt that until then, the railway ministry's notification for creating five new zones



A.B. Vajpayee L.K. Advani

should be kept in abeyance.

"It is not a simple problem between two states, re-organisation of railway zones will allow the parochial forces to take advantage of the situation," he said, insisting that he was for friendly ties with Bihar.

Mr Advani told reporters that he had called the chief minister to discuss the issue and said he would apprise Mr Vajpayee of all the aspects of the problem. The stand-off between Bihar and Bengal over the issue has assumed the dimensions of a confrontation with Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee making it a prestige issue.

Both the CPM and the Trinamul Congress have opposed railway minister Nitish Kumar's decision to create 5 new railway zones which will affect W. Bengal's interests

The CPM politburo, which was in session, termed the railway ministry's move as "unilateral and ad hoc" and demanded that a meeting of the interstate council be immediately convened to discuss the issue. Many states would face problems because of the railway ministry's decision, party leader Sitaram Yechury said. However, de-

spite this opposition, Nitish Kumar went ahead with formalising five more new railway zones, in addition to the two that the ministry notified last month.

On Saturday, the ministry made public the notification issued a couple of days earlier formalising five more new zones: North Central headquartered at Allahabad, East Coast at Bhubaneswar, West Central at Jabalpur, South West at Hubli and South East Central at Bilaspur zone. The decision for these new zones were taken by the Union cabinet in 1996 and 1998.

In the first notification (apart from the North West zone at Jaipur), a new East Central zone with headquarters at Hajipur in Bihar was carved out with three divisions of the Kolkata-based Eastern Railway going to the new zone.

7 JUL 2002

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Vajpayee in no hurry to decide

Vinod Sharma
New Delhi, July 5

THE BIHAR-West Bengal dispute over territorial reorganisation of Eastern Railway cannot be resolved without Prime Minister Vajpayee's intervention. But indications are the PM isn't inclined to act in a hurry on the issue having its genesis in a Cabinet decision.

In some ways, the dispute explains why Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee was so keen to wrest the Railways portfolio from the Samata Party's Nitish Kumar or at least have him divested of the charge. The Prime Minister's predicament is that he isn't in a position to please both sides.

With the warring lobbies unwilling to back down from their stated positions, even the



Atal Bihari Vajpayee
Nonchalant

option of referring the matter to an experts' panel or a Group of Ministers cannot be exercised without inviting a backlash in Bihar and Jharkhand.

The tough public posturing by the Railways Minister and his predecessor, Mamata, are aimed at identifying with parochial feelings they have themselves ignited to serve their respective political interests. But this is not to suggest that the debate hasn't thrown up issues requiring serious consideration.

The Railways are perceived to be an engine of economic growth. For this reason, West Bengal is unwilling to forego possession of the rail assets, on some of which Bihar could have a legitimate claim.

In fact, Nitish had explained the rationale behind rail reorganisation in some detail in his reply last month to a letter received from West Bengal CM Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee. "(In its present form) it's a heavily worked railway with a

large geographical spread", Nitish had written.

The Minister sought to allay West Bengal's fears of dislocation of Eastern Railway employees to the Hajipur-based East Central Railway. "For transfer and posting to the new zonal headquarters, staff will move on the basis of their options from various railways," Nitish wrote.

However, the counter view, articulated by noted economist and Trinamool leader Nitish Sengupta, is that the reorganisation plan was opposed by the Rakesh Mohan Committee which studied the rail system. Also, the new zones were bound to cause serious economic dislocation by disturbing the network patterned on the concept of port cities, industrial belts and the hinterland.

Emotions & egos at stake

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 5

THE CASE for the Railways' territorial reorganisation can be argued either way. And that's what politicians from Bihar and West Bengal are doing these days. Of course, the danger of the volatile issue unleashing chauvinistic sentiments across the country isn't lost on anyone.

The formalisation of seven new railway zones, announced between 1996 and 1998, entails carving out administrative domains from the existing nine. The exercise could be as painful as the reorganisation of states, and has the potential to stoke emotions comparable with the post-Mandal flare-up.

Rail Bhawan officials say the Railways' plans are backed by the H D Deve Gowda cabinet's decision to carve out six additional zones headquartered at

Hajipur (East Central), Bhubaneswar (East Coast), Allahabad (North Central), Jaipur (North Western), Hubli (South Western) and Jabalpur (West Central). Two years later, a zone at Bilaspur was added to the original list.

At the centre of the dispute now is the Railways' June 14, 2002 notification to operationalise the Hajipur- and Jaipur-based East Central and North-Western Railways. The Trinamool and the Left are livid because the Hajipur zone would now control the Danapur, Mughalsarai and the lucrative Dhanbad divisions of the Kolkata-based Eastern Railway.

The Bengal lobby, while predicting a crippling blow to Eastern Railway's already poor financial health, has given its case an emotive spin by claiming that state-centric zones could destroy the Railways' national unification role.

But their main worry is the inevitable dislocation of a large number of Railway employees and the impact on their respective constituencies.

But the Trinamool and the Left, including the CPI, which was a partner in the UF Government, have woken up to the problem rather late. Any reversal of the reorganisation plan now is bound to stir up states that stand to benefit from the move, which, if executed, would simultaneously sanctify eight new railway divisions.

"Why didn't Mamata protest earlier or had the move reversed when she was Railway Minister," is the common Bihar refrain. It is also pointed out that under the new dispensation, not even an inch of railway track in Bengal would be controlled from Hajipur.

It's clear that by giving in to pressure from the Bengal lobby, the Centre could end up



Mamata Banerjee
Derailed aspirations

opening a Pandora's box where the ongoing inter-state tussle could spill over to other sectors. DVC and Coal India are headquartered in Kolkata but their operational bases are in Jharkhand, which is backing the Hajipur zone.

With emotions running high, nobody is willing to guess from where the Railways would secure the Rs 3,500-4,000 crore needed for the zonal ventures.

GoM PLANS Rs 2,000-CRORE OUTLAY

Blueprint for developed status

Srinjoy Chowdhury in New Delhi

July 4. – Can India become a developed nation like the G-8 countries? The Centre thinks it can. It has constituted a Group of Ministers to take “India towards full-developed nation status”, and about Rs 2,000 crore may be allotted during the Tenth Five-Year Plan (2002-07) as start-up funds.

The report to the eight-member GoM headed by HRD minister Dr Murli Manohar Joshi says the Centre wants “India to become a fully developed country in the fullest sense of the term ... in the shortest possible time”. This requires selection of the right technology and its judicious development. Around Rs 2,000 crore of government funds, and later, funds from “stakeholders”, will be made available “for the Tenth Plan period to fill crucial gaps and develop viable synergies”.

These technologies, the GoM says, will create national wealth, improve quality of life in rural areas and enhance national security.

Like the Technology Missions of the '80s, the new “India Millennium Missions” will concentrate on specific areas. These include rural development; energy, health & water security; environmental security; safety & disaster preparedness; incubation centres for supporting small and medium industries; national security; development of advanced manufacturing technology and upgradation of indigenous technology. “Technology foresight” is the focus, the GoM report said.

■ The rural development mission will evaluate

food security and processing. It will ensure villages develop properly and “urbanisation” models are prepared. Efforts are on to develop technology for rural use and evolve traditional rural technologies.

■ The energy, health and water security mission aims to create a national energy map, evolve new energy technologies such as fuel cells, hydrogen gas hydrates, mini-gas turbines and clean energy technology. For health- and water-related issues, there are

plans to emphasise traditional and alternate systems of medicine and better water management.

■ The environment security mission looks at waste management. It aims to develop S&T solutions to implement environmental security problems not only at local levels but also policy levels. Data management may be stressed.

■ Another mission will aim to ensure more safety for people during cyclones, earthquakes and floods. It will try to ensure our transport systems are safer and number of accidents lessen.

■ “Incubation centres for supporting small and medium industries” have been planned.

These include units making herbal, metallurgical and knowledge-intensive products.

■ There are missions to improve national security through new technology and to upgrade R&D facilities. One or two more missions may be added.

Though most of the coordination will be carried out by the office of the principal scientific adviser, the GoM includes Cabinet ministers of HRD, defence, I&B, commerce & industry, power and finance. The Planning Commission is also involved.

Jaswant Singh began his stint in North Block making clear his priorities. His job, he said, was not that of a ‘policeman’. Instead, he would try to ensure food for all and more money in the hands of people; raise investor confidence levels and living standards

See Business Standard I

5 JUL 2002

THE STATESMAN

MAMATA STICKS TO STAND; BENGAL MPS PROTEST

Nitish rules out review of decision to bifurcate E. Rly.

By Vinay Kumar
and K. V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, JULY 3. The post-Cabinet expansion blues continue to bedevil the Vajpayee Government, as the Trinamool Congress — partner in the ruling National Democratic Alliance — remains insistent on picking up a quarrel over bifurcation of the Eastern Railway.

The battle spilled over to a meeting of the Parliamentary Committee on the Railways today with the Trinamool MPs, along with those of the Left Front, staging a walkout. The issue of the Eastern Railway being deprived of its money-minting divisions, which have been attached to the newly-created Hajipur headquarters of the East Central Zone, threatens to snowball into a no-holds-barred "Bihar versus Bengal" fight.

The Trinamool Congress leader, Mamata Banerjee, has linked the issue of reversing the decision to bifurcate the Eastern zone to her re-entry into the Union Cabinet. She has refused to join the Cabinet though the Vajpayee-Advani leadership apparently wanted to offer the Coal and Mines portfolio to her.

The development prompted the Railway Minister, Nitish Kumar, to call on the Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani,



this evening and explain what was behind the creation of new zones. Though the meeting prompted speculation of a review of the decision, Mr. Kumar firmly ruled out any such action. "There is no question of setting up any governmental group to look into the decision or undertake any kind of review. Not a single inch of West Bengal's territory is being taken away by this decision," Mr. Kumar told *The Hindu* after meeting Mr. Advani.

In his recent letter to the West Bengal Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the Minister defended his decision, saying the move was not ill-advised operationally. "In fact, the revised jurisdictions have been made so as to provide smoother movement of traffic, as well as to provide better control, and improve efficiency of the sys-



tem," he said.

The walkout from the Parliamentary Consultative Committee meeting was staged by Basudeb Acharia and Anil Basu (CPI-M), Joachim Baxla (RSP) and Amar Roy Pradhan (AIFB), who demanded that the notification to set up the new zone be withdrawn and a committee of experts be set up to study the viability of carving out new zones. The Trinamool Congress leader, Sudip Bandopadhyay, demanded that Mr. Kumar "review" the decision and put it on hold until the task was complete.

Addressing a press conference, the Left Front MPs, including Nilotpal Basu and Hannan Mollah, said it was unfortunate that the issue was being turned into a "Bengal versus Bihar" affair. The Left was opposed to the creation of any

new zone and distressed at the manner the issue was taken up, as if it was an internal affair of the NDA.

The Left MPs insisted that they opposed the creation of new zones when Ram Vilas Paswan as Railway Minister brought it up in the United Front Government, which was supported by the Left parties. Their basic objection was on the ground of economic viability and incurring of additional expenditure when railway projects often suffered for lack of funds.

The MPs said that an all-party delegation from West Bengal would meet the Prime Minister and the Railway Minister next week to convey the feelings of the people of the State.

Addressing a separate press conference, Mr. Bandopadhyay wondered what prompted Mr. Kumar to notify a decision taken six years ago by a different Government.

He also took exception to the burning of effigies of Ms. Banerjee in Patna, saying that it was "in bad taste."

Both the Samata Party and the Trinamool Congress maintained officially that there was no communication between the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, and Ms. Banerjee today.

THE HINDU

3 JULY 2002

The cosmetic changes at the Centre are not of much importance

Who's in, who's out

9/29/04
5-12

That the recent shake-up in the Central government has gone hand in hand with a shake-out in the hierarchy of the dominant party in the ruling coalition is no accident. The two jobs — giving a facelift to a lacklustre regime and revamping a party feeling downbeat after the drubbing it took at the assembly polls in several states — were parts of the same operation. That the much-hyped event made little difference to the image of either of the two is an altogether different story.

That most of the changes involved members of the dominant partner in the National Democratic Alliance is no surprise either, since the whole exercise was designed as a largely Bharatiya Janata Party affair. The revelation by a series of state assembly elections of an erosion of the party's support base perturbed most members of the *sangh parivar*. There was growing nervousness in BJP circles even about the party's poor chances of retaining its present strength in the parliamentary elections due in 2004 if it did nothing to buck the current trend.

The one thing that the visible shrinking of the BJP's social base did was to give the hardliners in the *sangh parivar* the chance that they had been waiting for to vent their spleen on the Central government. They ascribed the decline in the BJP's fortunes to the loss of identity it suffered from shelving its *Hindutva* and *swadeshi* agendas. Since some of them were merely echoing the sentiments of the BJP's ideological mentor, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, the consternation over what had happened did much to bring about a change in the balance of power both in the BJP and the *sangh parivar* as a whole.

There is widespread scepticism in the country about the rationale of the changes in the government, except for using the occasion as an excuse for providing more ministerial berths to young aspirants in the BJP for a share of the spoils of office. As for the swapping of portfolios by Jaswant Singh and Yashwant Sinha, it makes no sense to make both forgo the advantage of the experience they had gained in their old ministries — the one in the complicated game on the diplomatic front in the wake of September 11 and the other in learning the hard way of the need to keep a more watchful eye on the shady goings-on in the financial sector and the many difficulties in implementing the new phase of economic reforms, particularly in a period of world-wide recession.

As for the rest, the exit of a few Tweedledums and the induction of many more Tweedledees matter little except to the losers or the winners. The size of the new government, said to be the largest in the republic's history so far, will by no means give it a more dynamic look. Nor will the induction of a new president, a new secretary and official spokesman remove the glitches in the party machine. M. Venkaiah Naidu and

4/7

Arun Jaitley may be more aggressive in selling the NDA policies to the public. But no hard-sell can make up for lack of policies which produce results.

This is not to say that things will remain much the same as they are now. The process of decay of the institutions of both state and civil society in the country has gone too far to be reversed by anything less than a new will to stem the rot and a determination to take the necessary corrective action in the teeth of opposition from any vested interest which feels threatened by it. Can a prime minister who is compelled

SHAMLAL

the *sangh parivar* cannot wish away the compulsions of coalition politics, they have already managed to put those leading the government on the defensive by cashing in on the BJP's discomfiture over its loss of face in several states and thus securing more room for manoeuvre for themselves in influencing the BJP's thinking on contentious issues. There are many straws in the wind showing a shift in the party's approach to problems, putting voices of moderation at a disadvantage.

The prime minister's own speech at Goa, quite contrary to the spirit of his



‘ The exit of a few Tweedledums and the induction of many more Tweedledees matter little except to the losers or the winners ’

to provide a ministerial berth to the only member of his party in parliament from Punjab summon the nerve to be so tough? The large number of allies he has to accommodate and the calculus of region, caste and ethnic affiliations he has to take into account all the time, make him vulnerable to pressure from a score of quarters. Is it surprising that his refusal to appease Mamata Banerjee in the recent government reshuffle has made headlines? Or that attempts are still being made to appease her and somehow repair the injury done to her ego?

The changes in the NDA government and in the party organization of the leading partner in the ruling alliance, cannot give either of them a new aura of moral authority in the prevailing circumstances. There was a lot of unseemly squabbling behind the scenes over the allocation of portfolios. And there is no dearth of discordant voices in the *sangh parivar* even today. Indeed the RSS mouthpiece never misses a chance of having a swipe at the government whenever a particular policy decision goes against the grain of the thinking of the *sarsanghchalak*.

Although the most fanatical among

Uttar Pradesh unit of the BJP.

The designation of Lal Krishna Advani as deputy prime minister under the new dispensation is being sold to the public as no more than a formalization of a ground reality and converting a *de facto* into a *de jure* position. Yet, this is only the less important aspect of the change. It invests the home minister, on the prime minister's own admission, with new responsibility. Indeed those who regard him as the person who will lead the BJP in the next parliamentary elections may prove to be in the right. Advani will certainly carry much greater weight than before in shaping both the government's as well as the party's policies.

How far three years in office as the second most important man in the government has tamed him and made him painfully conscious of the restraints an unwieldy ruling coalition imposes on the government remains to be seen. But the deputy prime minister is too realistic to miss the implications of the explosive situation in the subcontinent, the long-term risk involved in diverting more resources to defence at the cost of slowing down the rate of economic growth, starving the social services and letting the rundown infrastructure suffer further deterioration. Nor is he unaware of the forces released by the globalization process which are chipping away at the sovereignty of the nation-state.

There is no point, however, in giving much importance to the cosmetic changes in the government. What will matter in the end is its ability to formulate policies designed to produce better results by way of increasing the country's economic strength, improving its defence capabilities against both external and internal threats, developing its material and human resources, and avoiding recourse to evasion in the face of difficult questions. The public has been told, for instance, that mobilization along the borders with Pakistan will continue until October. This makes many wonder what happens if Pervez Musharraf fails to dismantle all terrorist camps by then as is quite likely. Will the mobilization continue or will New Delhi expect the United States of America to make sure that the Pakistan president does not wriggle out of his promise on one pretext or another?

Again, has the government a precise idea of the political and economic costs of continued mobilization? Has it taken into account the possibility that the role of the US as facilitator of a dialogue between the two hostile neighbours, even in the absence of any common ground on the Kashmir issue, can evolve into that of a mediator? Ironically, the changes in the government, which engaged the public for over a fortnight, have turned out to be another meaningless exercise, diverting everyone's attention from more important tasks at home and from problems which have for long defied a solution.

New look, but in numbers

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 1: Jaswant Singh and Yashwant Sinha swapped places and jaded glamour got a look-in as two has-been actors, Shatrughan Sinha and Vinod Khanna, entered Atal Bihari Vajpayee's team in ministerial changes the Prime Minister had touted as "major".

If the finance-external affair's exchange was as expected, surprise lay in store in Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee not coming into the Cabinet amid what appeared to be murky developments around her party. She did not attend the swearing-in either.

Vajpayee's eighth shuffle since October 1999, when this government came to power, involved 13 ministers — four of Cabinet rank, one minister of state with independent charge and eight ministers of state. A number of ministers of state have had their portfolios changed.

After handing over charge to M. Venkaiah Naidu at a ceremony complete with sweets and a makeshift crown in the form of a colourful *pagri*, BJP president K. Jana Krishnamurthi, a lawyer, slips into the chair vacated by Arun Jaitley in the law ministry.

Talking of pacifiers, a long-standing malcontent — Delhi BJP leader Sahib Singh Verma — received the fruit of his labours when he was rewarded with the labour ministry, from which Sharad Yadav shuffles out to consumer affairs, food and public distribution, held so far by Shanta Kumar who moves to rural development.

Shatrughan Sinha did not campaign in Uttar Pradesh because he was not given a place in the political limelight, a grievance that has been redressed by handing him charge of the nation's health and family welfare.

His Bollywood mate Vinod Khanna hasn't been as lucky and gets only minister of state status in tourism and culture, befittingly for a party that equates the last with the Mumbai film world.

The Shiv Sena's Balasaheb Vikhe Patil is the fourth minister to be bestowed Cabinet rank, but his was a case of promotion from minister of state to full charge in the heavy industry department vacated by Manohar Joshi who became the Speaker.

Tamil Nadu's PMK party re-entered the ministry with N.T. Shanmugham and A.K. Murthy.

After today's changes, the strength of the council of ministers goes up to 78.

No other Cabinet shuffle in recent memory has provoked such high tension as the one carried out today. As speculation raged for the last three weeks, the interplay of pressures and counter-pressures and open bargaining were there for all to see.

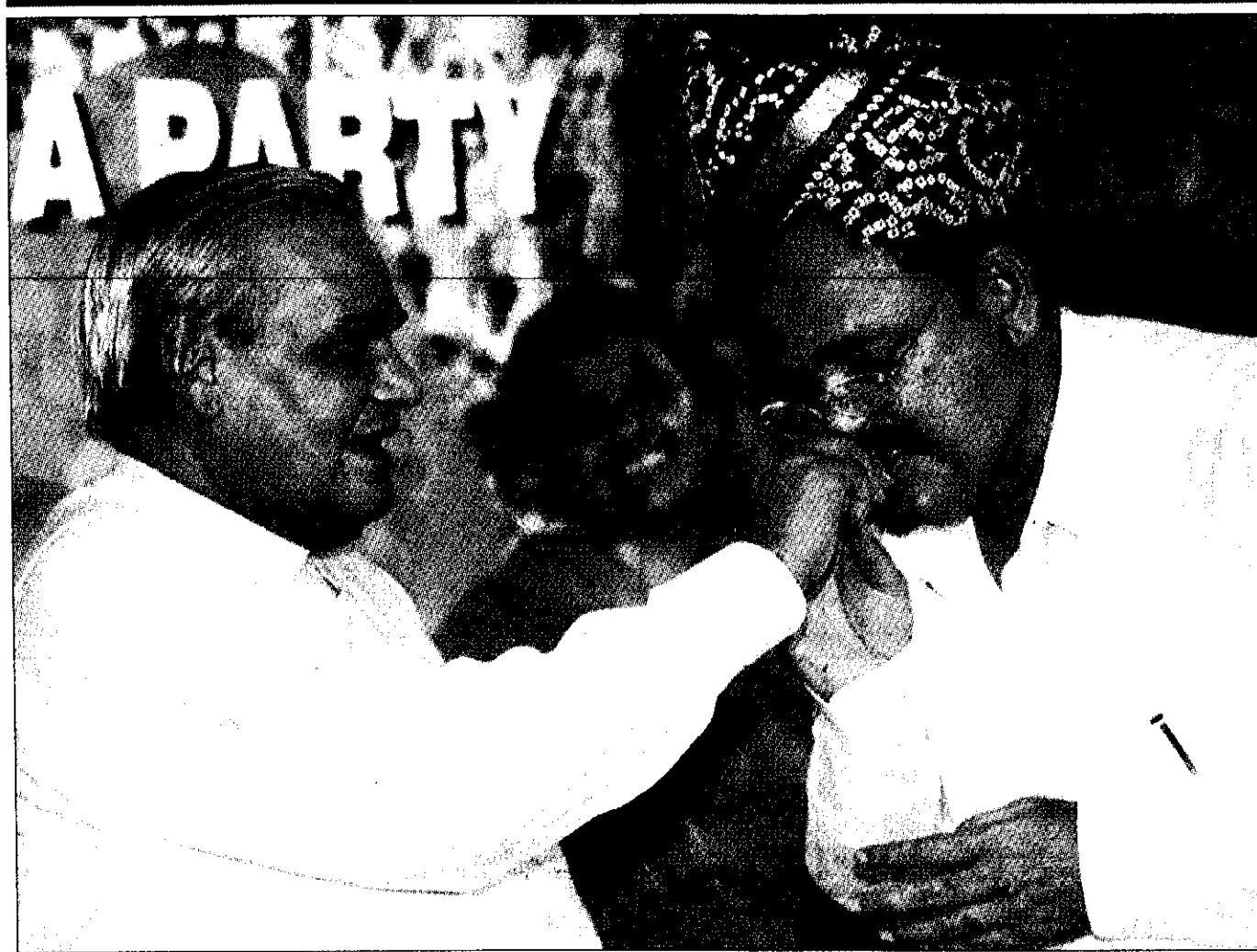
What gave it an extra dimension was the Prime Minister's declaration that the BJP organisation, too, would be subject to an overhaul. But even this exercise had its share of unseemly moments when the incumbent party chief fought his ouster tooth and nail and there was a tug-of-war among the prospective successors.

What did the exercise achieve? Apart from reasserting L.K. Advani's supremacy in the BJP and making his position as the number two in the government formal, it did little to encourage the idea that the Cabinet was being given a new look.

Krishnamurthi was elbowed out because he was not good enough to run the party, but was found competent to head a crucial ministry like law. Verma was blamed widely for the BJP's debacle in the Delhi civic polls.

The labour department has had two ministers, Satya Narain Jatiya and Sharad Yadav, who

BITE NOT THE HAND THAT FEEDS YOU



EMBRYONIC LINK: Atal Bihari Vajpayee feeds sweets to new BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu. (Reuters)

were shown the door for not being "committed" enough to labour reforms. Verma's preference for populist politics is well known. Would the leadership expect him to do a volte-face and fall in with the reforms proposed in labour laws, with the Assembly polls round the corner?

The shuffle was to prune

Bihar's "over-representation", but the opposite happened. The external affairs ministry will now have two Bihar ministers, Yashwant and Digvijay Singh. Omar Abdullah continues as the second minister of state.

The only Cabinet minister from Bihar to be dropped, C.P. Thakur, was replaced with Sha-

trughan. At the level of minister of state, the loss of one Bihar minister, Munni Lal, was made up with two inductions — Nikhil Choudhary and Sanjay Paswan.

If anything, there was apprehension in the BJP that the "positive" spin-offs of foreign policy could get undermined with Jaswant's shift. There was an undercurrent of resentment that Yashwant, held responsible by a large section of the BJP for alienating its middle-class support with his taxation measures, was "rewarded" with an equally weighty portfolio for his alleged incompetence and bungling.

■ See Pages 6 & 8, Business Telegraph and Backpage

Mamata smells twin split plots

FROM KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, July 1: Derailed by railway minister Nitish Kumar, a furious Mamata Banerjee today spoiled A.B. Vajpayee's show by her absence from the swearing-in ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

With Kumar going ahead with plans to bifurcate Eastern Railway, Mamata insisted that the railway portfolio be taken out of the hands of the Samata Party.

She was also miffed with NDA convener George Fernandes, her one-time mentor, for siding with his party colleague from Bihar. "George behaved as parallel Prime Minister, while Kumar thought he was the home minister," a source close to Mamata quoted her as saying.

Mamata's grouse was not just that she did not get railway. She also felt that the BJP was trying to split her party.

Sources said she was peeved with parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan. The Mamata camp believed that Mahajan had tried to offer a berth to party spokesperson Sudip Bandopadhyay in an attempt to split the Trinamul Congress. Bandopadhyay reported the matter to Mamata.

Sources said Mamata was "livid" at Mahajan's offer and snapped at him with a poser: "Who are you to decide?"

However, both Prime Minister Vajpayee and deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani said efforts will be made to persuade Mamata to join the government.

Sources close to Advani said

the ministry of coal and mines, vacated by Ram Vilas Paswan and now with Advani, will be kept warm for Mamata. However, she had rejected both coal and mines and rural development.

At Rashtrapati Bhavan, Vajpayee did not rule out the possibility of the Trinamul leader re-joining the Cabinet. But he added that there would be no big shuffle in the near future.

Asked whether Mamata was sulking, a smiling Vajpayee said: "Mamata kya, Samata to hai." Vajpayee dodged a question on what portfolio he had in mind for Mamata, but President K.R. Narayanan, seated by the Prime Minister's side, said: "That's a difficult question."

Mamata is understood to have told Vajpayee that if he could not give her the railway ministry, she would have no problem in joining the Cabinet as a minister without portfolio. But at no cost should railway remain with the Samata, she said.

But Trinamul debunked suggestions that Mamata insisted on the railway berth. The party said her main concern was the move to split Eastern Railway. She wrote to the Prime Minister this evening, urging him to stop Kumar. Vajpayee, the sources said, assured her that he would look into her demand.

"It is incorrect to state that she was adamant on getting the railway portfolio. She had spoken to the Prime Minister and Fernandes on several occasions since yesterday to stop the bifurcation," Bandopadhyay said.

■ Full ministry list on Page 8

Advani rules out rivalry

'PM is not grooming me for the top job'

New Delhi, June 30

L K ADVANI today dismissed the probability of rival power centres emerging in the NDA Government following his elevation and rejected any repetition of past experience when Deputy PMs "did not get along" with the Prime Minister.

Brushing aside a second power centre, Advani said he and Vajpayee had been working together for 50 years and there had been no tiffs. "Those who talk of these power centres...you see their reports saying that this conspiracy to make Advani Deputy PM has died a premature death. What kind of stories are these, written only a day or two ago?" he asked.

On whether a way was being paved for a smooth transition in the NDA for leadership, he shot back, "I don't think there was any problem in the NDA on issues of this kind."

To a question whether his elevation sent new signals to politics in the country, Advani said, "Frankly, this question only the Prime Minister can reply precisely and comprehensively. So far as I am concerned, I feel grateful to him as well as to the alliance parties in the NDA for having done this," he said. About an earlier statement that he did not favour the Deputy Prime Minister's post, Advani said he "could not have" said this.

"The Prime Minister conceived this a couple of months ago in the third week of April or so. He asked George to sound all NDA parties because he was thinking of this. He had planned to do it at the time of

reshuffle," he said. Advani added that only three days back on June 27 Vajpayee spoke to him about this for the first time.

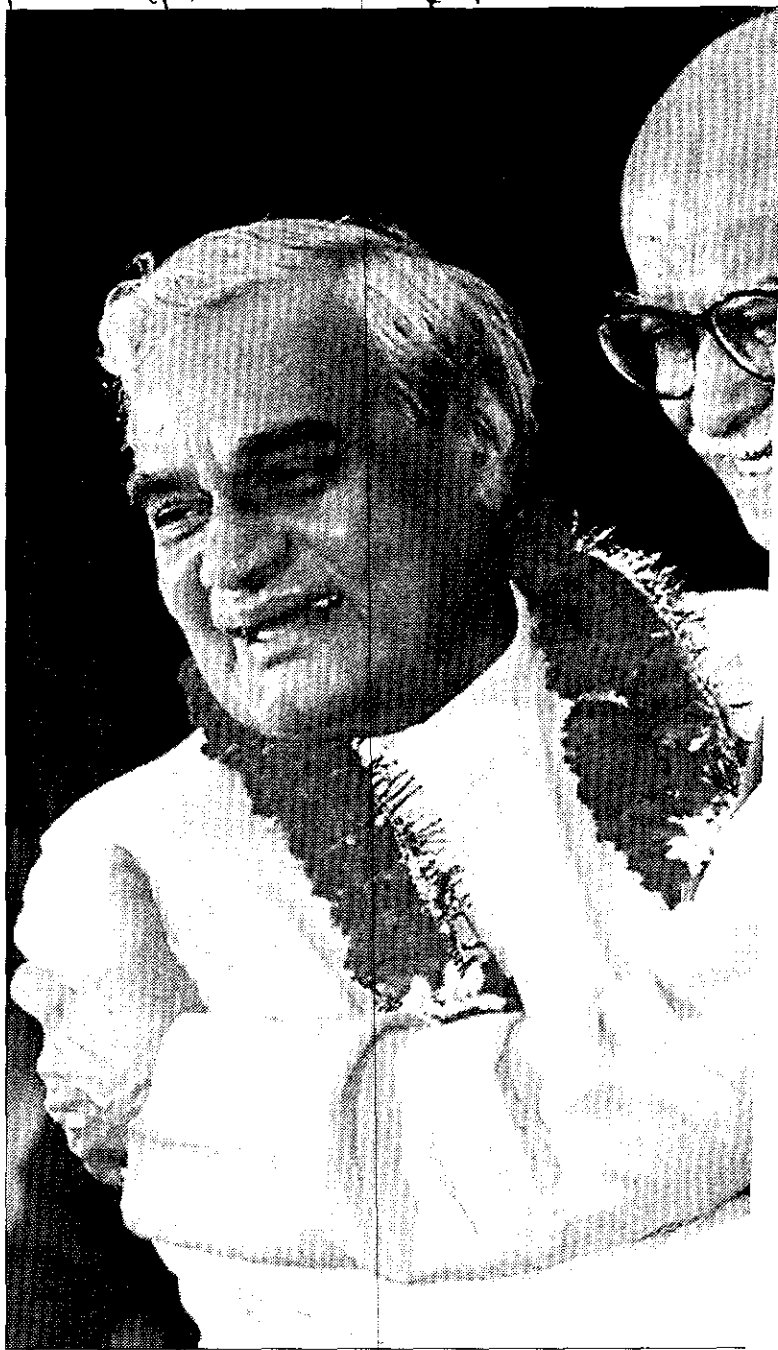
He said his elevation by itself was not going to change his "actual tasks" in the Government. "It is the Prime Minister, in his own inimitable style, debunking all stories circulated about differences between him and me," he said.

To a question on whether Vajpayee was grooming him to be the next Prime Minister, Advani laughed saying, "If a person grooms someone for this purpose then he does it of a person who is much younger, not someone who is in his 70s. I am 75 and he is 77. We would like to groom the younger generation."

Advani said when Vajpayee mentioned about this to him, he said the country would like him (Vajpayee) to lead the nation for many more years. "I am sure he will not disappoint me," he said.

Meanwhile, Advani's elevation as Deputy Prime Minister today received approval of all key NDA allies and AIADMK chief Jayalalithaa.

TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu called Advani and told him that with his (Advani's) vast experience as "an able administrator and a veteran parliamentarian, he would prove to be one of the most successful deputy prime ministers of the country." Jayalalitha, the first non-NDA leader to welcome Advani's elevation, wished him many more years of service to the nation and success in all his activities.



PTI A file photograph of LK Advani embracing Atal Bihari Vajpayee after succeed

Dy PM careful not to exceed brief

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, June 30

L K ADVANI, who was appointed the country's seventh Deputy Prime Minister yesterday, has asked Cabinet Secretary T R Prasad to update him on how his predecessors in the post functioned within the ambit of the Rules of Business.

Advani, who still holds the Home portfolio, asked Prasad to dig out past records because the new post given to him has no constitutional force. Advani's move, sources said, is only to ensure that he functions within rules. His objective in seeking the Cabinet Secretary's advice is to post himself on past precedence.

Old files and Rules of Business contain "valuable" guide-

lines. They would give Advani an idea about how the Rules of Business have changed over the years, especially when ministries were merged or leaders appointed as Deputy PM.

Meanwhile, in an interview to a private television channel, Advani scoffed at reports that his elevation as Deputy PM was a move to succeed Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. "It should not be seen as paving the way for a successor to Vajpayee as both of us are of the same age group. It is the party's view that Vajpayee should lead the BJP in the next general elections too," he said.

Advani said he felt the appointment might have been made with a view to dispelling any rumours in the media about differences with Vajpayee.

When asked whether his appointment will find favour with NDA allies given his hardline image, he said he had been working with the allies for over four years. "I have been accepted by them and no new situation will arise as a result of this appointment, which was made after due consultation with the allies," he asserted.

A day after his elevation as Deputy PM, Advani received a slew of congratulatory messages. Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J Jayalalithaa wished him "many more years of good health and service to the nation and success in all his activities". Railways Minister Nitish Kumar said Advani's elevation was a welcome step. Haryana Chief Minister and Indian National Lok Dal chief Om

Prakash Chautala also called on Advani today to congratulate him.

Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi and all MPs from the State also sent in their congratulatory messages. Describing Advani's appointment as an "honour" for Gujarat, Modi said after Sardar Ballabh Patel and Morarjee Desai, Advani was the third person from the State to be made Deputy PM.

The RSS did not see the need to comment on Advani's appointment, but the organisation's media coordinator Kishore Kant said at Kurukshetra that it was for the PM to decide which portfolio should be allocated to whom and this was not an issue that demanded any reaction.

with Atal



ing the latter as party president in 1996.

AFP

Thakur loyalists attack Patna office

Patna, June 30

HOURS BEFORE C P Thakur resigned as Union Health and Family Welfare Minister, about 100 of his supporters ransacked the Bihar BJP office in Patna on Sunday, provoked by rumours that their leader had been sacked.

The slogan-shouting supporters of Thakur invaded the party office in the afternoon and destroyed the furniture and other belongings, BJP office sources here said.

Thakur condemned the violence. "I have heard through the TV channels about hooliganism in the BJP office at Patna. Such incidence is highly condemnable," he said. Saying that party was above any individual, Thakur said, "I appeal to all to desist from such acts. Whatever party decides

should be honoured".

Thakur's supporters, however, accused the State party leadership of conniving with forces opposed to Thakur and launching a campaign for his ouster from the Central Cabinet. After ransacking the party office, they went to the Patna station junction and tried to stall movement of trains.

Sources at the Patna GRP confirmed that the protesters tried to disrupt movement of trains. Security has been tightened in and around the Patna junction to prevent disruption of trains. Thakur's supporters reached the junction just after Railway Minister, Nitish Kumar, had left after inaugurating a new look Patna junction and flagging off the Patna-Indore Weekly Express.

PTI

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Crown brings Advani closer to Atal

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, June 29: India has a deputy Prime Minister — Lal Krishna Advani.

More than half-a-century after Jawaharlal Nehru chose Sardar Vallabhai Patel as India's first deputy Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee tonight handed the No. 2 crown to his most powerful colleague who many consider the political heir to the Iron Man of India.

The first words of Advani as deputy Prime Minister reflected

his eagerness to set at rest speculation that his elevation signalled a powershift. "I am extremely grateful to the Prime Minister and all those parties in the NDA which had wholly supported my being made deputy Prime Minister," he told PTI shortly after a Rashtrapati Bhavan communique announced his new designation.

Advani, who will continue to look after the home portfolio, is the seventh deputy Prime Minister of the country, joining the ranks of Patel, Morarji Desai, Jagjivan Ram, Charan Singh, Y.B. Chavan and Devi Lal. Of

them, Desai and Singh went on to become Prime Ministers.

Advani's promotion capped a series of decisions that will set in motion the biggest shake up in the Union government and the B.P. since Vajpayee took over as Prime Minister.

After discussions through the day, M. Venkaiah Naidu emerged as the favourite to succeed BJP president Jana Krishna murthi, who is expected to resign on Monday when the changes will be formally announced.

One of the grey areas clouding the exercise is who will replace finance minister Yash-

want Sinha as his exit seems certain now. The only concrete proposal to emerge was that Sinha would swap places with a reluctant Jaswant Singh, whose foreign policy management was trumpeted as the NDA government's biggest achievement.

But human resources development minister Murlidhar Manohar Joshi has opposed Sinha's transfer to the foreign ministry. If the swap formula falls through, Joshi could be considered for finance.

The decision to elevate Advani was taken after defence minister and NDA convener

George Fernandes told Vajpayee this morning that none of the allies objected to the proposal. Fernandes had mooted the proposal last week.

Disclosing that Vajpayee had discussed with him the issue of deputy prime ministership on Thursday, Advani said: "But when my colleague George Fernandes talked and took suggestions from other members of the NDA and when it was brought to my notice, I got the impression that some steps are being taken."

BJP sources stressed that the move should not be construed as a "dilution" of Vajpayee's au-

thority. But it was insinuated that the promotion legitimised the line of succession within the party and, in a sense, signalled who would lead the BJP in the 2004 elections.

Advani said there would be no change in his job profile but added that his responsibilities would increase.

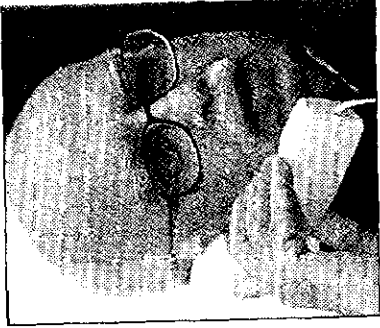
Besides Venkaiah Naidu, the other ministers who will return to the BJP headquarters are Arun Jaitley and Ananth Kumar. Both are likely to be inducted as general secretaries with Jaitley being given the additional charge of chief spokesman.

Rajnath Singh is also tipped to become a general secretary.

After talks involving Advani, Pramod Mahajan and Jaswant, Vajpayee has decided to induct former Gujarat chief minister Keshubhai Patel, Krishnamurthi and Shatrughan Sinha from the BJP and representatives of allies like the Trinamul Congress, the PMK, the MDMK and the Shiv Sena.

Patel and Krishnamurthi are slated to get Cabinet ranks while Shatrughan Sinha — who was sulking at being ignored — may be named minister of state.

■ See Page 6



Advani after being named deputy Prime Minister. (PTI)

THE TELEGRAPH

20 JUN 2001

Heart with FDI, head with naysayers

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, June 26: Among the first to call Sushma Swaraj just after she had announced that the print media was being thrown open to foreign capital was the editor of a Delhi-based newspaper. He congratulated her effusively.

Sushma was a little surprised because the daily was not only staunchly against any change in the media policy — it had successfully scuttled moves in the past — it was also actively lobbying within the government and had encouraged a Cabinet minister to nix the proposal in the bud.

But it is now clear that even if managements of some media companies have been stiffly against the entry of foreign investment, journalists working for their newspapers and magazines, almost across the board, have been wanting the opening-up. They anticipate more job opportunities and better pay packets.

Yesterday, almost every journalist quietly cheered Sushma's decision. The announcement by the financial daily, *Business Standard* that the *Financial Times* is likely to pick up a stake in the company, was welcomed, too. Journalists' associations, though, are unlikely to articulate the sentiment because their leaders' need for political posturing runs contrary to the interests of the profession.

So untrustworthy of their journalists were the companies opposed to foreign investment that they entrusted managers and not editorial personnel to lobby with the government. Journalists have more access in government than managers and every employer has used their networks at some time or the other to reach out to someone in the administration.

A Cabinet minister, aware of the intense lobbying against the move engineered by a leading media group, jokingly asked a journalist of the financial

daily from its stable: "Is your company's flag flying at half-mast?"

"I don't know about top floor (where the offices of the directors and proprietors of the company are situated)," the journalist replied. "But we are glad. Should have been done much earlier."

Journalists believe foreign investment will mean more resources for existing media companies and for new ones that may come in. This will intensify competition, forcing newspapers and magazines to improve quantity and quality. More pages to a newspaper should translate into more jobs.

In a joint statement, five editors said the new policy "gives the print media a more level playing field". The statement was signed by Aroon Purie (*India Today* group), Shekhar Gupta (*Indian Express*), T.N. Ninan (*Business Standard*), Narendra Mohan (*Dainik Jagran*) and Chandan Mitra (*The Pioneer*).

This morning, as journalists burned telephone wires trying to find out which

foreign companies were eager to get into the Indian market, most concluded that the opposition from some of the local media houses will not only peter out, but they may even use the new policy to expand business.

Among the foreign media companies that have some interest in India are Time Warner, Dow Jones and Pearson Plc (*Financial Times*). But it is unlikely alliances will be struck in a hurry. A non-resident Indian group based in London is also believed to be exploring the possibility of launching an Indian edition of the *International Herald Tribune*.

Journalists also celebrate the conditions imposed on foreign investment in the print media, chiefly, the rider that key editorial positions must be held by Indians.

Ironically, one media group that has been opposing foreign investment has a senior journalist in a responsible position in its flagship publication who is a US citizen.

PM begins talks on reshuffle

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JUNE 25. A crucial round of discussions began today between the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, and the Bharatiya Janata Party president, Jana Krishnamurthi, on revamping the party through the induction of some leaders who are currently in the Council of Ministers.

A decision on major changes in the party had been taken in April just before the Goa national executive committee meeting.

Mr. Advani had stated categorically at the executive on April 13 that "some people from the Government would go to the party and some in the party could go to the Government. The Prime Minister and the party president will discuss this and take a decision."

Major changes were expected in May, but for one reason or the other, these had been put off. Now the view among several party leaders is that these changes could take place in tandem with the proposed Cabinet re-shuffle by the Prime Minister.

The three or four Ministers whose names are being men-

tioned among those who may be asked to work in the party are Pramod Mahajan, Venkaiah Naidu, Sushma Swaraj and Arun Jaitley. But this will be contingent on the Prime Minister's thinking on a Cabinet reshuffle.

BJP leaders say that the entire exercise aims at giving the party

as well as the Government a new look, considered essential at a time when it has to prepare for the Assembly elections in 10 States next year and the Lok Sabha election the year after.

Official sources confirmed that the meeting at the Prime Minister's residence took place in several phases. After the ini-

tial meeting between Mr. Vajpayee, Mr. Advani and Mr. Krishnamurthi, Mr. Mahajan and the External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, joined in. Still later, the Samata Party leader and Defence Minister, George Fernandes, took part in the meeting. The consultations could spill over to tomorrow.

THE HINDU

26 JUN 2002

YASHWANT, UMA OPPOSE MOVE

Centre okays FDI in print media

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 25. — The Centre today allowed 26 per cent foreign direct investment in the news and current affairs sector and 74 per cent in the non-news category that includes technical, scientific and special journals, ignoring the opposition of some BJP ministers.

The liberal Mr Yashwant Sinha and hardliner Miss Uma Bharati opposed the proposal but apparently fell in line after the information and broadcasting minister clarified the government's position. Several other ministers, though reportedly opposed to the proposal, didn't speak against it for fear of rubbing the Prime Minister on the wrong side before the imminent ministry reshuffle.

Mrs Sushma Swaraj said certain safeguards would be taken before opening the news and current affairs to FDI. The decisions, however, don't apply to news agencies.

Though a foreign player would be allowed 26 per cent, an Indian shareholder in a firm with 26 per cent foreign equity would have more say in the company's affairs. Mrs Swaraj's ministry will have to clear the proposal of changing the holding pattern.

Editorial control, equally significantly, will remain in Indian hands. So, 75 per cent of the editorial staff will have to be Indian. All key posts (the government is yet to clarify these positions) will be held by Indians, including the editor's post. Three-fourths of the directors will have to be resident Indians.

For security reasons, the Centre will check the credentials of each foreign investor. I&B officials said the Foreign Investment Promotion Board's clearance would be required for FDIs and I&B ministry's for other foreign investments.

While Miss Bharati's opposition was expected, Mr Sinha's stand surprised many. He is the most aggressive spokesman of the government's liberalisation policy and had

opened up the insurance sector despite opposition from the RSS.

Some of his critics sought to know if his opposition was "genuine" or he was trying to impress the Sangh Parivar that was "instrumental" in making him finance minister. He was a champion of swadeshi before the BJP came to power.

Today, he spoke for about three minutes against the proposal and advocated safeguards, sources said. Miss Bharati spoke for five minutes and argued, like RSS's Swadeshi Jagran Manch, that allowing FDI in the

media could endanger India's.

The RSS deputy spokesperson, Mr Ram Madhav, said his outfit was surprised that those who advocated "unfettered liberalisation" and "berated us as retrograde" were opposing the move. "Suddenly those who attacked Indian culture have become great champions of Indian culture." The RSS, however, will make its stand clear after the Kurukshetra meeting in June-end.

Mrs Swaraj, who met several Cabinet officials yesterday evening, described the

FDI OKAYED:

(Continued from page 1)

decision as "very logical and timely". If FDI could be allowed in broadcasting, she argued, it should be allowed in the print media as well. She recalled that manufacturing was the first sector to be opened up. This was followed by the services sector. Now, it's the turn of the media.

On the Parivar's objections, the minister said certain members were present in the Cabinet and approved of the decision. On the possibility of raising the cap of 26 per cent in news and current affairs to 49 or 51 per cent, she said: "Let us see this first. One has to be careful about opening up after a total prohibition."

Defending the 26 per cent, significantly less than in broadcasting, she said different areas had to have different policies.

The BJP refused to comment on the decision, though its economic cell convener and member of the Prime Minister's economic advisory council, Mr Jagdish Shettigar, welcomed the move and suggested a regulatory mechanism to safeguard national interests. He argued that opening the print media to FDI would "improve the quality and ensure better services for working journalists". BJP spokesman Mr Sunil Shashtri said the party would come out with a detailed reaction tomorrow.

Opp reaction: The Congress and CPI condemned the decision. The CPI said the decision means that "views and news that aren't in tune with our national interests will find space in our print media... In the present international and national situation it'll be extremely harmful".

How much & where

■ 26 per cent FDI in news and current affairs publications but an Indian shareholder would have to have more than that

■ 74 per cent FDI in non-news and current affairs publications, primarily technical, scientific and speciality journals.

■ Three-fourths of the board of directors and staff have to be Indians

■ Key posts in the publication, including that of editor, would have to be held by Indians.

Turn to page 6

THE STATESMAN

25 JUN 2002

Cabinet to debate FDI ban in print media

Srinjoy Chowdhury in New Delhi

51-6 23/6

June 24. — For the second time in two months, a controversial proposal to partially lift the ban on foreign direct investment in the print media is likely to be placed before the Union Cabinet shortly.

The note regarding the FDI ban issue has already been circulated to Cabinet ministers ahead of the Cabinet meeting. The proposals this time appear to be very similar to the ones placed before the Cabinet on 24 April. The Information and Broadcasting ministry wanted FDI in technical, scientific and speciality magazines, periodicals and journals to be lifted. The FDI amount was fixed at 74 per cent as is the case now.

This proposal, the third after the one in October 2001 and April 2002, said implementation will be a continuous process not restricted to any prescribed time frame. The previous note had made similar prescriptions. The proposal argues a partial opening-up would be beneficial.

However the media and the political establishment remains strongly divided on the issue. The note quotes the standing committee on IT saying it favours publication of foreign, scientific and technical magazines, but many leading political parties oppose the decision while others favour it.

After the cabinet meeting on 24 April, Mr Pramod Mahajan, spoke about reconsidering the entire print media policy, and not just lifting the ban on scientific, technical and other speciality subjects. But this time around, there is no proposal to have FDI in news and current affairs publications.

Cabinet on CAT: The Centre's proposal to close down the Central Administrative Tribunal and their equivalents in the state is likely to be discussed by the Union Cabinet tomorrow.

The issue, which could affect thousands of cases of government officials, was on the agenda last week but could not be discussed because of lack of time. The Centre wishes to close down these tribunals for government officials, and transfer these cases to the High Courts or a forum attached to the High Courts. The decision has been on the anvil for a while, particularly after the L Chandrakumar case in the Supreme Court. The apex court said all tribunal cases should be moved to the High Courts and not directly to the Supreme Court.

Ordinance on recovery of debts: Mr KR Narayanan has promulgated an ordinance on the securitisation and reconstruction of financial assets and enforcement of security interest. This will allow banks and financial institutions to recover their debts from defaulters without major problems. The Ordinance is based on the recommendations of the Narasimham Committee and the Andhyarujina Committee reports. These reports called for a new law for regulation of securitisation and reconstruction of financial assets. While debt recoveries have gone up to Rs 2,153 crores during 2001-02, from Rs 1,185 crores the year before, there is still Rs 1,10,000 crores waiting to be recovered.

The Union budget is only four times the debt waiting to be recovered. So, the Centre and the RBI have advised banks and financial institutions to recover dues by evolving and implementing a policy through the Settlement Advisory Committee. The banks have been advised to use Lok Adalats to settle disputes. The Cabinet had cleared the policy on 18 June.

FILED IN THE MA...

25 JUN 2002

GOVT NOT CONSIDERING APHC PROPOSALS'

Fernandes says he was misquoted

Statesman News Service

JAMMU/ NEW DELHI, June 21. — Mr George Fernandes categorically said today that the Centre was not considering any proposal made by the Hurriyat Conference. This was in sharp contrast to the defence minister's statement yesterday that the Centre would look into Hurriyat's proposals. He had said so at the inaugural function of Kashmir Vision 2020 in Srinagar.

"I was misquoted yesterday when some reporters consistently asked me about the proposals made by the Hurriyat Conference. As there was a sea of visitors and journalists, amid much noise I replied if there were such proposals, the Centre could consider those. However, I never said the government was considering those proposals," Mr Fernandes said at a press conference in Jammu this evening.

Asserting that the Centre has no plan for talks with the Hurriyat leadership, he said the Centre had sent its interlocutor Mr KC Pant for talks with the Hurriyat, "but its leadership had rejected the offer and did not come forward for discussion with Mr Pant".

Regarding infiltration, he said it had come down in the past few days to the extent that there was no report of any fresh incursions. But, there was no plan for immediate withdrawal of troops.

Asked if there was any possibility of India-Pakistan talks, he said General Musharraf had conveyed to the government that infiltration would be "completely and per-

manently" stopped. "We are still waiting for its permanent stop," he said.

He appears to have once again jumped the gun when reacting to the APHC proposal on brokering a ceasefire in J&K.

The APHC leadership had on Wednesday proposed a visit to Pakistan to broker a ceasefire with the mujahideen in PoK. In response to this, Mr Fernandes said: "Is par socha ja sakta hai aur is par socha jayega (It can be considered and it will be considered)."

No genuine desire for talks: Delhi

NEW DELHI, June 21. — India today accused Pakistan of showing no "genuine desire" for talks and reconciliation of outstanding issues. "Pakistan refuses to formulate a serious vision for peace in our region. What we see is the same tired worn-out rhetoric from the Pakistani establishment," the foreign ministry spokesperson, Mrs Nirupama Rao, said.

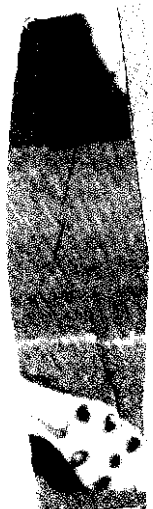
She was commenting on the Pakistani religious affairs minister's reported remark that the separatist movement in Kashmir was indigenous and Delhi was trying to suppress it. — SNS

Sources reduced Mr Fernandes's statement as a baseless remark — "If a minister makes a comment like this, it doesn't mean that the government's stand has changed... Consideration in India has a different connotation... A proposal can be considered, but turned down later."

Senior policy-makers feel that it is "absurd" to even think that the Centre might consider sending a Hurriyat delegation to Pakistan. "If the Hurriyat leaders are really keen to persuade the mujahideen to drop their guns, they can do so even from the Valley," an official said.

This is not the first time that the Hurriyat has made such a proposal. The Centre's open stand has been that, firstly, it is not necessary for the amalgam leaders to visit Pakistan if this is their "sole purpose". Secondly, APHC members in their individual capacity could visit Pakistan if that country granted them visas. The insistence on "individual capacity" flows from the government not deeming the APHC a credible body to be termed as representative of the Kashmiris.

Turn to page 2



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ward, the s

Delhi open to Hurriyat offer

HTC and Agencies
Srinagar, June 20

THE CENTRE might consider accepting the All Parties Hurriyat Conference offer to broker a ceasefire between Indian security forces and militants in Jammu and Kashmir.

"Is par socha ja sakta hai aur is par socha jayega [it (the offer) can be considered and we will consider it]," Defence Minister George Fernandes said here today at the S K International Conventional Complex.

Fernandes is in Jammu and Kashmir for a business and investment summit called Kashmir Vision 2020. Yesterday, Hurriyat chairman Abdul Ghani Bhat had sought New Delhi's permission for a delegation to visit Pakistan to speak to the separatist leaders there. The Hurriyat's terms for deal: once the militants agree to hold fire, the Government will have to send the Army back to the barracks.

The last time the Hurriyat made a



George Fernandes

similar offer — in November 2000 — negotiations collapsed over a disagreement on including Jamat-e-Islami hardliner Syed Ali Shah Geelani in the team for Pakistan. Geelani is in prison now, awaiting trial on Pota charges.

Today, the Defence Minister said again that infiltration from across the Line of Control (LoC) had "almost ended". Whatever little incursion from Pakistan-occupied Kash-

mir (PoK) was taking place, would stop soon, he said.

The troops massed on the borders, however, would not be demobilised immediately. "We will have to wait," Fernandes said. "Past experience teaches us to wait." The ground situation in Kashmir was yet to change substantially and terrorists already inside Indian controlled territory were continuing their activities, he said.

According to Fernandes, despite the plug on infiltration, "mobile" terrorist training camps were still operational in PoK.

"Before September 11, militants had strongly established camps, but now these are shifted from one place to another," he said.

Fernandes said members of Osama bin Laden's al-Qaida and Afghan Taliban were active in PoK. "These are not mere reports, but quite the truth." The Government, he said, had credible proof of this, he added.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

21 JUN 2000

Minus PWP, govt hopes it will make it

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Mumbai: The decision of the Peasants and Workers Party (PWP) to abstain from voting during the trial of strength in the state legislative assembly on Thursday has brought some cheer to the Congress-led Democratic Front coalition.

The PWP's move, which was ratified at a meeting of the party's secretariat council in Mumbai on Wednesday,

13/6
tively reduced to 281. With the PWP choosing to abstain from voting, the house will have five fewer MLAs. This will help the DF government to scrape through," a senior DF minister told this newspaper on Wednesday.

The Shiv Sena-BJP combine, however, seemed undeterred by the PWP's decision. "We will defeat the DF government under any circumstances. We are prepared to send this government pack-

ing into oblivion," senior BJP leader Gopinath Munde told mediapersons at the state BJP office.

Mr Munde lashed out at speaker of the legislative assembly Aran Gujarathi for going "out of his way" to protect the DF government. "The manner in which Mr Gujarathi has been conducting the disqualification proceedings is highly dubious. The speaker is blatantly partisan," Mr Munde said.

The Congress gameplan, Mr Munde alleged, was to dissolve the legislative assembly as the party was eager to contest the next election minus its ally, the NCP. "But

we will not let this happen," he added. Meanwhile, Mr Gujarathi will burn the midnight oil on Wednesday to dictate the historic judgment on the seven cases brought before him under the anti-defection law for disqualification of MLAs. He will deliver his judgement at 8 a.m. in the Vidhan Bhavan. The state assembly will meet at 11 a.m. to decide the fate of the DF government.

CURTAIN CALL

Parties backing the DF govt

● Congress	74
● NCP	56
● Bharatiya Republican Party	02
● CPM	02
● Janata Dal (Secular)	01
● Native Peoples' Party (Pappu Kalani)	01
● Independents	07
● RPI (Gaval)	01
Total	144

Parties opposing the govt

● Shiv Sena	69
● BJP	56
● Independents	05
● Gondwana People's Party	01
● Samajwadi Janata Party	01
● BRP (Rebel)	01
● JD (S) Rebel	01
Total	134

Neutral Party

● PWP	05
● Defector MLAs facing disqualification	05

If five MLAs are disqualified and the PWP stays neutral, then the effective strength of the 288-member house drops to 275. The government needs 138 votes to stay in power.

MECHANISM FOR FORTNIGHTLY REVISION

Petrol, diesel prices up

By Sushma Ramachandran

NEW DELHI, JUNE 3. The Government today announced a price rise of about Rs. 2.50 a litre of petrol and Rs. 1.50 a litre of diesel while reducing the excise duties by two per cent on the products.

Simultaneously, a mechanism has been set in place for regular fortnightly revision of prices by the oil companies along with a quarterly review of excise duties by the Government to check "excessive volatility".

This mechanism was aimed at protecting the domestic consumers from the volatility of the international markets.

The hike which comes into effect midnight tonight brings the rates in Delhi to Rs. 28.94 a litre for petrol and Rs. 17.99 a litre for diesel. In Chennai, the petrol price will be Rs. 31.05 a litre and diesel price will be Rs. 19.63 a litre.

The Petroleum Minister, Ram Naik, said the increase was meant to offset the financial burden being faced by the oil companies due to the \$ 5 a barrel rise in the world crude oil prices since February.

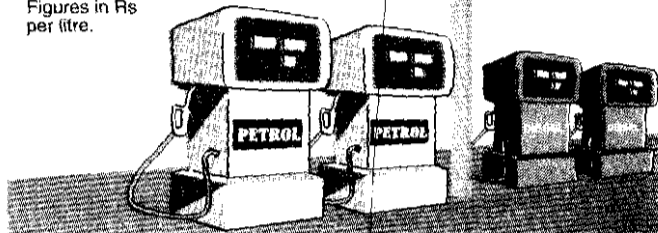
The burden of Rs. 2000 crores in April and May was borne after the formal dismantling of the administered pricing mechanism (APM).

10-1 4/6

Metro	Existing	Revised	Increase
PETROL			
Delhi	26.54	28.94	2.40
Mumbai	30.78	33.47	2.69
Kolkata	26.99	29.39	2.40
Chennai	28.49	31.05	2.56
DIESEL			
Delhi	16.59	17.99	1.40
Mumbai	21.10	22.85	1.75
Kolkata	16.97	18.38	1.41
Chennai	18.10	19.63	1.53

Figures in Rs per litre.

Indicative retail prices of petrol and diesel



Graphics by Varghese Kallada

anism (APM).

The companies have been advised not to raise the prices for three months after the APM withdrawal.

As the companies had agreed to this discipline despite the fiscal strain, he said, the Finance Ministry has decided to compensate the oil companies.

This could be in the form of cash or bonds, but these modalities were yet to be worked out. Mr. Naik described the recent hardening of world prices

as excess volatility. The prices rose by 25 per cent from \$ 20 to \$ 25 a barrel of crude oil over a three-month period.

The two per cent cut in excise duties meant that the duty on diesel falls from 16 to 14 per cent and on petrol from 32 to 30 per cent.

This was a "revenue neutral" decision as the revenue collections had risen substantially due to the higher oil prices.

Decontrol in place: Page 18

Words No Longer Matter; Time Now For Some Serious Action In J&K

PM unveils Rs 6,165-cr package

Srinagar
23 MAY

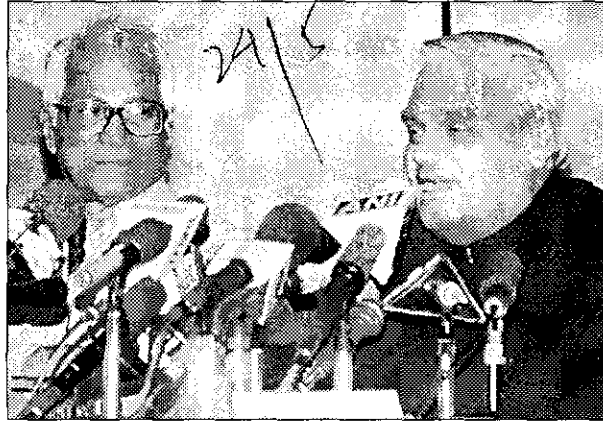
PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee on Thursday outlined a series of steps aimed at the development of terrorism-hit Jammu and Kashmir as he announced a Rs 6,165 crore comprehensive package covering agriculture, rail, road improvement, border development and security.

Winding up his three-day visit to the state amid heightening tension on the border with Pakistan, Mr Vajpayee said thrust will be laid on a generation of new employment opportunities for the youth of the state and relief for migrants affected by militancy and cross-border shelling.

He said the much-delayed 287-km Udhampur-Baramulla rail line will be completed within five years at a cost of Rs 3,600 crore to help speed up the socio-economic development and promote national integration besides India's security infrastructure.

"The first train will roll into the Kashmir Valley before August 15, 2007," Mr Vajpayee said.

In an effort to strengthen the security grid, he announced that two India Reserve Battalions (IRB) will be raised over the next two years at a cost of Rs 26 crore and a provision of Rs 5 crore will be made over five years for better training and weaponry for the Jammu and Kashmir volunteer force (the group of special police



TALKATHON: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee addresses a press conference in Srinagar on Thursday as defence minister George Fernandes looks on. — AFP

officers). Rs 25 crore will be provided over the next five years for incentive schemes for 4,000 police personnel who are members of the Special Operations Group (SOG), he said, adding that the government has decided to increase the ex-gratia payable to the next of kin of each SPO killed in action against terrorists from Rs 1.25 lakh to Rs 2 lakh.

Appreciating the role of village defence committees in countering terrorism and infiltration, Mr Vajpayee said they would be provided with better weaponry and higher allowances on selective basis. Rs 8 crore will be provided for welfare fund of the J&K police this year to upgrade police hospitals to treat those wounded in ter-

rorist attacks, establishment of rehabilitation centres for widows of personnel killed by terrorists and schools for orphans of personnel killed by terrorists. Mr Vajpayee said the textiles ministry will provide Rs 70 crore over five years to develop state handicrafts and sericulture. "The programme will also focus on revival of exportable tweed and Kashmir's famous Kani shawl," he said.

In the agriculture sector, he announced Rs 100 crore for technology mission horticulture, for apples and walnuts and Rs 100 crore for eco-restoration of degraded catchments of the Chenab, Jhelum and the Shivaliks using participatory watershed approach over five years.

India rejects Pervez statement

New Delhi
23 MAY

INDIA, on Thursday night, dismissed Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's statement that he would not allow his country's soil to be used for terrorism, saying it was merely a repetition of his January 12 assurances which had not been translated into action.

"The statement is no different from the one issued on January 12 and subsequent clarifications. It is just the same," external affairs minister Jaswant Singh told reporters after an hour-long meeting of the Cabinet committee on security, presided over by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

"We go by examples of conduct. Similar assurances were given earlier also. We wish to see it translated into action," he said.

— PTI

The Economic Times

24 MAY 2002

PM talks war, Pak sig

5/1 285 9 209 604

WHERE WE STAND

The steps taken by the government since the December 13 attack on Parliament are those usually prescribed for a full-scale war. A checklist follows

ARMED FORCES



● **Army mobilisation:** Done. Completed by January 11 under Operation Parakram. No leave to soldiers except for personal emergencies. Headquarters staff not yet posted out, but command and tactical headquarters moved to operational locations

● **Air force alert:** Done. IAF put in APM (adopt precautionary measures) mode

● **Navy alert:** Largely done. Western Command fleet being augmented. Five warships from Eastern Command asked to report to Flag Officer Commanding, Western Naval Command. A destroyer, a frigate and three missile corvettes will reach the Arabian Sea within a week

● **Unified command execution:** Almost done. BSF and CRPF in border areas ordered to report to the army. Coast guard asked to report to the navy

● **Missile assets:** Army's 333 missile group deployed

● **General mobilisation:** Not yet done. This can be ordered with an official declaration that the country is in a 'state of war'. Announcements can be made on radio/television, ordering service personnel to battle stations and asking civilian authorities to implement standard operating procedures for rear area security

WINTERLAND SECURITY

● **Air defence:** Artillery batteries alerted and initial movement begun. Anti-aircraft batteries could be deployed to guard installations in the capital and the metros, at airports, ports and in VIP areas



● **Civil defence:** Rehearsals like blackouts on the drawing board

● **War effort requisition:** Trains used for mobilisation. Civilian aircraft not sought till now. Merchant vessels asked to report positions to the navy

● **Border closure:** Not done

● **Internal emergency:** Not imposed

● **External effort:** Repeated visits by Indian emissaries since December to mobilise world opinion

Compiled by Sujan Dutta. Graphic: RAJ



After addressing jawans in Kupwara, AB Vajpayee looks through a pair of binoculars seized from militants. (PTI)

Time for 'decisive battle'

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, May 22: India today indicated that it had virtually reached the point of no return as Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee told front-line troops that the time had come for a "decisive battle".

He characterised Pakistan as the enemy state that needed to be effectively countered.

"A war is being imposed on us. We will fight that war and we will emerge victorious. Let there be no doubt about it in anyone's mind," Vajpayee said in a speech dripping determination.

He urged the armed forces to be "ready for sacrifice" in pursuit of victory. The Prime Minister was addressing front-line troops next to the Line of Control in Kupwara in Jammu and Kashmir.

Vajpayee was at pains to imbue his visit to the front with a special meaning. He said it was immaterial whether India's neighbour (Pakistan) or the international community understood the significance of his visit. What mattered was that India was poised to write "a new victorious chapter in its history. There can be no doubt about it", a grim Vajpayee declared.

The Prime Minister claimed that the world knew that "India was being wronged". However, he said, no one was willing to come out openly even though

their opinion was in India's favour. "We will have to protect ourselves and we are ready for that."

India will not keep on stretching its limits of tolerance, the Prime Minister asserted. "Let not anyone think that there is no limit to our tolerance. Let not anyone think that we are not alert."

Vajpayee openly characterised Pakistan as an "enemy state" which had refused to give up its animosity towards India despite several attempts to talk peace with it.

Referring to his Lahore visit, Vajpayee said Pakistan used "stealth and deception" in Kargil even when India was trying to develop "brotherly relations". He said the enemy lost decisively in Kargil and now a "proxy war" had been imposed on India.

The Prime Minister said mercenaries and jihadis were sent to fight in Kashmir with the promise of heaven after death. "They do not fight a war. They kill innocents," he said.

Referring to the barbaric killing of the family members of

Indian soldiers posted at the border, an angry Prime Minister asked: "What kind of a war is it in which women and children are targeted, where children are snatched from the laps of their mothers and murdered? What is this animosity with children? Yet, we have had to see this happening in our own country."

Such "barbarism" was a challenge to India and "we have accepted this challenge", he said.

The Prime Minister praised the armed forces for time and again fulfilling successfully their responsibility to protect the nation.

"We are being tested again. I have confidence in you, our soldiers and the 100 crore people of India who stand behind you as another line of defence. They, too, will fight for your victory in war. We must work towards victory and for that we should be ready to sacrifice (our lives) — because the time has come now for a decisive battle. May we be victorious in that battle," he said.

Earlier, Vajpayee noted that emotions were running high in the country. Both he and defence minister George Fernandes were constantly being questioned by the people about what they were planning to do, he said, indicating that the answer could be found in his visit to the front line.

QUOTE

The time has come to wage a decisive battle against cross-border terrorism

AB VAJPAYEE

signals retreat

FROM IDREES BAKHTIAR

Islamabad, May 22: Amid mounting international pressure and signals of war from across the border, Pakistan appears to have decided to check infiltration of militants into Kashmir.

A statement issued after a joint session of the National Security Council and the Cabinet said: "The government will not allow the territory of Pakistan or any territory whose defence is the responsibility of Pakistan to be used for any terrorist activity anywhere in the world."

This, some observers said, is an obvious reference to a decision to stop infiltration, which India has been demanding if a conflict were to be avoided.

Analysts read the description "any territory whose defence is the responsibility of Pakistan" as meaning Kashmir on the Pakistani side of the Line of Control.

In his January 12 speech, President Pervez Musharraf had said he would not allow terrorist activity from Pakistani soil. But today's statement suggests the first public commitment not to permit such activity from the part of Kashmir Pakistan controls.

It may be too early to say if the assurance will avert a conflict, but it will give New Delhi

something to chew on and buy Musharraf time, easing the pressure from the US.

The development came on a day Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee declared that the time had come for a "decisive battle". Reacting to the threat, Islamabad said: "The Indian leadership should desist from such blatant war-mongering and instead focus on addressing their internal problems."

Apart from holding the Cabinet and security council meeting, Musharraf today briefed senior journalists and editors on the situation on the border. During the discussion, sources said, indications were that the decision to stop "infiltration" had already been taken, though it was not spelt out in clear terms.

The impression given was that the only way of easing the tension was preventing infiltration. Some of the participants felt the US and Britain had told Pakistan that "if infiltration is stopped, they would know immediately". Musharraf, the sources said, believes it.

The Daily Telegraph, the British newspaper, published a report today, giving a vivid picture of how small groups of militants trained in Pakistan are being sent to Kashmir night after night.

The Musharraf administration's statement also "reiterated that no organisation in Pakistan

will be allowed to indulge in terrorism in the name of Kashmir".

It must be kept in mind though that Musharraf had promised in his January 12 speech to crack down on militancy. India accuses him of not doing enough to stop militancy and says new terrorist training camps have come up with al Qaida and Taliban members.

Today's meeting reaffirmed that Pakistan would continue to extend moral, political and diplomatic support to the struggle of the people of Jammu and Kashmir for the realisation of their right to self-determination.

It agreed that all differences, including the core issue of Kashmir, should be resolved through talks or other peaceful means. In this context, the meeting stressed the need for a comprehensive dialogue between the two sides.

Condemning the assassination of Kashmiri leader Abdul Gani Lone, the meeting conveyed its condolences to the aggrieved family and called for an impartial inquiry.

In a move that may be construed as an indication that the international community does not see Pakistan as a safe place for its officials, the British government today decided to pull out around 150 of its diplomatic staff from Islamabad, Karachi and Lahore. The US had taken a similar step earlier.

■ See Pages 4, 6 & 8

02. The Marka ceremony for ladies and gents will be held on 23-05-02 at Amr: Veia Mandir Lal Chand House, 31/1 Marquis St., Kolkata-76 at 4.15 pm. T107229

ANNOUNCEMENT

ADI special DI-Fatton open quiz for the Errol Cowser Trophy at Da'house Institute. Prelims Friday, May 24 at 5.30 pm. Final Saturday, May 25 at 6 pm. Spot registration. Quiz Master: Neil O'Brien. T107225

28th at Salt Lake, Ranikuthi & Kalyani Art Excel (8-15 yrs.) starting Mon. 27th at Ranikuthi, Ph. 463 1018. T108003

Asia Heart Foundation requires Ophthalmologists, Dentists, Radiologists and Gynaecologists for their forthcoming Center at Salt Lake, Kolkata. Interested candidates may contact Mr. Sudhanshu Roy at 426-7400. T108123

As'sha's Lakhnawi chikan sarees, suit materials at identity. Last day today. T107234

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Diplomats from South-East Asian countries are often seen at Jong's, our Oriental multi-cuisine restaurant. Naturally, say we. Come find out why! Call our hospitality desk for reservations: 249-0369/ 249-0370/ 249-9744/ 249-5572. Valet parking available. T107634

Dolna Day School congratulates its students for their excellent ICSE results with 100% success.

good association by Chitra Roy (Delhi) and her community at Town Club on June 1. Contact: Mr. Rudra Bir Roy, B-16/14 Kalyani, Nadia. Ph. 582-6633, 580-8458. 0107996

Free Counselling for BBA & BCA courses of W.B. University of Technology at Nopany Institute of Management Studies at 10.30 am on Saturday, 25th May. Venue: Nopany School, 2-D Nando Mullick Lane (near Girish Park Metro), Kolkata-6. 0107928

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Opp backs Govt war on terror

Rhetoric is no substitute for a strategy, Sonia tells BJP

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 17

THE GOVERNMENT sought — and won — the Opposition's support for any response, military or otherwise, against Pakistan for Tuesday's attack in Jammu. Parliament was united in saying India would fight to finish Pakistan-sponsored terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir.

The Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha adopted identical resolutions on the last day of Parliament's budget session to convey this message.

Even though the Opposition was not satisfied with Home Minister LK Advani's reply to a the debate in the Lok Sabha, it showed considerable restraint and made it clear that its immediate concern was to strengthen the Government's hands.

Nevertheless, it advised the Government, and the BJP, to replace rhetoric with action. "Rhetoric is no substitute for a strategy," said Leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi. Advani praised the Opposition, particularly Sonia Gandhi, for setting the tone of the debate by calling for unity of purpose and action.

Advani said in both Houses he could not reveal India's plans for a response. But he promised the Government would act with purpose after finalising its strategy in consultation with defence officials.

Advani also said Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee would take Opposition leaders into confidence and address the nation on India's response. "A right decision will be taken and you all will be informed. No announcement can be

made from Parliament," he said.

Asked by NDA allies and the Opposition why terrorists could not be stopped from carrying out such attacks, Advani said, "We do it if we are able to identify them. This year alone we have eliminated 601 terrorists in intelligence-based operations."

But the Opposition said Tuesday's attack had exposed the weakness of India's security apparatus and the Government had been found wanting in its efforts to sensitise international opinion to India's position.

One thing said clearly in the Lok Sabha was that the US's pledge to fight global terror was hollow. All parties were "deeply disappointed" that the US, the leader of the international coalition against terrorism, had done little to force

Pakistan to stop acts of terrorism in India and instead wanted New Delhi to exercise restraint.

Sonia Gandhi, and CPI(M), Samajwadi Party and Shiv Sena leaders criticised the US. "We are told that the war on global terror is to be fought wherever terrorism exists," Sonia Gandhi said. "But so far we see this as a statement of intent and not as a statement of facts."

In his reply, Advani acknowledged the Government too was deeply disappointed by Washington's failure to pressure Pakistan to stop violence in J&K.

MPs were particularly upset at US Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca's statement that India should not be stubborn when actually it was the victim of Pakistan-sponsored terrorism.

More reports on Page 9

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

8 MAY 2002

We'll take action, Atal tells Bush

Opposition backs Govt's firm stand on terrorism

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 15

A DAY after a terrorist strike in Jammu left 31 dead, President George Bush got on the line to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and told him he shared India's distress and outrage over the senseless killings. A firm Vajpayee told the US Head of State that he was contemplating "appropriate action" against those behind the heinous crime.

Earlier in the day, addressing the Lok Sabha, Vajpayee was equally tough. As the House stood one in its condemnation of the seemingly unending acts of cross-border terrorism, he said: "Iska pratikar karna hoga (There has to be a remedy to this)." Foreign news agencies immediately picked up the statement and interpreted it as a retaliation threat. Subsequently, he clarified: "I used the word *pratikar*, not *badla*. I had meant response, not revenge."

The Prime Minister talked of an all-party meeting to discuss the problem of cross-border terrorism. Leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi, on a tour of Jammu, promptly backed the Government's initiative, saying: "In the war against terror the Government has our full backing." She described the killers as "*insaniyat kay dushman* (enemies of humanity)".

As the day's events unfolded and Defence Minister George Fernandes rushed to Kaluchak, where the militants struck yesterday, the US Administration sent repeated feelers of support to New Delhi. Assistant Secretary of State Christina Rocca - heading off to Islamabad from New Delhi - set the tone when she condemned the killings. A White House spokesman followed suit

with another statement. Then, President Bush himself got on the line to the Prime Minister.

As the tough-talking Indian establishment added to the rising tension with their hard-hitting statements, it seemed as if the tenuous peace in the sub-continent was perilously close to snapping. President Pervez Musharraf rushed to deny any hand in the Kaluchak incidents and put his troops deployed on his eastern borders on high alert.

Echoes of the Indo-Pak sabre-rattling were heard in far-away Reykjavik. US Secretary of State Colin Powell counselled restraint. Washington and Moscow, he said, would jointly do everything to keep tempers under control. But in New Delhi, Foreign Office spokesperson Nirupama Rao made it clear that enough was enough. "India has taken a lot of pain, but not any more."

Coupled with the sharp tongue-lashing New Delhi also began lining up a series of diplomatic measures reminiscent of the post-December 13 steps. Among the steps under consideration is a snapping of the already downgraded diplomatic ties with Pakistan, foreign office sources said.

Elsewhere, Home Minister L K Advani said he had convened a high-power meeting to take stock of the situation. On a visit to Goa, he told reporters: "We have made it amply clear to the Pakistanis that there can be no talks with them as long as they keep stoking cross-border terrorism. Pakistan is doggedly pursuing the path of terror."

In Kaluchak, Fernandes on a fact-finding tour, kept up the shrill rhetoric. "Musharraf, it seems, is training young people to indulge in such acts. What better can we expect from Pakistan."

BLAMING IT ON PAKISTAN



It is his (Pervez's) trained armed terrorists who have brutally killed children and women



Pakistan is doggedly pursuing the path of terrorism

L K Advani



Iska (terrorism) pratikar karna hoga

Atal Bihari Vajpayee

BJP raises pitch, doesn't rule out war

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, May 15

THE BJP today endorsed whatever action the Government would take against Pakistan to avenge the Jammu killings. It also lambasted the United States for not taking the international battle against terrorism beyond Afghanistan to include Kashmir.

BJP Parliamentary Party spokesman VK Malhotra said India had the right to take appropriate action to respond to Tuesday's attack. Asked if there was a possibility of war, Malhotra said, "We are demanding that the Government take strong action to deal with terrorism. A war certainly cannot be ruled out."

Asked to comment on statements by Defence Minister George Fernandes and External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh, both of whom have ruled out a military conflict till the elections in Jammu and Kashmir were over, Malhotra said, "How can we rule out a war if Pakistan attacks India?"

He said it is an open secret that Islamabad was helping *fidayees* to strike inside India.

Malhotra regretted that despite its immense clout, the US was not doing enough to force Pakistan to stop helping terrorists. "America treats any violent act west of Pakistan as serious, but takes a lighter view of any act committed east of that country," he said. "There cannot be distinctions in acts of terrorism."

Justifying his party's hard line, Malhotra said even Prime Minister Vajpayee had said that steps would have to be taken to counter terrorism.

Vajpayee growls but does not bark

A PRECARIOUS BALANCING ACT ON THE BORDER



Soldiers cross a rickety pontoon bridge while returning to their camp in Kashmir. (PTI file picture)

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OUR BUREAU
New Delhi/Srinagar, May 15: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today told Parliament his government would "react" appropriately to the terrorist strike near Jammu, leading some to interpret his statement as a threat to retaliate against Pakistan and sending a ripple of panic through the financial markets.

"Whatever happened is very heinous," he said. "Uska hamein pratikar karna hoga (We need to take appropriate action)."

Vajpayee told President George W. Bush much the same thing. If it is not really an indication of India breaking out of its current state of restraint and engaging in an armed confrontation with Pakistan, the tough message emanating from Delhi is sure to be conveyed by the US to President Pervez Musharraf.

US assistant secretary of state Christina Rocca, who left for Islamabad this afternoon, told the Pakistani leadership that "infiltration must stop".

Some positive signals to satisfy India could come out of Pakistan in the next few days. Lashkar-e-Toiba founder Hafiz Mohammad Saeed was detained today in what might be interpreted as such an indication. Al Mansoorian, the group that claimed responsibility for yesterday's attack on an army camp and a bus, is a Lashkar offshoot.

Intervening in the Lok Sabha amid demands from the Opposition and from within the ruling National Democratic Alliance for an adjournment motion on the killing of 30 people, including soldiers and their wives and children, Vajpayee said the government would take steps to "counter" such incidents.

Home minister L.K. Advani has called a meeting with defence minister George Fernandes and top military officers to formulate a response.

"The whole House is one that what has happened is very

heinous and we have to counter it," Vajpayee said. "This question is not such that we have to raise it on partisan lines. The question of adjournment motion does not arise," he said and offered to meet Opposition leaders to discuss the issue with the request that they do not disturb question hour.

In the backdrop of a national outrage over the Jammu incident, Vajpayee's comments were read in sections of the media as an expression of his government's desire to "retaliate". But an aide of the Prime Minister was seen counselling journalists that what the Prime Minister meant was "react".

But the damage had already been done to market sentiment with the rupee and stock prices

Bush calls PM

New Delhi, May 15: President George W. Bush today called up Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to condemn yesterday's terrorist attack in Jammu in the strongest possible terms and expressed understanding of India's distress.

Bush did not mention the word restraint even once in his conversation with the Prime Minister.

Vajpayee thanked the American President, but told him India would have to take "appropriate action" to deal with the situation. Bush, South Block officials said, even showed understanding with that position and pointed out that as a democratically-elected leader, Vajpayee would have to do what is expected of him.

The call, made by Bush from the White House at 6.15 IST, lasted five minutes.

Describing yesterday's attack as a "terrifying and outrageous" terrorist act, Bush said he was "appalled at the incident". He conveyed his condolences to the victims' families.

dropping in tandem.

The BJP was much more vocal than the Prime Minister as it assailed the US for failing to get Pakistan to stop cross-border terrorism. If Pakistan persisted with its help to terrorists, "a war cannot be ruled out", it said.

It demanded that the government take strong action to deal with terrorism. "War is not ruled out but the decision has to be taken by the government," spokesman V.K. Malhotra said.

Defence minister George Fernandes has revealed the government's mind in an interview to *The New York Times* in which he said Delhi would not go to war with Islamabad, whatever the provocation.

Although that interview was given before the Jammu attack, Fernandes' assertion runs contrary to the government's efforts to create an impression that India's patience with Pakistan is running out.

Fernandes said India had no plans to launch a military attack over the next few months against Pakistan. "We do not want the elections (due in Kashmir in September) to be disrupted at any cost," he told his interviewer.

His comments have left his senior colleagues in government aghast. On a visit to the site of the massacre, Fernandes was more careful with words. He said punishment would "certainly be given for the crime committed" at Kaluchak.

Asked if Vajpayee had implied retaliation in his comments, Fernandes said: "These things are not discussed as these would only help the enemy."

That is exactly what he has done in his interview.

The defence minister also visited some forward areas and said the army would be stationed on the borders as long as needed. "The soldiers were in high morale and had only one question: 'Hamein kuchh karne ke liye kab chhorenge' (when shall we get orders to act)?"

■ More reports on Page 6

Renewed cries for
finance minister's scalp

Cornered Sinha taps Advani

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 13: Stung by the latest attack mounted on him, finance minister Yashwant Sinha met home minister L.K. Advani this morning to gauge the mind of the man who has stood by him in the past.

Sinha has been accused of using poll material supplied by a tainted company, Flex Industries, in his parliamentary campaign in 1999.

After returning from Shanghai, Sinha met Advani to complain that a section in the government had launched a "vilification" campaign against him to seek his ouster before an impending Cabinet reshuffle.

Apparently, his explanation did not wash with the home minister, otherwise considered one of Sinha's well-wishers, sources said. They added that Advani had tried, without success, to contact Sinha yesterday itself when reports of his links with Flex appeared.

Flex is under investigation for paying bribes to senior government officials.

In Parliament, the Opposition sought the finance minister's exit on "moral grounds". Parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan said Sinha will make a statement on Wednesday.

The CPM's Sonnath Chatter-

jee grabbed the opportunity to fire a stinging taunt: "The government seems very accommodative on this issue as Sinha is going."

The Flex scam claimed its first casualty in Prabhat Kumar, the ex-Cabinet secretary who became the Jharkhand Governor. He resigned once it was established that Flex chairman Ashok Chaturvedi paid for parties hosted at Kumar's residence.

Advani has bailed Sinha out twice in the past, but BJP sources said the alleged association with Flex has made it "untenable" even for the home minister to stand by his colleague.

"This is the first time in the last two-and-a-half years when the number one and two in the government see eye to eye on Sinha," said a source.

Raisina Hill was agog with rumours today that Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee would jump at this chance to drop Sinha, who has been under pressure since the BJP lost the last round of Assembly polls, a defeat for which his budget was openly blamed by his own party leaders.

Advani had defended him that time and Sinha appeared to have earned a respite. Earlier, when the UTI scam broke him, the home minister had backed him.

The PMO was reportedly keen on seeing Sinha's back after the UTI debacle.

TDP opts out of Speaker race

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

HYDERABAD, May 4. — Mr N Chandrababu Naidu today rejected the BJP's offer of the Lok Sabha Speaker's post to his party. He cited the BJP's failure to change the Gujarat leadership as one of the reasons behind the TDP's decision.

"The BJP rejecting Mr Narendra Modi's removal demand is one of the reasons that prompted this decision," he said. This came after an hour-long politburo meeting at his residence this evening.

"The politburo decided not to accept the Speaker's post. This is our principled stand. It's not correct to accept the Speaker's post and we won't contest," Mr Naidu told a Press conference.

Asked if the Prime Minister has learnt of the decision, he said: "I am informing him through you."

Asked if this meant the TDP distancing itself from the BJP, he said: "Why do you think like that? We will support the government... whenever they do good things." He said even during the UF regime

the TDP was not for seeking power.

Party insiders were surprised with Mr Naidu taking a decision on such a crucial issue so early when the election to the Lok

Naik for Chair?

NEW DELHI, May 4. — Union petroleum minister Mr Ram Naik is a possible candidate for the Lok Sabha Speaker's post. Sources said the choice was determined more by "strong lobbying by an industrial house with high stakes in the oil sector."

Mr Naik has been consistently championing the cause of oil PSUs. "There's pressure to re-move Mr Naik from the petroleum ministry," a source said. — SNS

Sabha Speaker's process begins next week. The decision and the subsequent conference were seen as an attempt to ward off ambitious MPs, sources said.

"We've analysed various things

and took the decision in the overall interests of the party," he said while elaborating on the various situations where the TDP opposed any violation in the the NDA agenda.

"We are not in government. Nor are we part of the steering committee," he said, underscoring the point that his party has been opposing the NDA agenda's "violations".

On constitutional provisions regarding the Speaker's post, Mr Naidu reiterated that the decision was a "principled" one.

The decision is bound to affect the party MPs, especially Mr Yerran Naidu, Mr U Venkateshwarulu and Dr M Jagannatham, who were keen to bag the post.

PM to decide after talks: With the TDP deciding not to nominate a member for the Speaker's post, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee will take a decision in this regard after consulting the allies, adds SNS. A meeting of the NDA may be held next week, probably on Monday, to finalise the name of the candidate for the Speaker's office, said Mr VK Malhotra, chief BJP spokesman.

THE STATESMAN

5 MAY 2002

TDP not to stake claim for LS Speaker's post

Hyderabad
4 MAY



Naidu

"We have taken this decision not to stake our claim for the Speaker's post. We will continue to support the government whenever they do good things." Andhra

FURTHER DIS-
TANCING itself from the BJP, the TDP on Saturday night decided not to stake claim for the Lok Sabha Speaker's post but maintained that it would continue to support the NDA government whenever it does something good.

Pradesh chief minister and TDP supremo Chandrababu Naidu told reporters after a meeting of the party politburo.

The TDP's decision to spurn BJP's offer came three days after the 28-member parliamentary group of TDP walked out of Lok Sabha protesting against the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's rejection of its demand for removal of the Gujarat chief minister, Mr Narendra Modi, and its refusal to support the government on the Opposition censure motion on communal violence in the state.

Telegu Desam Party (TDP) nominee G.M.C. Balayogi had held the post from 1998 till March 3, when he was killed in a helicopter crash creating the vacancy.

President K.R. Narayanan fixed May 10 as the date for the election of the new Speaker, a post which is now likely to go to the BJP.

Mr Naidu said this was a "principled stand" taken after thoroughly discussing all the issues and the political situation. Asked if this decision meant that this was the beginning of the end of the relationship between the TDP and the BJP, he said: "why do you think like that. We will continue to support the government whenever they do good things."

When suggested that it was a constitutional post and there should be no problem in accepting it, Mr Naidu said: "It's a political decision because the Speaker will go back to active politics if he is not in the post."

Mr Naidu said from the beginning the party had been extending outside support to the NDA government and was not after power.

"In fact circumstances had forced us to join the United Front government in 1996,"

he said. He said the rejection of the TDP's demand for Modi's removal was one of the reasons for the party's decision on Saturday. "We have taken into account several other factors also."

The chief minister said whenever the NDA deviated from the agenda the TDP had opposed on issues like saffronisation of education, the Gujarat government's RSS order, Ayodhya and the communal violence in the state.

He said the party's commitment to secularism would be unflinching and the government should stick to the NDA agenda.

The Congress on Saturday night said the TDP's decision not to stake claim for the Speaker's post showed that the government had lost its image of running a minimum programme.

— PTI

Gandhinagar
4 MAY



Narendra Modi. Finding a few days of suspense about the former DGP of Punjab, an official spokesman said the government has decided to appoint Gill as the chief minister's security advisor.

Gill to be Modi's security advisor

UNDER ALL-round attack for the communal carnage in the state, the Gujarat government has decided to rope in the services of supercop K.P.S. Gill as the security advisor to chief minister

6 5 MAY 1996

Govt wakes up to benefits of 'consensus'

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, May 2. — Two days after the nation witnessed political leaders stooping to a new low in the Lok Sabha during a highly personalised debate, the BJP today discovered the value of consensus. The government in the Rajya Sabha accepted the Opposition's motion on Gujarat, enabling the House to pass a unanimous resolution on the subject on which division among the parties had been very sharp.

Soon after Mr Arjun Singh (Congress) initiated the discussion, House leader Mr Jaswant Singh said: "We accept the motion in letter and spirit and the home ministry has already taken some steps under Article 355."

The Opposition motion would otherwise have been carried because the ruling coalition is in a minority in the Rajya Sabha and some of its allies would have abstained as they had done in the Lok Sabha.

Intervening in the Lok Sabha debate, the Prime Minister had sought to pass a unanimous resolution on Gujarat, putting aside voting under the rule, but the Congress insisted on a division. The BJP today had its way in the Upper House and made a belated attempt to send a message that it wasn't opposed to the Opposition's concern on continued violence in the state.

The Opposition, however, was unrelenting. It came down on the Centre for failing to protect lives in the continuing communal violence in Gujarat even as the government expressed its anguish over the situation.

The motion said: "This House expresses its deep sense of anguish at the persistence of violence in Gujarat, leading to loss of a large number of lives and destruction of property worth crores of rupees and urges the central government to intervene effectively under Article 355...."

Mr Arjun Singh began the debate by launching an attack on the government, saying it represented the "forces of disintegration" whose

"hidden agenda" posed a serious threat to the country's unity and integrity. His colleague Mr Ahmed Patel (from Gujarat), too, was unsparing in his attack, and accused the Prime Minister of speaking in different languages on the violence. Mr Nilotpal Basu (CPI-M) alleged the Centre and state governments were working partisanship while dealing with the violence.

A Laloo amongst Elders

NEW DELHI, May 2. — The "maiden speech" in the Upper House will never be the same again. Mr Laloo Prasad Yadav today broke new barriers with his debut speech in the Rajya Sabha. Ostensibly having risen to speak on Gujarat, Mr Yadav dwelled on all his "favourite" issues except for that of the riot-scarred state.

Mr Yadav broke the decibel barrier to rebuke BJP members. And raised the baritone to ridicule the Prime Minister, the defence and foreign ministers, the Gujarat Governor, et al. Calling ministers and ruling party leaders 'thieves', Mr Yadav defied the Chair on several occasions, and went on an impromptu *dharna* in the Well, resulting in an adjournment.

All this in a House which he had said is no ordinary one, but one of 'scholars'. Of course, his shenanigans went down well with the Opposition, who lapped up his diatribe cheering lustily. — SNS

Law minister Mr Arun Jaitley expressed anguish over the violence and emphasised the government's resolve to protect the lives of all citizens, while admitting the violence had tarnished the country's image.

Soon after the government agreed to endorse the motion, the Congress demanded the Centre serve a notice on the Modi government under Article 355, as a first step before imposing Article 356.

Congress spokesman Mr Jaipal Reddy said by deciding to endorse the motion, the Vajpayee government had virtually "admitted to an abnormal situation in the state tantamount to a collapse of the state machinery". Therefore, he argued, the notice under Article 355 should be immediately served.

THE STATESMAN

3 MAY 2002

Bruised BJP seeks to put up brave front

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The violence in Gujarat has clearly singed the NDA and left the BJP's credibility in tatters. The exit of the Lok Janshakti and the National Conference from the NDA government, the abstentions by two Janata Dal-United MPs, the walkout by the Telugu Desam Party and the uniformly anti-BJP rhetoric by other NDA allies—barring the Shiv Sena—point to the weakening of the alliance and an immediate negative impact in Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and Jammu and Kashmir.

Shaken by the party's moral, if not political isolation, BJP leaders admitted on Wednesday that although they did not see it that way, the public perception was that Narendra Modi was a political liability. But with the opposition taking a strident position, the BJP simply cannot drop him at this stage as it will be seen as action taken under pressure. Simultaneously, the party has dismissed the desertion by the four-member Ram Vilas Paswan-led Lok Janshakti as inconsequential in view of its having secured a far bigger Dalit prize in Uttar Pradesh in the form of the Bahujan Samaj Party. The exit of the five-member National Conference was expected, they said.

The TDP's walkout, however, hit the government hard, forcing it to take a lenient view of the "lapse". A senior cabinet minister said, "We understand Chandrababu Naidu's difficulties because he has the Congress to deal with in Andhra Pradesh. Besides that, his parliamentary party split three ways on Gujarat, and this was the only way out for him. The government will offer the speakership to the TDP again next week."

A BJP national executive member said, "The TDP was never part of the NDA, it was

just extending issue-based support from outside. We had requested the TDP to give us a Lok Sabha speaker, not the other way around. The TDP's abstention cannot be compared with that of the National Conference, which was in the government and morally bound to vote with the government or quit."

The real reason behind these differing yardsticks, a BJP functionary said, was the party's electoral calculations for Andhra Pradesh as well as Jammu and Kashmir. In Jammu and Kashmir, "elections are due later this year, and the BJP and National Conference will contest separately as in the past. Omar Abdullah, it was known, would become National Conference president by May-end, and perhaps chief minister immediately after in the run-up to the polls. The National Conference was just looking for an opportune moment."

In Andhra Pradesh, the BJP functionary emphasised, if the TDP and the BJP did not contest the next elections together, the Congress would sweep the polls. This interdependence, he said, would ensure that the two stick together despite this temporary difference.

At a lesser level, the party is concerned about Bihar. The exit of the Lok Janshakti from the NDA and the division in the JD-U can only strengthen the BJP's bete noire in the state, Laloo Prasad Yadav's RJD. With the JD-U not having issued a whip, the party is unlikely to take any action against Devendra Prasad Yadav and Shashi Kumar who abstained, and the BJP is unlikely to press for action. As for the two MPs, Mr Yadav confirmed he and his colleague were still very much part of the NDA.



Govt wins vote comfortably

NEW DELHI: The NDA government sailed through the opposition-sponsored censure motion on Gujarat in the Lok Sabha with a comfortable margin of 87 votes on Wednesday.

While 281 members voted against the motion, 194 supported it. Five members of the National Conference abstained. In a house with an effective strength of 540, the number of members who voted was 480. Of the rest, 28 of the TDP walked out before voting. Some others may have stayed in the house without participating in the voting. (PTI)

► See Edit: Parliamentary Farce, Page 8

THE TIMES OF INDIA

2 MAY 2002

Govt. wins, but emerges weaker

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, MAY 1. The Government may have defeated the Opposition-sponsored censure motion on the Gujarat violence due to its numerical superiority in the Lok Sabha, but it has emerged weaker after being hauled over burning coal by even its allies. By the end of the debate, it stood as exposed as the shocking photographs of 'trishul'-wielding mobs hunting for victims.

The Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister sat in Parliament speechless, listening to senior MPs, such as the former Prime Minister, Chandra Shekhar, attacking the Union Minister and BJP leader, Uma Bharti, as a person with "a fascist Hitlerian mentality". Another MP told the Government that it should understand that no matter how hard it tried, "the 15-crore Muslim population cannot be drowned in the Arabian Sea". Worse, the Government could not find words to respond to these charges.

The aggressive Government strategy — which became obvious when the first speaker from its side, Ms. Bharti, spoke the language of unbridled Hindutva communalism, and when the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, "defended" Gujarat say-

ing that "such incidents" had been happening for the last 50 years — came undone when the Home Minister, L.K. Advani, said that Mr. Fernandes' speech made him uncomfortable.

Partners and friends of the NDA enterprise attacked the Government almost as vehemently as the Opposition did. Some voted with it because they enjoyed comfortable Ministerial berths at the Centre (such as the Janata Dal-United leader, Sharad Yadav), some because they wanted Cabinet positions (such as the Trinamool Congress leader, Mamata Banerjee) and others be-

NEWS ANALYSIS

cause the political stakes in the States were high (such as the Bahujan Samaj Party, whose government will be installed in Lucknow courtesy the BJP). The openly opportunistic politics of the allies was fully exposed.

It was dishonest on the part of the Telugu Desam Party and the Trinamool Congress to demand the sacking of the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, and then walk out before the vote was cast (as the TDP did) or worse, vote against the motion (as the Trinamool did). Their loud demand for Mr. Modi's ouster was an admission that

their parties had concluded that his role in the riots was not above reproach, or at the very least that they did not think that he was competent enough to control the dangerous situation threatening the integrity of the country, not just Gujarat.

The TDP (and some other NDA parties) have continued to explain their positions in terms of "political compulsion". How could the TDP be seen to be on the same side of the political fence as its enemy, the Congress? That was the TDP's wholly specious argument. What is the logic or morality in arguing that they could not be seen on the same side as their main enemy even while acknowledging that they agreed with their demands?

Two Ministers did not vote with the Government — Ram Vilas Paswan (Lok Janshakti) quit a day before the debate and voted with the Opposition and Omar Abdullah (National Conference) abstained after handing over his resignation to the Prime Minister. Another alliance partner, the Janata Dal (United) is all but united in its support for the Government.

The creaky alliance may continue, even for a full term, but does it any longer have the moral authority to govern?

THE HINDU

2 MAY 2002

Govt poised to defeat motion

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, April 30. — The government appeared poised to defeat the Opposition censure motion on Gujarat as the numbers are on its side despite the expected abstention by the 28-member TDP, the five-member National Conference and the 11-member AIADMK.

The debate, which began a few minutes after noon today, continued well beyond midnight, but the Lok Sabha could find no answers on why the violence was continuing unabated in the state for more than two months.

At 2-30 a.m., the Prime Minister and the Home Minister were yet to reply to the debate.

Apart from Mr Narendra Modi, the other man who was the focus of the discussion was Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, who was asked by speaker after speaker from the Opposition benches as to what went wrong between Ahmedabad and Goa. Was it the same Vajpayee talking about national shame and preaching *Raj Dharma* to Mr Modi in Ahmedabad who spoke about "jihad Muslims" in Goa and held Godhra responsible for the Gujarat backlash?

The day began on an ominous note for the government with the minister of state for external affairs, Mr Omar Abdullah, meeting the Prime Minister and offering to quit if his continuance in the Union council of ministers was untenable in the light of his party's decision to abstain from voting on the Opposition motion in the Lok Sabha.

Mr Abdullah said the Prime Minister would convey to him whether he should put in his papers or not. The BJP spokesman, Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, told reporters that Mr Vajpayee has not taken any decision on the offer.

The speeches in Parliament were marked by interruptions and acrimony as Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav initiated the debate on behalf of the Opposition, accusing the Centre of failing in discharging its constitutional responsibility by not dismissing the Gujarat government.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi was more candid in asking the House what could be expected of "this government when the Prime Minister changed his stance from Gujarat to Goa singing in different tunes". Mrs Gandhi quoted the Prime Minister as saying in Goa "jehan jehani Musalman rahte hain mil jul kar nahin rahte..." and then asked: "Is there anything to be added after this?"

She questioned the oft-repeated statement of the BJP and the Prime Minister that had Parliament taken a strong view of the Godhra carnage, the subsequent violence in Ahmedabad could

have been prevented. "I would like to ask the Prime Minister who is also the leader of the House what prevented him from taking the lead in condemning the Godhra incident in Parliament," she said forcefully.

It was Mr Chandra Shekhar who revealed to the Lok Sabha that he had proposed to move a resolution in the Lok Sabha on the day of the Godhra incident on 27 February but was not supported by the government or the then Speaker.

There was not much comfort for the government when Miss Mamata Banerjee

while declaring that she would vote against the motion and for the government wanted Mr Modi to go. There is no reason why the BJP or the government should defend Mr Modi to the hilt, she said.

The TDP, another ally, appeared more concerned about proving its secular credentials and praising Mr Chandrababu Naidu than clearing its stand on their conduct in responding to the motion of the Opposition. Mr Yerran Naidu, the TDP leader, condemned the communal violence and reiterated his party's demand that the government sack Mr Modi.

The CPI-M leader, Mr Somnath Chatterjee, voiced his disgust over the atmosphere obtaining in Parliament and said: "I must protest the abuse of this Parliament Hall". The Prime Minister had all the time to devise a strategy to defeat the Opposition motion but did not find time for two months to chalk out one to end the communal violence in Gujarat.

Earlier in the day, Mr N Chandrababu Naidu decided to ask TDP MPs to stage a walkout in the Lok Sabha protesting against the Prime Minister's refusal to replace Mr Modi, SNS adds from Hyderabad. Mr Naidu, however, would continue to fight for Mr Modi's ouster till the end.

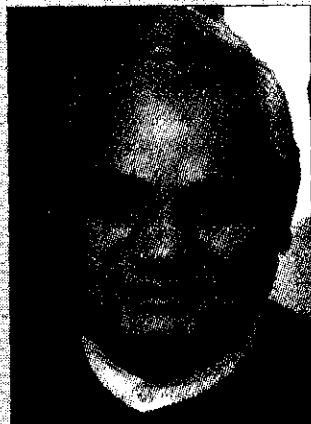
After hectic parleys with his MPs, Mr Naidu formulated his demands on Gujarat. They were Mr Modi's ouster, postponement of Gujarat elections, rehabilitation of the riot victims and restoration of normalcy in the state.

The last two demands remained merged till yesterday. Mr Naidu split them up with the knowledge that Mr Vajpayee would not announce a change in the Gujarat leadership. Hence, despite the rejection of the main demand, the TDP could claim a 75 per cent success rate with three of its four demands being met.

On Mr Modi's continuance in the office, Mr Naidu reportedly said: "The issue is not over with today's discussion. We will continue to fight for his (Mr Modi) dismissal even if the PM stands by him. There is no dilution of our stand here - he has to go". He added the BJP would remove Mr Modi in the next few weeks.

The morning's line worked as the day progressed. The TDP MPs informed Mr Naidu that the BJP had got the message across to them that Mr Vajpayee would announce a rehabilitation package apart from assuring a speedy restoration of normalcy in Gujarat. But, the government ruled out early elections.

There was enough ground for the TDP to abstain or even vote against the government as Mr Modi continued to be in power. But Mr Naidu indicated his unwillingness to be bracketed with the



What went wrong between Ahmedabad and Goa? the Opposition asked the Prime Minister, who was the focus of the debate besides Modi

Mum's the word for DD

NEW DELHI, April 30. — Doordarshan officials today said they did not show the Parliament debate live because there is no news channel, but there may have been fears that the Centre's embarrassment could be laid bare before viewers.

Though there was no DD news channel when the HD Deve Gowda government faced a trust vote, it was shown live on DD. An official admitted the debate could have been shown on DD1 and if not, on DD Metro or DD Bharati. — SNS



Motionless and still: The outcome of Tuesday's Lok Sabha debate seems uppermost in the mind of these women as they look around a street from the doorstep of their house in Ahmedabad. — AFP

Congress, in the event of voting in favour of the motion. He was also against deepening the divide within the NDA. A walkout would have a better impact than mere abstention, Mr Naidu reckoned.

Around 9.15 p.m. the TDP politburo

authorised Mr Naidu to take "an appropriate decision at the appropriate time". Mr Yerran Naidu said he would voice the final party decision only after Mr Vajpayee's speech.

More reports on page 6

Battered govt set to defeat **censure motion**

Opposition, TDP demand Modi's head **Omar quits over Gujarat issue**

Times News Network
NEW DELHI: The BJP-led central government looked certain to defeat the opposition's censure motion in the Lok Sabha at the end of a day's debate where it faced a torrent of criticism for its handling of the Gujarat issue. Though the attack on the government was led by the opposition, the wounds it sustained were self-inflicted.

A key ally, the Telugu Desam Party, abstained in the voting, and minister of state for external affairs Omar Abdullah announced ahead of the vote that he had submitted his resignation. On Monday, Ram Vilas Paswan had resigned from the cabinet and led his Lok Janshakti out of the NDA.

Leading the opposition broadside, Congress leader Sonia Gandhi made a frontal attack on the Prime Minister when she said "his shifting statements have shocked us". Referring to his lecture to Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi on 'rajdharm' on April 4 and his speech at a public rally in Goa when he said that Muslims did not know how to live in peace, she said, "Such double-speak—what does it say to the nation?"

The PM, she recalled, had said that if parliament had condemned the Godhra carnage, the subsequent violence in Gujarat would not have followed. "What stopped him, as leader of the House and the PM, from taking the initiative? The PM's failure cannot be portrayed as parliament's dereliction." She appealed to Mr Vajpayee to rise above party affiliations and "put the Gujarat government on notice under Article 355", dismiss Mr

Modi, appoint a sitting supreme court judge to inquire into the murder and mayhem, and implement the recommendations of the National Human Rights Commission.

In a concise, but emotionally charged speech, Ms Gandhi described the situation in Gujarat as "a defining moment for all of us in public life" and said the Gujarat government stood indicted "not just for incompetence but for deliberate connivance". Referring to the stripping and murder in broad daylight of a Hindu woman for trying to protect her Muslim friend, Ms Gandhi said, "That act sent out a message of separatism and segregation."

She accused Mr Modi of being partisan and said that large-scale transfer of police officials in the state was a clear evidence of the administration's bias.

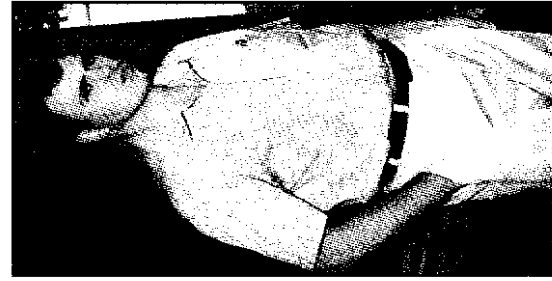
She said that though the Congress was ready to face elections it considered the BJP's proposal to dissolve the Gujarat assembly in the midst of raging riots an "insult to the people".

Earlier, initiating the debate, Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav, said he did not understand how the government could take umbrage at western criticism of the Gujarat violence. "Don't you raise the issue of Hindus in Fiji or Bangladesh? It is no longer an internal matter, when you have shamed India in front of the world by your Hitler-like behaviour." He also appealed to the allies to support the motion, if they were truly patriots.

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: Barely hours before the crucial debate on Gujarat began in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, minister of state for external affairs Omar Abdullah met Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee and offered his resignation. He is the second NDA minister to quit over the violence in Gujarat.

A senior cabinet minister said that Mr Abdullah's resignation would be accepted in the next couple of days. "If his resignation is not accepted, it will send a message to our NDA allies that they can vote against us and stay on, claiming it is just one lapse." The National Conference (NC) suggested, according to Mr Abdullah, began on Saturday, when his father, Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah, met the Prime Minister and informed him that since the NC had



Omar Abdullah comes out of parliament in New Delhi on Tuesday.

decided to abstain from voting on the Gujarat debate, he was handing in his son's resignation. "The PM told my father to reconsider his decision, so he came back with the letter. But after that, the NC parliamentary party and working committee met and the decision to abstain was reiterated. So, this morning, I verbally conveyed to him that my offer of resignation stands. He is considering it."

Asked whether his resignation had anything to do with the fact that he was due to take over presidency of the NC, Mr Abdullah said, "No, not at all. It is true that I would have gone back to the state sooner rather than later. But I could have quit at the end of the month. As far as my resignation is concerned, I felt that as a central minister, it would be morally not correct for me to continue in that position while abstaining from the vote."

HINDUSTAN TIMES

9.6.2002
PM's awakening
8/5
HTS

THE PRIME minister's explanation in the Rajya Sabha for not removing Narendra Modi from the Gujarat chief minister's position is worrying. According to him, he had desisted from carrying out the earlier plan to replace Mr Modi because of the fear of more violence. What it implies is that any anti-social group, or a canny chief minister, can hold the Centre to ransom by threatening to unleash violence. Mr Vajpayee's argument might have seemed credible if persisting with Mr Modi had helped in checking the disturbances. But more than two months after the riots started, the argument does not hold.

It doesn't take much political sense to see the kind of stranglehold which Mr Modi has on the Centre. It is evidently so strong that even the prime minister has to talk of ways other than the chief minister's removal to follow the *rajdharma*. The secret of Mr Modi's success is the continuing belief in the BJP and the Sangh parivar that the RSS *pracharak* is doing exactly what the party's and the *parivar*'s core supporters want him to do — 'teach'

the Muslims a lesson. It is the fear of alienating them and thereby inviting more violence which is inhibiting the Centre — apart, of course, from a lurking sympathy within the government for its own political kith and kin. As a result, though Mr Vajpayee may indulge in rhetorical displays about his opposition to Hindu militancy, these are not backed with action.

Nothing demonstrates the government's pusillanimity more than its refusal to act against Ashok Singhal for ascribing the riots to an "awakening" of the Hindus. It is not only an unqualified endorsement of the murder and mayhem perpetrated by the Sangh parivar activists in Gujarat, but also a reassuring message that no harm will come to them even if the Centre sends 'supercop' K.P.S. Gill to Gujarat and talks of implementing Article 355. While the leaders of SIMI are arrested for provocative speeches, the VHP leader goes scot-free because his incarceration can spark off trouble. When a government runs scared of trouble-makers, it is a sad day for the country.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

3 MAR 2002

Vajpayee says he thought of sacking Modi

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee on Monday gave a new twist to the row over the continuation of Narendra Modi as Gujarat chief minister, saying he had decided to remove Mr Modi but changed his mind fearing a backlash in the strife-torn state.

Referring to last month's national executive meeting of the BJP, Mr Vajpayee said, "Before going to Goa, I had made up my mind to change the Gujarat chief minister. However, later I felt that any change in the leadership would only worsen the situation."

Intervening in the Rajya Sabha debate on the Gujarat carnage motion moved by the opposition, the Prime Minister also ruled out immediate assembly elections in the state.

It is the first time in parliament history that an opposition motion has been carried unanimously, with the BJP deciding to back the motion because of the opposition's majority in the upper house.

Explaining the reasons behind visiting the state weeks after the violence had broken out, Mr Vajpayee claimed that he had been stopped from going earlier. "I was told not to go as it could have worsened the law and order situation," he said. He, however, declined to reveal who had advised him against visiting the state.

Responding to the criticism of his controversial remarks against

Muslims in his Goa speech, Mr Vajpayee maintained that he was referring to "militant Islam" and quickly added that he also disapproved of "militant Hinduism". "I accept the Hindutva of Swami Vivekananda. But the kind of Hindutva being propagated now is wrong and one should be wary of it," he said, adding that although there were laws to deal with any eventuality, he was confident that Hindu organisations would not become a danger to the country's unity.

In his intervention at the request of the opposition, home minister L.K. Advani denied reports that

DOWN, BUT NOT OUT



the Gujarat police force was communal.

However, when Congress member Kapil Sibal asked if he was satisfied with what the Centre had done in Gujarat, Mr Advani declined to reply. The home minister refused to

answer the opposition once again when asked if the government would book those accused of rioting, arson, murder and rape under the Prevention of Terrorism Act.

The opposition accused the Centre of double-speak on Gujarat, pointing out that Mr Vajpayee and external affairs minister Jaswant Singh had spoken in different voices on the issue. The Congress and the Samajwadi Party said while Mr Singh had assured the Rajya Sabha of action under the provisions of Article 355, Mr Vajpayee had dismissed any such possibility.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

7 MAR 2002

Joins issue with Sonia HD-1

We can't be derailed: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 27. In a sharp reaction to the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi's address to industry on Friday, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today declared that his Government was here to stay for the full five-year term. Stung by her remarks on the prospects of a change in the direction of political winds, he said, "This Government cannot be derailed. It is stable; it is here to stay."

On the communal violence in Gujarat on which Ms. Gandhi had spoken at length, Mr. Vajpayee said it had shocked and traumatised the country and described it as "a blot on India". But he decried the attempt to ignore the complexity of the situation. It did not help the interests of the country, the cause of secularism or the interests of business to forget that the Gujarat violence was a "temporary aberration" and not a fundamental fissure in society.

Mr. Vajpayee, who was addressing the concluding session of the Confederation of Indian Industry's (CII) annual conference, devoted much of his address to responding to the issues raised by Ms. Gandhi at the inaugural session.

Insisting that it was not his intention to impart a political tone to his speech, he said the climate of debate in recent months had become so "highly vitiated" by half-truths and exaggerations that even the CII platform was not spared. Having said that, he went on to use the podium to engage in political sparring with the Leader of the Opposition.

He joined issue with Ms. Gandhi, who had placed significance on being invited to the inaugural function, and noted that such people seemed to think that chambers of commerce had more powers to



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, with the CII president, Sanjiv Goenka, at the CII national conference and annual session, in New Delhi on Saturday. — Photo: S. Arneja

make and unmake governments than the people. With the invitation to Ms. Gandhi causing controversy, the outgoing CII president, Sanjiv Goenka, tried to make up for the *faux pas* of not inviting Mr. Vajpayee for the inaugural session by stressing in his welcome remarks that the special plenary was the "centrepiece" of the event and "there was no inaugural of this annual conference".

Mr. Vajpayee minced no words when he advised Ms. Gandhi to learn from industry that "it does not make business sense to count one's chickens before they are hatched".

Ms. Gandhi had said, "When the Leader of the Opposition is invited by the country's leading industrialists to start off their annual get-together, it is natural to speculate. What could be the motive? What sort of political winds are blowing and in what direction?"

The Prime Minister was heard in rapt attention by the audience, comprising corporate leaders, diplomats and bureaucrats, who burst into applause at his opening comments.

He said that when the people elected the Parliament, they expected it to run for five years. And those mandated to sit in the Opposition were expected to play their *due role*.

When the time came to elect a new Parliament, everyone had a chance to go back to the people. He cautioned that attempts in recent years to destabilise governments had neither helped the cause of business, nor done any good to democracy.

Mr. Vajpayee was also critical of Ms. Gandhi's comments on Gujarat and secularism. "Yes, a tragedy is a tragedy," he said, adding that the crime perpetrated either in Godhra or elsewhere should not be belittled.

The determination expressed by the Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha, to attain 7 to 8 per cent GDP growth was not misplaced as the economy had achieved more than a mild recovery, the Prime Minister said. In this context, he called on the industry to "believe" in the Finance Minister as he had earlier urged it to "believe in India".

THE HINDU

Atal slams door on foreign sermons

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, April 25: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee tonight played on national pride in a blunt bid to nip the growing murmurs of concern abroad on Gujarat, saying there is no need to sermonise India on secularism and pluralism.

"India is being advised on

pluralism and secularism. We need not learn about secularism from anybody," Vajpayee told a meeting on the occasion of Mahavir Jayanti.

The rebuke came close on the heels of some western nations, especially European, voicing concern over the killing of minorities in Gujarat. The Arab world has also started turning restive.

"We need not learn secularism from anybody. Our founda-

tion is strong. There is no reason why people, who in the present circumstances have deviated, should not come back on the right path," Vajpayee said.

The Prime Minister repeatedly used the word "deviation" to indirectly refer to the macabre incidents in Gujarat. "Sometimes, we deviate from the right path. There are ups and downs on the way but we correct ourselves," Vajpayee said. "The de-

viation is momentary. This deviation will end and should end."

However, even as he spoke, violence flared up in Gujarat in the evening after a brief lull during the day. (See Page 6)

Delhi had yesterday expressed strong resentment against "foreign interference". The VHP joined in, saying it would send emissaries abroad to clear the air.

The British government

today tried to contain the diplomatic fallout by clarifying that it was not working alongside Gujarat families there to file a case against chief minister Narendra Modi. Britain added that "it is for the affected families to take legal action and they have not approached us".

Canada said it does not want to interfere but added that it expressed concern because it was a "strong friend" of India.

publicly frowned on Delhi's "balancing act" on the current flare-up in West Asia.

But both the issues are likely to crop up at the meeting of the foreign ministers of the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), scheduled for early May in Doha. If the violence in Gujarat continues for the next few days, the OIC may send a strong signal to the Indian government on the status of the minorities.

But discontent is brewing among the Arab nations. Questions are being raised in the Arab world whether there is a link between India's inability to stop the attacks on Muslims in Gujarat and its ambiguous stand on the West Asian crisis.

Unlike the West, the Arab world has so far refrained from making any critical statements on the Vajpayee government's handling of Gujarat. Nor has it

26 APR 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

We too can use Rule 184: BJP

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, APRIL 24. The Bharatiya Janata Party seems to have set its heart on paying the compliment of a censure motion back to the Opposition parties.

The party spokesperson, V.K. Malhotra, today warned that motions under Rule 184 would now be moved for happenings in Bihar and West Bengal as a "precedent has been set" by the Lok Sabha Deputy Speaker by accepting the Opposition-sponsored motion related to Gujarat. He was referring to the "precedent" of discussing a State subject in the Lok Sabha.

Some Trinamool Congress MPs had discussed the matter with him, he said, and they would bring a motion under Rule 184 against the West Bengal Government, and on Bihar such a motion could be jointly moved by the Samata Party and the BJP.

Mr. Malhotra disagreed that the precedent for discussing a State-related subject may have

been set much earlier when an adjournment motion in relation to Bihar demanding the dismissal of the then Laloo Prasad Government was moved by Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, then Leader of the Opposition. It was admitted and discussed and before the debate ended converted into a motion under Rule 184.

In July 1997, P.A. Sangma, then in the Speaker's chair, had also on that very day admitted a censure motion under Rule 184 in relation to a police firing on Dalits in Maharashtra. But Mr. Malhotra insisted today that a "bad precedent" was set on Tuesday when the Deputy Speaker admitted the censure motion on Gujarat.

The BJP emphasised today that the "Centre was not directly responsible" for the Gujarat killings. (The implication was that, therefore, a censure motion ought not to have been admitted.) But, of course, his party had accepted the decision of the presiding officer of the Lok Sab-

ha, Mr. Malhotra added.

He was asked whether the BJP and the Trinamool had arrived at a "quid pro quo settlement" in that the BJP would support a Trinamool-sponsored censure motion in return for the Trinamool vote against the Opposition motion on Gujarat to be taken up on April 30. "No quid pro quo" was Mr. Malhotra's response.

He said that in Bihar the number of people killed was "10-fold as compared to Gujarat" but he did not give the comparative period in which this had taken place. "In total, more people have died in Bihar in the last three to four years than in Gujarat," he added.

Mr. Malhotra lashed out at the CPI(M) and the Congress saying that were more interested in showing "cracks" in the NDA than in helping to restore normality in Gujarat, nor did they have any genuine compassionate feelings for the sufferings of the Gujarat riot victims.

25 APR 2002

THE HINDU

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Gujarat won't have long-term fallout: Sinha

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

WASHINGTON, APRIL 22. The Union Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha, has admitted that the communal violence and carnage in Gujarat has had an effect on the Indian economy, but maintained that there would not be long-term fallouts.

"What has happened in Gujarat is most unfortunate. It certainly has impinged upon the economy, and Gujarat is a very important contributor to the GDP of the country," Mr. Sinha told presspersons at the Indian embassy here.

The Finance Minister was here for the spring meetings of the World Bank and the Inter-

national Monetary Fund (IMF). Before he left, Mr. Sinha met the IMF Director.

Mr. Sinha said no one had "mentioned" Gujarat or for that matter Enron. "It is my belief that the worst is behind us. What we are witnessing are sporadic incidents here and there, law and order problems which can also be seen in many parts of the country and elsewhere in the world. It is not something that will have a long-term deleterious impact on economic development or growth. Let me tell you that nobody with whom I had interaction here even mentioned the word Gujarat. I think we are more obsessed with the impact of Gujarat on

foreign investment in India."

Mr. Sinha said Enron was not going to "make or mar" the future of India. "No businessman or Government official talked to me here about Enron," he said, making the point that the law would take its course in India and in the U.S.

Mr. Sinha was invited to attend a special meeting organised by the U.S. Treasury Department on the issue of terrorist financing. At this meeting of the "Extended Group of Seven", Mr. Sinha said he had pointed out that terrorist financing was taking place through normal and non-banking channels and was sustained by narcotics trade.

Centre of Trouble

An entire week of parliamentary business has yet again been lost to disruptions, walkouts and adjournments. While normally there would be little to choose between the ruling and the opposition parties when it comes to parliamentary decorum, this time there are no doubts about where the blame for the impasse lies: With the Central government, which has sought to divert attention from Gujarat by challenging the opposition to move a no-confidence motion. This is a non-issue. The question before Parliament is not whether the overall performance of the Vajpayee government has been to the satisfaction of the House. It is whether the Centre's handling of the Gujarat situation meets the House's approval. That the NDA's own constituents are uneasy in the extreme about the Centre's role in Gujarat is without dispute. Over the past fortnight, first the Telugu Desam, and then slowly the other members, have voiced their disquiet at the disturbing state of affairs in the riot-ravaged state. While as chief minister Narendra Modi must be held accountable for not being able to restore normality, indeed for discriminating between citizens, he is not alone in the dock. The Centre must take equal share of the blame for wilfully abdicating its constitutional responsibility vis-a-vis Gujarat. Not to go as far as dismissing the Modi administration, the Centre has not even acted under Article 355 which mandates Central intervention to contain internal disturbance in a state. Instead, Central ministers have conveniently invoked federalism, forgetting that this principle did not deter them from advocating intervention in Bihar, West Bengal and Tamil Nadu in the past. This, in fact, is the crux of the matter.

It is for the opposition to determine the precise rule under which it wants to move a motion. The government cannot dictate otherwise unless it has valid reasons for doing so. So far, the government has not made out a persuasive case for disallowing voting under rule 184, except to argue that a censure of the government would be tantamount to a moral defeat. Clearly, the idea is to warn the NDA constituents that they could be paving the way for elections. Herein lies the clue to the government's behaviour. In truth, the ruling coalition is at war with itself, which a vote in Parliament will bring out into the open. A no-confidence motion, on the other hand, would spare the allies the dilemma of deciding where they stand. If the vote is on the overall performance of the government, clearly the allies would find themselves on the same side as Mr Vajpayee. However, the government must know that the final decision on parliamentary procedures rests with the presiding officer. Unfortunately, a parliamentary culture has developed over the years that inhibits the presiding officers from giving their rulings on controversial issues. It is quite likely that the present impasse will drag on till the BJP-BSP alliance is sealed and the NDA coalition is confident of accepting the challenge of voting. Besides causing important legislative business to suffer, a confrontational atmosphere in Parliament can only further delay the healing process in Gujarat. The deadlock in Parliament is as much a sign of the failure of leadership of the ruling coalition and the prime minister as of our parliamentary culture.

7 2 2002

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Opposition demand ridiculous, says PM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, April 20. — The stalemate in Parliament will in all probability continue next week as the ruling BJP and the Opposition stuck to their stands. While the BJP decided at a high-level meeting of the party not to give in to the Opposition demand for a discussion on Gujarat under Lok Sabha Rule 184 that allows for a vote, the Opposition today gave a call for unity of secular forces on the issue.

That the impasse is nowhere near to being resolved was evident when Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, castigating the Opposition for the stand-off, said their insistence on a discussion under Rule 184 had reached "ridiculous levels". Mr Vajpayee comment came while addressing a conference on the role of the voluntary sector in national development.

Pointing out that the differences were only on the rule, he asked the Opposition to play a more constructive role. The Prime Minister said he was surprised his description of the events in Gujarat had stirred a controversy, and denied reports of any

rift within the NDA over the issue. He pointed out that he had condemned the Gujarat incidents in the strongest terms, and had said that it had put "us to shame". The fathers of the Constitution had laid down the foundations of

down while describing the violence in Gujarat. "Even if there is darkness, the small lamps will show the way," the Prime Minister said, adding that the incidents "have put a question mark on all our efforts".

RULES OF THE RULE

The Opposition wants a discussion under Rule 184 which allows voting at the conclusion of the debate. The government is citing Rule 186 which states that a motion can be admitted under Rule 184 provided that "it shall not revive discussion of a matter which has been discussed in the same session". On the basis of this, the government is insisting that Gujarat, discussed under Rule 193 before the Budget session went for recess, cannot be discussed again under Rule 184. The Opposition's contention is even if the matter came up for a discussion earlier, the House can't be deprived of its privilege to discuss it again if the situation so warranted.

a nation with a secular fabric and not a "theocratic country", he asserted.

Mr Vajpayee assured Ms Nafis Barot, head of a voluntary group in Gujarat, that the government was providing all assistance to the state. She broke

But the Opposition dug in and rejected the Prime Minister's stand on the Gujarat debate. "The Congress has taken a firm stand on the issue and there is no change. The Opposition stand is a very reasonable one ... and the Prime Minister calling it 'ridiculous' is unwarranted," the party spokesman said. Congress leaders said the party was determined to have a discussion and voting in the Rajya Sabha under Rule 170.

CPI-M leader Mr HS Surjeet also reacted strongly to Mr Vajpayee's remarks: "The Opposition has taken a united stand ... in a democracy the government has to respect the opposition's point of view and be ready for a discussion. But the PM, typical of the RSS, is trying to impose an authoritarian regime which does not believe in discussion. The Opposition is not going to yield to his plans."

■ See VAJPAYEE: Page 10

VAJPAYEE:

(Continued from page 1)

Senior BJP leaders met at the residence of the Prime Minister to discuss the party's strategy for Parliament. It was unanimously decided that the Opposition demand should not be accepted, and at the same time resolved that BJP MPs should not take up the issue of Mrs Sonia Gandhi's remarks against the Prime Minister.

Those attending the meeting included home minister Mr LK Advani, external affairs minister Mr Jaswant Singh, law minister Mr Arun Jaitley, I&B minister Mrs Sushma Swaraj, and BJP parliamentary party spokesman Mr VK Malhotra. In the context of the ongoing imbroglio, the Speaker, parliamentary sources say, has a role to play. "The Speaker has the power to direct the government to accept a discussion or to disallow the Opposition motion".

According to provisions of Rule 187: "The Speaker shall decide if a motion or part thereof is or is not admissible under the rules, and disallow any motion or part thereof when, in his opinion, it is an abuse of the right of moving a motion, or is calculated to obstruct or prejudicially affects the procedure of the House, or is in contravention of these rules."

Mr Vajpayee greeted Mr Chandrababu Naidu on his 52nd birthday. His telephonic conversation comes almost a week after the two last spoke to each other about Gujarat, adds PTI.

7 1 2007

Cabinet nod for delimitation panel

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 19. The way has been cleared for the long-awaited exercise of delimitation of the Parliamentary and Legislative Assembly constituencies in the country, with the Union Cabinet deciding to set up a Commission for the purpose. The Cabinet, which met here on Thursday night, has decided to introduce a Bill in Parliament in this regard soon.

The panel, which is being set up after a gap of 25 years, would seek to remove the disparities that have arisen in the size of Lok Sabha and Assembly constituencies because of the uneven growth of population. For instance, in the capital, the Outer Delhi Parliamentary constituency has an electorate of about 20 lakhs, the Chandni Chowk constituency has an electorate of just about five lakhs.

Announcing the decision, the Union Minister and Cabinet spokesperson, Pramod Mahajan, said that following the delimitation exercise, the number of Scheduled Castes reserved constituency was expected to go up by seven in Lok Sabha in the wake of increase in SCs population as recorded in the 2001 Census.

There would, however, be no change in the total number of seats in both Parliament and State Assemblies. Parliament has already passed a law freezing the total number of seats up to the year 2025 to ensure that the States which had done well in population stabilisation do not feel penalised by a reduction of their strength in the Lok Sabha.

Mr. Mahajan said that while no time limit would be set for the Delimitation Commission, the expectation was that it would complete its work in six to eight months, as all the necessary data would be available on the computer.

Asked about the suggestion of the Election Commission that it should be entrusted with the task of delimitation of

constituencies, he said the EC had no role in it. "It can only be done by a Delimitation Commission appointed by a law passed by Parliament."

The delimitation exercise comes ahead of the scheduled Lok Sabha election of 2004 and, if completed in time, the shape and size of the Lok Sabha and Assembly Constituencies should be quite different from what they are now.

The Cabinet also set its seal on the closure of the controversial Rs.1,000 crore-Sankhya Vahini project, which envisaged setting up of a high-speed data network through a joint venture company involving a U.S. university.

Mr. Mahajan said the Cabinet was informed that the Ministry of Communications and Information Technology had decided to "close the case for the formation of Sankhya Vahini India Limited".

The proposal to form the company was mooted two years ago. It was to be set up by the then Department of Telecom Services, IUNET, a subsidiary of Carnegie Mellon University, Pittsburgh, the Department of Electronics and some educational institutions in the country.

The project came under a cloud after the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and several organisations opposed it on the ground that it could lead to a security risk. The project, which aimed at expanding the bandwidth for easy access to Internet and promoting educational and research activities, had rocked Parliament for several days with various sections stiffly opposing the proposed project, alleging that there was lack of transparency in the deal and that the project had security implications for the country.

Subsequently, the IUNET pulled out and the joint venture was abandoned. On October 2001, V.S.Arunachalam, president of the IUNET, conveyed to the Government, the university's decision to withdraw from the ambitious project alleging red tapism.

The Cabinet also approved the proposal for direct flights from Chennai and Kochi to Kuwait. It approved the grant of the two cities as additional points of call to the designated airline of Kuwait.

It also approved Cairo as an additional "beyond point" of call for the designated airlines of India. Consequently, there would soon be a change in route schedules.

Funds for elementary education

To ensure that the Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA) progresses as per schedule, the Union Cabinet decided that grants for this mission to universalise elementary education would be released directly to the State Implementation Societies instead of routing them through the State Government.

For the past couple of months, the Human Resource Development Ministry has been contemplating such a move for fear of cash-strapped States diverting the money meant for SSA elsewhere. In fact, direct transfer of funds to the State Implementation Societies had been the practice with the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP).

Despite the success of the DPEP model of funding, the Ministry decided to send SSA funds to State Governments in view of the preference for such an arrangement expressed by them. Though State Education Secretaries prefer the DPEP model as money can then be disbursed within days of it reaching the State Implementation Societies, the State Governments wanted to be the routing authority as such remittances boost their budget. Apparently, the HRD Ministry gave in to their plea as allocation for DPEP is not factored in into the Central allocation to States.

But with more and more States facing a financial crunch, the Ministry over the past year decided to revert back to the DPEP "path of funding" to ensure that SSA is not derailed due to procedural delays.

CONG MPs ON STANDBY IN DELHI

PM dares Opp over no-trust

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, April 19. — The government and the Opposition dared each other to prove their numbers even as Parliament adjourned for the fifth consecutive day today without conducting business. And Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today met President KR Narayanan, wherein he was understood to have discussed various issues, including Gujarat.

An all-party meeting called by the Deputy Speaker, Mr PM Sayeed, today turned acrimonious after Mr Vajpayee rejected the Opposition demand for a discussion on Gujarat under Rule 184, that allows for voting on an issue. Mr Vajpayee then challenged the Opposition to move a no-confidence against the NDA government if it was so sure of the numbers.

In another significant development, the Congress today asked all its MPs not to leave the Capital from Monday. Party sources said the message was conveyed to each member by the party's Lok Sabha chief whip. MPs have been told that any member who wants to leave Delhi must first seek Mrs Sonia Gandhi's consent and that too, only in case of an emergency.

Rejecting the offer of a no-confidence motion, Congress spokesman Mr Anand Sharma said: "Even today many NDA allies were absent from the meeting. The government knows it does not have the numbers to face the vote and is, therefore, running away from the discussion."

Mrs Sonia Gandhi set the tone by claiming the entire Opposition was united on the demand for discussion under Rule 184, and made "a personal appeal" to the Prime Minister to concede the demand.

Opposition leaders took potshots at Mr Vajpayee, charging him with "avoiding the Lok Sabha" and "not making any effort to break the deadlock".

The CPI-M MP, Mr Somnath Chatterjee, wondered why the BJP leader was fighting shy of a discussion under Rule 184 if the government was sure of its majority. Mr Chatterjee, deploring Mr Vajpayee's recent absence from the House, alleged he

was more interested in making provocative speeches on Gujarat, instead.

Mr Sharma clarified that in the Rajya Sabha, too, the Congress insists on implementing Rule 184, and that Mr Pranab Mukherjee was explaining the rules of voting to party MPs yesterday. Mr Mukherjee said: "There is no question of climbing down on the issue. We never made any such decision".

The government does not appear to be ready to take any chances in the Lok Sabha with some allies having expressed reservations about the Gujarat government's handling of the post-Godhra violence and the inability of the Centre to do anything on this count. The situation however may change once the BSP-BJP alliance gets formalised, as the NDA will then get the support of 13 more Lok Sabha MPs.

RJD leader Dr Raghuvansh Prasad said he had told the Prime Minister that he was seen these days only at birthday functions.

At today's all-party meeting, the TDP, which has 28 members in Lok Sabha, merely stressed that there should be a discussion, but did not specify if it should be under Rule 184. Other NDA allies said they wanted a discussion sans voting. The entire Opposition, barring the BSP which went along with the NDA, however, insisted on Rule 184.

The BJP objected to the motion as it would be tantamount to censure. The party spokesman, Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, said: "To say that the Central government had failed in its duty is censure. If the Opposition wanted to test the government's majority it could do so by moving a vote of no-confidence."

The Deputy Speaker later said though the Chair was fully authorised to decide under which rule a debate should take place, it was in line with the democratic traditions of Parliament that a consensus view of the House should prevail on the subject.

Expressing concern over the entire week having been "wasted" without work being done and the Finance Bills pending for discussion, Mr Sayeed appealed to all parties to ensure a "compromise solution" was worked out within the next three days.

20 APR 2000

THE STATESMAN

PM ready for trust vote

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 19

ATL BIHARI Vajpayee today dared the Opposition to move a no-confidence motion against his Government as an all-party meeting convened by Lok Sabha Deputy Speaker P M Sayeed failed to end the stand-off in Parliament on the Gujarat issue.

The Opposition and the ruling alliance did not budge an inch at the meeting, attended by Vajpayee, Sonia Gandhi and other leaders. The Opposition stuck to its demand for a discussion under Rule 184 — a censure motion that entails voting. But the Government held that it should be debated under Rule 193, which would not involve any voting. Sayeed, however, hoped the deadlock would be resolved within the next two days.

Rejecting the charge that the Government was shying away from a trial of strength, Vajpayee said if the Opposition wanted to test the NDA's strength, it could move a no-confidence motion. Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan told reporters. CPI(M) leader Somnath Chatterjee, however, said the PM made no such direct challenge.

Sonia Gandhi and other Opposition leaders rejected Vajpayee's counsel of Rule 193, saying such a discussion would be too short and would not help in clarifying the stand of all parties.

BJP allies Trinamool Janata



Defence Minister George Fernandes addresses reporters in Ahmedabad on Friday. He said nothing had been finalised yet on an Army pullout from riot-hit Gujarat. (Report on Page 9)

Dal(U) and the MDMK did not attend the hour-long meeting. The TDP and the Trinamool hold that the Lok Sabha should discuss Gujarat but it is for the Deputy Speaker to decide on the type of debate. The JD(U) and the MDMK are opposing any debate involving voting. Sayeed said though it is the Speaker's prerogative to decide on the type of debate, consensus has been the tradition.

Mahajan said a censure dis-

cussion was not possible under the rules of business since the Gujarat issue had been discussed in the House. The Centre was not directly dealing with law and order in Gujarat. Besides, the violence was under investigation by a commission appointed by the State Government.

He said law and order was a State subject and it was for the Gujarat Assembly to decide Modi's fate. "Tomorrow some party might demand the West Bengal

CM's removal. How can the Centre accede to such a demand?"

The Opposition rejected the Government's challenge of a trust motion, saying such a move would help the NDA keep together its allies. "A no-trust motion against the Centre can't remove Modi. It should be moved in Gujarat Assembly," said Congress leader Anand Sharma.

Related reports on Page 9

20 APR 2002

THE HINDUIST IN TIMES

Oppn Demands Adjournment Over Gujarat, BJP Seeks Sonia's Apology

Logjam over Modi continues

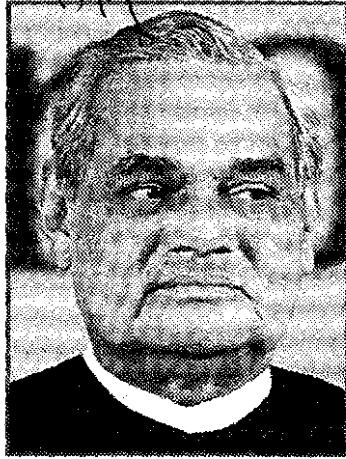
Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 16 APRIL

THE LOGJAM in Parliament on the issue of removal of the Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi continued for the second day on Tuesday, as treasury and Opposition benches stuck to their respective stands, forcing the adjournment of both the Houses for the day.

That some common meeting ground still eluded both sides became evident when chairs of both Houses lost no time in calling it a day, after members refused to relent and persisted with disrupting the proceedings.

The Opposition kept up its demand for an adjournment motion on the Gujarat issue, which was squarely rejected by the government. BJP members, on the other hand, sought an apology from Congress president Sonia Gandhi for her remarks against Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee in Guwahati recently.

Significantly, the manner in which the government allowed the House to be adjourned within minutes clearly indicated that it was more anxious to settle things with the TDP first. There were indications of backroom manoeuvres being made from various quarters to try and coax the TDP supremo Chandrababu Naidu to acquiesce



VAJPAYEE: EYE OF THE STORM



SONIA: BURNING ISSUE

to the NDA's wishes.

It seemed to have gained partial success at least with the Trinamool Congress. According to agency reports, Ms Mamata Banerjee said in Kolkata that the Trinamool was with the NDA and would be voting in favour of the government, although its Opposition to Modi's continuation remained.

In the Opposition camp, there was somewhat dampening news for the Congress, which had sounded upbeat after Mulayam Singh Yadav responded positively to Ms Sonia Gandhi's request and attended an Opposition meeting that she convened. "Leaders of almost all

major non-Congress Opposition parties met on Tuesday. We have decided to insist on a discussion under Rule 184 which requires voting in Lok Sabha," CPI-M leader Somnath Chatterjee told reporters after the meeting.

Asked about the stand of the Congress, he said "it is an open appeal to all parties. Let them take their own decision." Those who attended the meeting included leaders of all Left parties, Samajwadi Party, NCP, RJD, Kerala Congress and IUML.

Mr Chatterjee also charged that Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee had "forfeited the right to lead the nation."

BJP endorses decision not to remove Modi

New Delhi
16 APRIL

THE BJP parliamentary party, on Tuesday, endorsed the party national executive's decision not to remove Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi and asserted it will oppose any adjournment motion on the Gujarat issue.

The parliamentary party also opposed any move to have a discussion on the issue under Rule 184 which provided for voting.

"The parliamentary party endorsed Goa national executive's resolution on Gujarat. The party agreed that there was no need for removing Mr Narendra Modi as chief minister," party spokesman V.K. Malhotra said. — PTI

House debacle threat to NDA

New Delhi
16 APRIL

PRIME MINISTER Atal Behari Vajpayee on Tuesday described the disruption of parliamentary proceedings by the Opposition on the Gujarat issue as a "challenge" to the ruling National Democratic Alliance and asked all MPs of the ruling coalition to face it together.

Mr Vajpayee said the Opposition parties were "not interested in a test of strength," party spokesman V.K. Malhotra told reporters. — PTI

A clarification

MR VIJAY Mallya was not accompanied by Dimple Kapadia as the caption to the agency photo carried on this page in Tuesday's edition of *The Economic Times* mentioned. He was flanked by his wife, Rekha Mallya. This inadvertent mistake was due to an erroneous PTI photo caption circulated on Monday evening. The agency corrected the caption on Tuesday.

17 200 200

The Economic Times

Vajpayee should act as NDA PM: Naidu

By Dasu Kesava Rao

HYDERABAD, APRIL 15. The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, has dismissed the BJP's contention that the Gujarat events pertain to itself (the BJP) and the State and asserted that the country's prestige and pride were at stake.

"I am surprised that some people are talking about the NDA and the BJP being two different things as far as Gujarat is concerned. They can't say it is strictly their (BJP) business and others need not interfere." The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, might belong to the BJP, but he should act like an NDA

16
10-1
Time Minister, he said at a press conference on Monday.

Mr. Vajpayee had termed the Gujarat events a 'national shame', the Human Rights Commission had highlighted the failure of the State administration and the miseries of the people. Several other agencies had also indicated the State administration. What could be more painful than the foreign media (*The Time* magazine) writing about "Bloody India", he asked.

Mr. Naidu sought to finetune the party's stand in the fast-changing political environment as he felt that it was not properly elaborated at Sunday's media

briefing, adding 'you (press) people laid him (the TD parliamentary party leader, K. Yerran Naidu) a trap'.

He reiterated his party's demand — change the leadership in Gujarat, give up the idea of early polls and take immediate and effective steps for the restoration of normalcy, rehabilitation of the riot victims and bringing the guilty to book.

The Telugu Desam had conducted itself as a mature and dignified ally of the BJP for four years without creating any problem for the Government. He condemned the reprisals in Gujarat and the proffering of Godhra as an excuse for the vio-

lence as also the Modi Government's controversial justification, saying that people at the helm should exercise restraint. He did not lose his cool when his Cabinet colleague, A. Madhava Reddy, was killed by extremists.

The Gujarat administration should have been impartial and acted tough from day one. "We in Hyderabad kept day-and-night vigil to protect lives for one week and I have asked the Police Commissioner to be impartial and tough. That was how we controlled riots and maintained communal peace all these years", he said.

The TDP called for a change of leadership in Gujarat because it badly needed a healing touch and the restoration of confidence.

With the BJP firmly rejecting his demand for the resignation of Mr. Modi, would he take the issue to its logical conclusion? "The problem with you is you want logical conclusion. We want a solution to the problem", Mr. Naidu retorted.

Asked if he felt "isolated" in the current developments, he joked "Why should I when the entire press is with me". Would he be going to Gujarat? "No decision yet", he replied.

'Decision not taken'

The Telugu Desam has let it be known to the NDA Government that it has not yet taken a decision on continuing or withdrawing support to it. Mr. Naidu is understood to have conveyed this to Mr. Vajpayee, when the latter telephoned him earlier in the day. Sources said that Mr. Vajpayee called up Mr. Naidu to thank him for deciding to continue the support to his Government and the latter politely put to him that the party took no decision in this regard.

THE EDITOR

PM says he is ready for trial of strength

TDP hardens stand, Mamata backs Naidu

Times News Network

PANAJI: Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee on Sunday hit back at his critics among the National Democratic Alliance partners who have opposed the BJP's decision not to remove Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi. Mr Vajpayee said he was ready to face a trial of strength in parliament when the time came. "If necessary, we will prove our majority in the Lok Sabha," he told reporters. The three-day national executive of the BJP concluded here with a commitment not to deviate from the common agenda of the NDA.

In a related development, the Telugu Desam Party has reiterated its demand for the removal of Mr Modi.

Andhra Pradesh chief minister and TDP president N. Chandrababu Naidu held talks with senior party leaders at his residence on Sunday and apprised them of the talks he had with Mr Vajpayee, L.K. Advani and Pramod Mahajan on Saturday night.

A TDP politburo member said that Mr Naidu expressed unhappiness over the manner in which the BJP leadership was deviating from the common agenda of the NDA. The politburo members are understood to have said that the party should give greater importance to maintaining the secular image of the party and should not hesitate to distance itself from the BJP. A second politburo meeting was scheduled to be held later in the night to decide whether to withdraw support to the NDA government. However, according to party sources, the TDP may decide to wait

for another two or three days before finally announcing the withdrawal of support or deciding to extend issues-based support to the government.

Another key ally of the BJP, the Trinamul Congress, also threw its weight behind Mr Naidu on the Modi issue.

"Whatever stand the TDP will take on the Gujarat issue, we are fully with them," Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee told newsmen in Kolkata after holding a detailed discussion with Mr Naidu over the phone.

Emphasising that the TDP had always

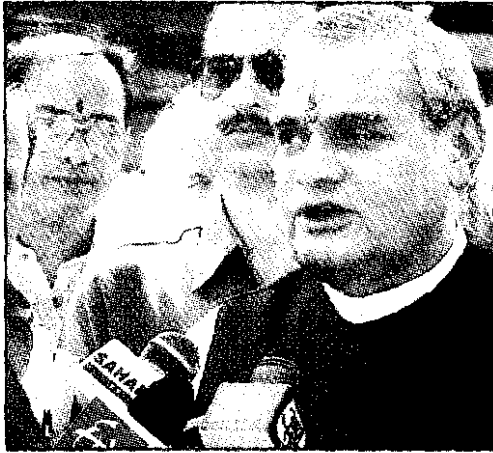
supported her party on all issues, Ms Banerjee said, "Now it is our turn to support them. Old friends are real friends, new friends are like seasonal birds."

To a query whether her party, which has nine members in the Lok Sabha, would leave the NDA, Ms Banerjee said she would discuss the issue with Mr Naidu, saying, "whatever we will do, will do together".

Meanwhile, the

BJP, which on the opening day of the Goa conclave, proudly wore its Hindutva tag with the Prime Minister making an unusually strident speech about terrorism, later saw the party toning down its rhetoric on the issue in an apparent bid to mollify the secular allies angry over the BJP's decision to go in for elections in Gujarat.

But at the same time, the party also made it clear that allies had no right to "interfere" in the BJP's affairs and could not dictate who its chief minister should be in a state ruled by it.



Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee speaks to journalists after laying the foundation stone of a secretariat building in Panaji on Sunday.

Government ready for show of strength, says Vajpayee

Sushob K Verma in Patna

April 14. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today said the NDA was ready for a show of strength, though most faces in the BJP's national executive meeting here seemed worried at the fast developments. The BJP president, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, asserted that the government would go along even if the TDP withdrew support.

The party is trying to work out an arrangement with the BSP in Uttar Pradesh to get the support of its 13 Lok Sabha members to counterbalance the TDP in any show of strength. The Prime Minister told the executive that a decision on Uttar Pradesh would be taken by the BJP's parliamentary board soon.

Mr Krishnamurthy ruled out the BJP reconsidering its stand on the Gujarat chief minister and the executive suggestion for dissolution of the state Assembly and fresh polls. He asserted that none of the allies has the right to dictate terms to the BJP and vice-versa. "The question of Mr Narendra Modi's continuation is beyond the scope of any NDA partner. It also applies to parties supporting the NDA."

The Prime Minister tried to prop up the national executive members in his valedictory message, saying "we'll face the consequences". He told them that despite being old, he was quite capable of handling the situation.

He asked party leaders to set aside intra-party differences to face the challenge.

The Prime Minister told reporters in the morning that the BJP was ready for a show

Sonia says sorry

NEW DELHI, April 14. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi today apologised for her remark on Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee. In Guwahati yesterday, she said the Prime Minister had lost his "mental balance". "I'm not happy with the expression I used yesterday about the Prime Minister on the spur of the moment. I didn't mean it. However, we in the Congress are gravely concerned at frequent changes in the stand of the Prime Minister on the secular issues in general and the disturbing situation in Gujarat in particular." Earlier in the day, Mr Vajpayee dismissed Mrs Gandhi's barb, saying this only shows "her mentality". — SNS/PTI

of strength, if needed. He said talks were on with the TDP and hoped that something positive would emerge.

He told the national executive that he had asked Mr N Chandrababu Naidu whether he had taken his stand after studying the Gujarat situation. "Did he send a team to Gujarat to get a first hand account. I asked him and told him that newspapers were reporting di-

rectly the opposite of the actual situation there," he said.

While speaking about Uttar Pradesh, the Prime Minister became poetic. He said: "Sangharsh ke path per yeh bhi sahi woh bhi sahi, sangharsh ki rauh mein kuch milte hain kuch bichad jaate hain. Isse dama nahi chahiye (In struggle, both things are right. While some meet some part ways. One should not be afraid of this)."

Mr Krishnamurthy gave vent to the party's anger against the TDP and its latest statement that electoral process was being used to settle communal agenda.

The TDP was free to take any stand, but it was against the spirit of the NDA that an ally should demand resignation of a chief minister of its partner, he said. Ever since the NDA was formed, it was for governance at the Centre, he stressed.

To give a positive message to other NDA partners, the BJP has decided to set up a sub-committee that would look into various aspects of the party's Chennai declaration in the context of the NDA's national agenda for governance.

Based on the committee's findings, the party would take up issues for the mass contact programme it plans to launch to counter the Congress.

The BJP had accepted the challenge and would carry the battle into the Congress fort. Mr Krishnamurthy said.

15 APR 2002

THE STATESMAN

TDP decision today

By Neena Vyas

HD 1
14/4
GOA, APRIL 13. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani and the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, met late night here on the sidelines of the national executive meeting of the BJP and discussed the apparent threat of withdrawal of support to the Vajpayee Government by the Telugu Desam Party. A phone call was made to the TDP leader, N. Chandrababu Naidu, in Hyderabad, who is reported to have conveyed to the BJP leadership that his party's decision on withdrawal of support would be made known only tomorrow only after a formal meeting of the party.

BJP decision on Gujarat opposed

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, APRIL 13. The Telugu Desam has strongly opposed the BJP decision to dissolve the Gujarat Assembly and reiterated its demand for a change of leadership in the riot-torn State.

The party politburo presided over by the Chief Minister and party president, N. Chandrababu Naidu, on Saturday night, adopted a resolution to

the effect. The resolution said it was 'opposed to using the noble process of elections for achieving narrow and communal ends'.

It said that secularism was a fundamental principle of the TDP and strict adherence to it was the condition for its support to the NDA alliance at the Centre. The Telugu Desam believed India was a pluralistic society and that divisive forces could not take the country forward. Blaming the Gujarat Government for 'total failure' to restore peace and normality after violence broke out, it said the administration was also accused of gross partiality and even complicity in handling the law and order situation. Effective and impartial intervention could have curbed the gross human tragedy. Several impartial individuals and organisations spoke of the 'lapses' of the Gujarat Government in curbing violence.

The politburo went on: "To say that elections will be held in Gujarat to decide on this, is in our view, trying to make political capital of a human tragedy and a covert attempt to clothe narrow and partisan ends with the legitimacy of a democratic process". The leadership in Gujarat, it said, had lost the moral authority to govern and the devious use of the electoral process could not restore such authority.

14 APR 2002

THE HINDU

Govt 'interprets' its rules to suit Reliance

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, April 4. — "Interpretation", not rules, seems to be the decider for disqualifying bidders of public sector companies. Disinvestment minister Mr Arun Shourie has said Reliance Industries can bid for the Indian Petrochemicals Limited (IPCL), because the case against it does not show prima facie evidence that the company or its executives violated "national security".

When Mr Shourie's bureaucratic deputy, secretary Mr Pradip Bajjal, was asked how the Hindujas, who were bidding for Air India, were disqualified under national security considerations — the Cabinet Committee on Security had met to discuss the issue — he said the "ministry had made its own interpretation".

Pressed further, Mr Bajjal said: "Please ... I do not want to go into these details now."

His reluctance to elaborate is perhaps explained by the abundant lack of logic in the ministry's "interpretation" of its own guidelines in the two cases.

The Hindujas were charge-

sheeted by the CBI under the Prevention of Corruption Act for their alleged role in the Bofors payoffs case. The CBI chargesheet nowhere mentions that the Hindujas were passing secrets to the nation's enemies.

Yet, when the disinvestment ministry considered the Reliance Industries case, its internal assessment hinged on the fact that the CBI complaint against the Mumbai-based company, though based on the Official Secrets Act (OSA), did not mention Sections 3, 5(1) and 5(3) of the legislation. These deal with espionage and passing of national security-related information to enemies.

Since the disinvestment ministry guidelines require that a chargesheet is enough ground for disqualifying a bidder only when national security is involved — a conviction is required for other offences — and since the internal assessment noted that the relevant sections of OSA were not applicable for Reliance, the company was cleared to bid for IPCL.

But this raises the almost unanswerable question: these offences were not applicable to the Hindujas either. So, under what

571 579
"interpretation" were they deemed to have violated national security?

Not only were the Hindujas barred from Air India, but Ashok Leyland, in which the London-based group has a stake, withdrew from the bid for IBP; the withdrawal was in anticipation of a show cause notice to be served by the disinvestment ministry.

The ministry won't answer the glaring contradiction in the application of its own guidelines in the two cases, not even after Mr Bajjal had earlier quoted his minister as saying that the guidelines would be "followed blindly". Instead, it is getting busy selling IPCL. Mr Bajjal said IPCL will be sold soon, "probably within this month".

Reacting to the disinvestment ministry giving a clean chit to Reliance, senior CPI-M leader from West Bengal, Mr Somnath Chatterjee, said: "This is yet another example of the double standards of the Vajpayee government in implementing guidelines, especially when it comes to their favourites in the industry who may also be their benefactors. Therefore, the decision on Reliance should not surprise any one."

THE STATESMAN

PM rejects Pirabhakaran plea

Nilova Roy Chaudhury

ON BOARD THE PM'S SPECIAL AIRCRAFT, April 11 — The Prime Minister today ruled out any role by India in the proposed peace talks between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE, but said New Delhi would "sympathetically" consider the request to extend medical help to the ailing LTTE spokesman, Anton Balasingham. "We aren't going to be part of any negotiations or interfere in any talks between the Sri Lankan government and the LTTE."

On his tenure in office, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said: "Half the night is over, the other half remains." The comment possibly reflects the hope that dawn might break. But it suggests an acceptance of the fact that his tenure has been rather bleak. Asked if the Centre was to blame for the BJP's reverses in the recent polls, he said the results "hadn't been up to the expectations". He stressed the

need to study the reasons behind the debacle.

Mr Vajpayee was non-committal over the demands for removal of the Gujarat chief minister, saying the matter will be discussed at the BJP national executive meeting in Goa tomorrow: "Goa mein vichar hoga."

The Prime Minister was upbeat about his trips to Singapore and Cambodia, which he said was in pursuance of New Delhi's "Look East" policy. His tours to Indonesia, Malaysia and Vietnam last year and Mr Jaswant Singh's visit to Myanmar earlier this month, too, were illustrated the government's commitment to strengthen ties with South-east Asia.

Describing his two-nation tour as "fruitful and rewarding", Mr Vajpayee said Singaporean leaders had reaffirmed their desire to intensify bilateral interaction and accelerate the progress in various areas of cooperation. He also spoke on terrorism, and stressed that the Island Republic, too, has been stirred by recent arrests of Al-Qaida activists. The leaders there had raised with him the issue of

"Islamic fundamentalism" as opposed to terrorism, and the need to curb both.

His visit to Cambodia, the first by an Indian PM in almost 50 years, was specially satisfying. He was moved by the hospitality of King Norodom Sihanouk, who even arranged for Indian cuisine for him. Mr Vajpayee said his visit was to correct the "imbalance" in bilateral ties that had cropped up due to Cold War exigencies, and to thank Cambodia for its role in backing India's effort to be a summit-level partner of the Asean.

Lanka sees hope in offer: Praising yesterday's LTTE peace overture, the Sri Lankan Prime Minister today said a political solution to 18 years of ethnic strife is now a possibility. But Mr Ranil Wickremesinghe cautioned that making a politician out of an armed guerrilla will not be an overnight process, reports AP from Colombo.

More reports on pages 2 and 6

LIFE IN GUJARAT A MATTER OF SHAME FOR ALL OF US, SAYS PM

Uphold dignity of office, Vajpayee tells Modi

Statesman News Service

GANDHINAGAR, April 4. — The Prime Minister has a clear and terse message for the Gujarat chief minister: "Rajdharma ka palan kare" (uphold the dignity of high office), and not discriminate on the basis of birth, caste and community.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee — here on a day-long visit for a first-hand assessment of the situation — conveyed this at a press conference at the end of his tour. In response, chief minister Mr Narendra Modi, sitting next to him, claimed he was already doing what Mr Vajpayee wanted him to do.

Asked if he envisaged a mid-term poll or was considering the replacement of Mr Modi, Mr Vajpayee replied: "I do not see any changes."

Also with Mr Vajpayee on his tour of the relief camps were Union ministers Miss Uma Bharati — saffron-clad and walking with the aid of a stick — and Mr Arun Jaitley, and Gujarat industries minister Mr Suresh Mehta. Senior government officials were present and policemen had cordoned off the area.

Immediately upon arrival at Ahmedabad, Mr Vajpayee headed for Godhra to see for himself the scene of the carnage. This was followed by his visit to the refugee camps. And after his visit to the Shah Alam camp, the Prime Minister met several delegations seeking a fair assessment of the events in Gujarat. He later visited two small camps at Kankaria.

At Godhra, categorically calling for violence to end, Mr Vajpayee said: "It is horrible and heart-rending.... The way you live here is a matter of shame for all

Rehab package

GANDHINAGAR, April 4. — Resettlement of the riot-affected will not be on communal lines, Mr Vajpayee said while announcing the rehabilitation deal here today.

The Centre will provide Rs 1 lakh to the next of kin of those killed, he said. This is in addition to the Rs 50,000 already announced by the state government. Orphans and widows will be resettled in line with the guidance of Self-Employed Women's Association.

The Centre will give Rs 50,000 to reconstruct houses in rural Gujarat. In urban areas, houses will be re-built after a comprehensive survey. "The Centre will provide full relief," the Prime Minister said. Aid will also be given to rebuild shops and business establishments.

The Centre will bear the cost of the food being supplied to refugee camps. Children will be given free books and uniform. In riot-affected areas, free ration will be provided for two months to those below the poverty line. — SNS



Protest placards greet Mr Vajpayee in Ahmedabad on Thursday. The banner on the right reads: 'Ataji, this is an attack on humanity. We want justice.' — AFP

of us: people have become refugees in their own land ... homeless in their own home ... (it) is a very sad affair." He added that "there is no other way" but for (people) to live in brotherhood and amity. Calling on the people to leave behind memories of the riots and "look ahead", he said the "government has to rebuild the trust ... this is the need of the hour".

At the press meet tonight, asked if the majority community needed protection, he said: "Do I need to answer this?", and

hastened to add: "The majority has safety in numbers; it is the minority community that needs protection."

When Godhra cropped up in another question, he said: "You are simplifying the issue ... the conspiracy runs deep: small groups can foment serious problems."

And asked about fixing responsibility for the riots that are still raging in parts of Gujarat, the Prime Minister said: "Officials have been asked to do their duty."

To another question on the current polarisation of communities, he said: "Gujarat is a puzzle to me; why this riot occurred and why on such a large scale... (Even) tribal areas were affected for the first time. The killings were brutal. I am deeply hurt." "This does not happen in a civilised state," he said as an afterthought.

Mr Vajpayee called the Godhra carnage a "pre-planned conspiracy".

Turn to page 6
Editorial: Get it right, Modi! page 4

5 APR 2002

Decision on U.P. after I return: Vajpayee

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, APRIL 7. The Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, today gave more than a hint that the Bharatiya Janata Party would decide on a political tie-up with the Bahujan Samaj Party to form a government in Uttar Pradesh after his return on April 11 from Singapore and Cambodia.

Sources in the BJP had earlier indicated that the parliamentary board of the party could meet after its three-day national executive meeting in Goa, which starts the day after the Prime Minister's return. If discussions on a political arrangement of power-sharing with the Bahujan Samaj Party could be sewn up over the next one week, then the parliamentary board could meet to review its earlier stand that the BJP had been given the mandate to sit in the opposition and it must do so.

"This will be discussed after I return," Mr. Vajpayee said when presspersons sought his comment on the consultations between the BJP and the BSP on government-formation in the State, which is currently under President's Rule. The Human Resource Development Minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, who enjoys a rapport with the BSP general secretary, Mayawati, and was reported to have met her recently, also indicated that a decision would be known "soon."

The Uttar Pradesh BJP chief, Kalraj Mishra, said in Lucknow yesterday that there was no question of discussing the issue as the party's parliamentary board had decided that the BJP must sit in the opposition. But there have been reports, both from the BJP and the BSP camps, that some consultations are on.



The Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, showing a paper to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, at the Indira Gandhi International Airport, in New Delhi on Sunday. The External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, looks on. — PTI

Over the last one week, a string of leaders from the State had met Mr. Vajpayee and the BJP president, Jana Krishnamurthi. However, it was not known what exactly was discussed.

For the moment, both the BJP and the BSP are keeping their cards close to their chest. And that is to be expected as there is considerable resistance to a political arrangement between the two in both the parties.

In the BJP, a sizeable number of MPs and MLAs from the State feel that yet another coalition government with the BSP would prove fatal for the party as the already shaky upper caste Hindu vote support base of the BJP would move to the Congress if the BJP were to help Ms. Mayawati become Chief Minister for the third time. As for the BSP it has a large number of Muslim MLAs and after the recent hap-

penings related to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and Ayodhya and the violence against the minorities in Gujarat, they are certain to feel uneasy about a tie-up with a party which is being increasingly seen as anti-Muslim.

Ms. Mayawati was reported to have indicated in Lucknow today that she would reveal her cards at an "appropriate time" but refused to say anything more at this juncture. But some of her supporters in the BSP have been saying that "there is no way out except for the BJP to support a Mayawati-led government."

PTI reports:

A hoax phone call about the planting of a bomb at the airport hours before Mr. Vajpayee's departure sent the security apparatus into a tizzy.

PM in Singapore: Page 11

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THE HINDU

PM's advice a 'sentimental outpouring'

Sangh rallies behind Modi

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, April 5: A day after the Prime Minister asked Narendra Modi to follow *raj dharma*, the RSS sprang to his defence, dismissing Atal Bihari Vajpayee's advice as "sentimental outpouring" and warning him against sacking the Gujarat chief minister.

"It is very dangerous to kick Modi out because think of what will happen if he is kicked out. He becomes an enemy of the BJP, and, in effect, the Sangh and the VHP also become enemies of the BJP. The party will lose two of its most important constituents," a senior RSS member said.

Violence erupted at Sabarmati and Vatva in Ahmedabad late tonight, forcing police to gun down two people. Another person was stabbed to death.

The Sangh is slated to give its first official certificate of commendation to Modi in the next issue of its mouthpiece, *Organiser*. Editor Seshadri Chari, who is writing the piece, said he would

quote Vajpayee's *raj dharma* phrase (which he described as "fair enough"); reproduce excerpts from a Gujarat government report on Godhra and the ensuing violence; and conclude that "a new beginning has to be made in Gujarat and for this everybody should rise above party and ideology".

Claiming there was more pressure on the BJP leadership to sack not Modi but his predecessor Keshubhai Patel, RSS sources said the chief minister's greatest asset was "his ability to create and lead an effective team". "The moment the Delhi brass try to tamper with him, be sure this team will come to his rescue."

Pointing out that Vajpayee had taken "utmost care" to keep Modi in good humour during his Ahmedabad visit, the sources stressed that sacking him will not be easy.

"The Prime Minister made it a point to first visit Godhra and the train, and the camps came much later. That set the tone and tenor of his visit. Whatever he said later about events being shameful and the entire country being with the victims were sen-

timental outpourings because he's an emotional person."

The BJP, too, persisted with its defence of Modi, interpreting Vajpayee's advice as a "general remark". "We do not see it as a disapproval of Modi," spokesman Sunil Shastri said.

But rumblings have begun in the BJP about how Modi can turn into a "liability" if the Gujarat violence continues. Many see Vajpayee's comments yesterday as a stern message to Modi to "pull up his socks".

A national executive member said: "Apart from the VHP and the RSS' backing, everything else has gone against Modi. But, so far, the heat is only on him. The moment it reaches Vajpayee, he will have to act."

On when Vajpayee would "act", the explanation was: "In similar situations, Congress governments have also taken their own time to act. As in Orissa, where Giridhar Gamang came under enormous pressure to quit (after the supercyclone) but the high command sacked him after the heat and dust had settled."

■ See Page 8

Atal's Acid Test

As a helpless prime minister reluctantly packs his bags for a first-hand assessment of the ground realities in Gujarat — a full month after he described the carnage in the state as a *kalank* — the Modi government has gone into an administrative overdrive. The intent behind this sudden flurry of activity — like everything else that Mr Modi has done or, more often, not done in the past month — is as cynical as it is chilling: To sweep under the welcoming red carpet for Atalji, all tell-tale signs of his own government's complicity in abetting the horrific aftermath of Godhra. On Tuesday, barely 48 hours before Mr Vajpayee was due to arrive, state and municipal officials woke up to the realisation that thousands of violence victims in the state have been left to "live" in conditions that defy human imagination. On a war footing, they set about turning the two or so camps, that the prime minister is expected to see for himself, into model human habitations. From supplies of safe drinking water to generous helpings of DDT, from cash doles to tents for protection from the blistering sun, they brought to the inmates the fruits of Mr Modi's munificence. While the official machinery was frantically sprucing up the camps — which neither the chief minister nor any of his ministers has so far visited even once — Mr Modi magnanimously found time to express concern about the "plight" of the affected people. He even granted an audience to representatives from minority groups, promising them "soft loans" to rebuild their shattered lives, homes and businesses. Having done all he could to address the Atalji's reported ultimatum on rehabilitation of victims, Mr Modi can only blame his stars that the violence in the state showed no signs of abating and has in fact spread to new areas.

Not that Mr Modi needs to worry too much on that count. A day after the National Human Rights Commission took the Gujarat government to task for its failure to control violence and provide relief, the BJP president, Jana Krishnamurthy, gave Mr Modi a clean chit and ruled out any change of leadership in the besieged, lawless state. Parroting the chief minister's righteous refrain against the media for its "partisan" coverage of the communal situation, Mr Krishnamurthy upheld Mr Modi's specious claims of having restored normality in the state. Shocking though Mr Krishnamurthy's irresponsible outburst might be, it is of a piece with the pronouncements of the parivar. In the last few weeks, the RSS and its affiliate organisations have made it abundantly clear that they see nothing wrong in the Gujarat government's handling of the violence and subsequent relief operations in the state. Clearly, even before Atalji leaves for Gandhinagar, every effort is being made to present him with a fait accompli: To exonerate Mr Modi from any blame. A whisper campaign has meanwhile begun, lauding Mr Modi as a new Hindutva hero, who will bring the party untold electoral bounties in the future. While the prime minister is said to be deeply unhappy with the events unfolding in Gujarat, he has demonstrated no public will to crack the whip against the guilty government in Gandhinagar. It is time Mr Vajpayee demonstrated the authority reposed in him by a billion-plus Indians. Bringing Mr Modi to account is only the first necessary step in that long endeavour.

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Modi defiant despite dressing down

By Smita Gupta
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: Mindful of how Gujarat's communal carnage has hurt the BJP, Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee finally cracked the whip on Wednesday, albeit in private, telling Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi that he wanted the state government to prepare a blueprint for the rehabilitation of the 97,000 persons living in 101 relief camps before he visits the state next week.

Mr Vajpayee said the chief minister should take such confidence-building measures as providing alternative housing to people whose homes had been destroyed by rioters and creating conditions that would allow refugees to return home. Until this happens, the situation in Gujarat could not be described as normal, Mr Vajpayee said.

Mr Vajpayee was so unhappy with Mr Modi that he refused the chief minister permission to tell the press that the prime minister was satisfied with his performance, sources said. Mr Vajpayee told Mr Modi he wanted to see how the Gujarat chief minister conducted himself in the future. When Mr Modi was asked the same question by the press, he tried to avoid answering by saying, "It is not a question of whether people are satisfied or not." Pressed further, he said, "Everyone is satisfied."

Mr Modi had made a Powerpoint presentation on the Gujarat situation to the prime minister and the home minister. Government sources said that when the PM told Mr Modi that he expected him to build new homes for those whose houses had been burnt down, the chief minister said he did not have the funds to do so. The PM told him that he should



THE GUJARAT CHIEF MINISTER GETS AN OPPOSITE REACTION: Narendra Modi speaks to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee at his residence in New Delhi on Wednesday.

mobilise funds from private agencies as had been done for earthquake victims. But Mr Modi expressed his reluctance to do so, the sources said.

As for providing security to those too scared to return home, Mr Modi told the PM that many were casual labourers who did not want to leave the camps because they had no jobs or money. The PM said that it was Mr Modi's job to create conditions in which they would get work again.

The PM also dismissed Mr Modi's complaint that media reports were exaggerated, emphasising he wasn't very concerned

about the opposition or the media. Mr Vajpayee said he was finding it difficult to explain to members of his own party why violence in the state had not stopped. Unsatisfied with Mr Modi's explanation that the recent transfer of senior police officers who had done their job by acting against the rioters and arresting VHP leaders was a "routine" affair, the PM said transfers must be done in such a transparent manner that no one could criticise them.

However, Mr Modi struck a defiant tone with journalists later when he said the police officers had been promoted, not punished.

Mr Modi also announced that the Centre would provide half the amount to be paid as compensation to those who had lost family members. The Prime Minister said he would consider Mr Modi's demand that the Centre provide a Rs 100 crore grant for rations for those living in camps and money for rehabilitation. Mr Vajpayee said he would make an announcement about this when he visits Gujarat. Mr Modi dismissed the National Human Rights Commission report as "routine", adding that he had replied to the NHRC on Wednesday.

► See Edit: Blind Apathy, Page 8

THE TIMES OF INDIA

28 MAR 2002

Why Vajpayee took a hardline stance

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, MARCH 27. Why did the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, flare up so dramatically on Tuesday evening towards the fag end of the POTO debate in the Joint Sitting of Parliament? In his theatrical "intervention" which was aimed entirely at the Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, the Prime Minister went hammer and tongs at her and ended up provoking an unprecedented confrontation in the Central Hall. His performance was at variance with his own cultivated image of moderation.

The non-NDA opinion is unanimous that Mr. Vajpayee over-reacted, and that his response was totally disproportionate to the nature or cause of provocation, if any, from Ms. Gandhi. In the non-NDA view, the Prime Minister did not enhance his or his office's prestige. And, by reacting in so exaggerated a manner, that too before a national audience, Mr. Vajpayee has unwittingly helped consecrate Ms. Gandhi's leadership credentials.

But the other side fully justifies the Prime Minister's reaction; and, in fact, there is a sense of near jubilation in the NDA circles that Mr. Vajpayee has taken his gloves off. This display of partisanship has given comfort to the BJP back-benchers who feel comfortable in anti-Sonia Gandhi rhetoric. Even the traditional anti-Congress parties such as the Telugu Desam and the DMK are happy to find one more occasion to indulge

in their anti-Congressism.

However, it is believed that the Prime Minister was quite upset over the tone and tenor of Ms. Gandhi's entire speech, which was seen as part of a carefully-crafted political move. According to one Prime Ministerial aide, Ms. Gandhi's intervention was perhaps motivated by a desire "to test the waters" and see if the Congress could launch a comprehensive offensive against Mr. Vajpayee.

The instant decision was that Ms. Gandhi should not be allowed to establish any kind of beachhead against the Prime Minister's credibility and competence. A calculated display of tantrum recommended itself. And that is precisely what the seasoned parliamentarian proceeded to do.

By asking Ms. Gandhi to keep away from his presumed troubled relations with the Sangh Parivar, Mr. Vajpayee endeared himself to the RSS bosses, cost-effectively at that.

Though Ms. Gandhi had vaguely talked about the Government's "moral integrity", the Prime Minister saw it as casting an aspersion on his personal integrity. This presumed personal slur had to be refuted. But more than that, it was part of Mr. Vajpayee's calculation that he had to re-state and reassert his moral authority, within his own party, within the ruling National Democratic Alliance as well as in the country at large.

The high personal popularity and accept-

ability that he enjoys — and which got depleted when he succumbed to internal pressures and reinducted George Fernandes in the Cabinet — had to be re-established. This was the purpose of the dramatic outburst. The calculation is that it would be a while before Ms. Gandhi gathered the courage to attack the Prime Minister. An evening worth all the tantrums and the commotion.

New HC Judges

By Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 27. The President, K. K. Narayanan, has appointed Shanti Lal Kachar, Krishan Kumar Lahoti, Uma Nath Singh, Narain Singh "Azad", Prabhat Chandra Agarwal and Chandresh Bhushan, as additional judges of the Madhya Pradesh High Court, judges of the same court.

Subhas Samvatsar, Ajit Singh, Rajendra Menon and Sugandhilal Jain have been appointed additional judges of the court for two years.

For the Bombay High Court, the President has appointed the additional judge Justice Sharad Arvind Bobde, judge; Dhyananjaya Yeshwant Chandrachud, additional judge for two years and Ajay Manikew Khanwilkar, additional judge for three months from March 29.

THE HINDU
28 MAR 2002

Bitter Bill blasts off

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 26

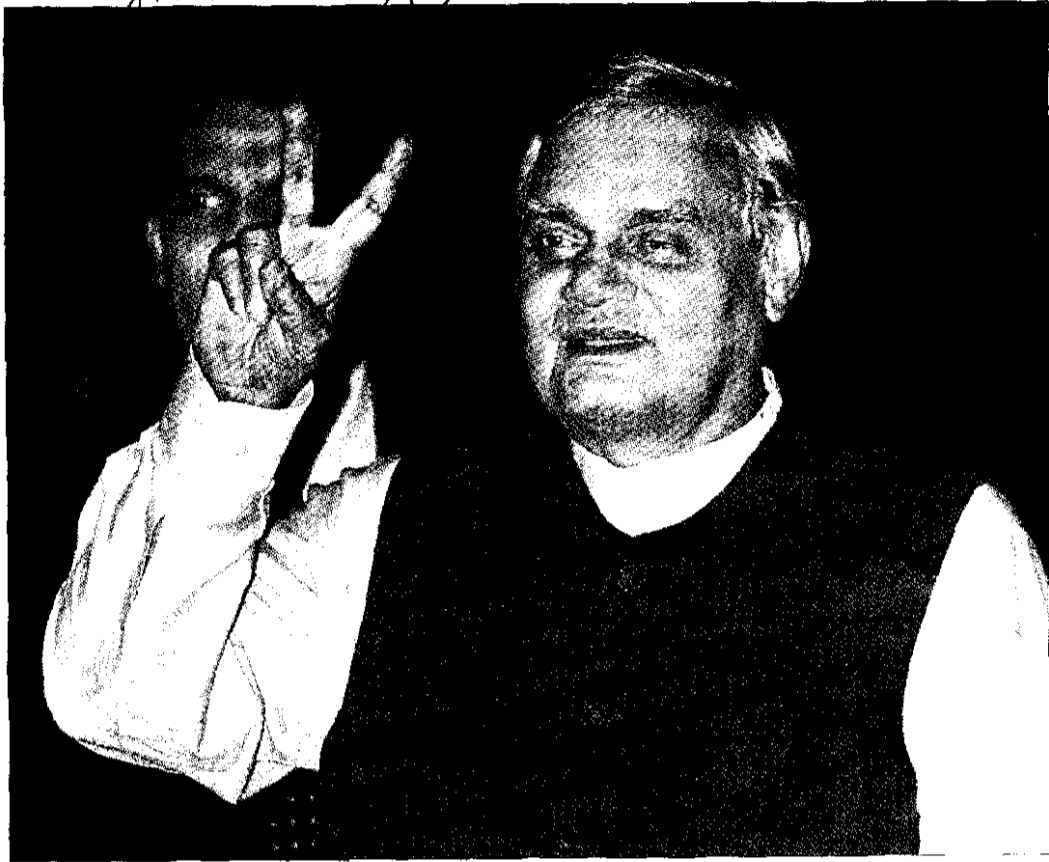
HIGH DRAMA and bitterness marked the passage of the Prevention of Terrorism Bill 2002 here tonight as Atal Bihari Vajpayee lashed back at Sonia Gandhi's sharp criticism of his leadership. Poto sailed through the joint session of Parliament as 425 members voted for it and 296 against.

The law will be binding on all States. Though criminal laws are under the Concurrent List, the anti-terror legislation will have to be enforced by the States who may either adopt it in toto or make their own laws consistent with the provisions of the Central Act.

Having sat through most part of the eight-hour long debate, the Prime Minister, in his extempore intervention, accused the Leader of Opposition of levelling "personal charges" against him. Reacting to certain observations in Sonia's speech delivered at the very outset, Vajpayee demanded an apology for questioning his Government's "moral integrity".

What stung Vajpayee were Sonia's biting comments that he was succumbing to Sangh Parivar pressures. "Will he be submissive and weak in his leadership or will he uphold the prestige of the high office he holds? His moment of reckoning has come," she said in her address.

"Is this the language to be used against the Prime Minister? What does it mean? Am I be-



POTO-OP: The Prime Minister flashes the victory sign after Parliament passed the terror Bill on Tuesday.

ing put in the dock?" asked Vajpayee in his rapid-fire riposte. "I am not PM on Congress charity. I am Prime Minister despite their opposition and shall remain so till the people want me," he shot back.

Refuting the charge of being under pressure from the US and the Parivar, Vajpayee said had that been so, his Government wouldn't have ordered the Pokhran-II test that one of his predecessors had called off at Washington's behest. He even recounted his blunt talk with Bill Clinton when he proposed a meeting between Vajpayee and Nawaz Sharif in the US during the Kargil war.

Opposition benches were taken aback by the PM's outburst. As Vajpayee talked about his parliamentary career, agitated Congressmen rushed to the Well of Central Hall. For about 10 minutes, rumpus ruled in the House, with Deputy Speaker P M Sayeed's pleas for order falling on deaf ears.

While Sonia engaged in consultations with her senior colleagues, former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar tried to calm tempers. At this stage, Arjun Singh rose to make a point of order. The Treasury benches protested against the Congress MP taking the podium. Amid protests from NDA members, Singh argued that the Leader of Opposition's position cannot be undermined. "The tone and tenor of the PM's remarks has not done him any good."

An immediate casualty of the PM's intervention was L K Advani's reply to the debate. The Home Minister spoke for less than 10 minutes before commending the Bill to a vote.

More reports on Page 6

VOICES IN PARLIAMENT

Anti-POTO

Congress paid a heavy price for TADA, BJP will suffer for Poto.

— *Mulayam Yadav (SP)*

We'll go to the people against Poto if it is passed today

— *Raghuvansh Prasad (RJD)*

Under Poto, accused is a terrorist if prosecution says so.

— *Kapil Sibal (Congress)*

Pro-POTO

Rate of conviction under IPC, other laws is just 65 per cent.

— *Arun Jotley (BJP)*

Let's pass Poto and let people decide if it is of any worth.

— *Yerran Naidu (TDP)*

Shiv Sena backs Poto and wants it to be more stringent.

— *Manohar Joshi (Shiv Sena)*

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 MAR 2002

PM summons Modi

29/3 By Neena Vyas

9-2009 PM HD-1

NEW DELHI, MARCH 26. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has summoned the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, here tomorrow to present him the "facts" related to the continuous violence in Gujarat. It has not gone unnoticed by him that after 26 days, the rioting, murder and looting have not yet abated although initially his Government had claimed that the riots had been brought under control within 72 hours.

It seems that Mr. Vajpayee is worried that the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court and Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, J.S. Verma, has virtually charged the State Government with inaction in the face of continued violence. Justice Verma has, in fact,

publicly stated that he would come out with his own report if the State Government failed to respond to his request for a full and comprehensive report on the situation.

Worse, recent reports have suggested that police officers and senior bureaucrats who did not toe the Government "line" were being transferred. The Centre had to virtually order the State Government to withdraw selective use of POTO against the Godhra accused when the draconian law was not being used against those arrested for murder and rape of victims in Ahmedabad and Vadodara, and reports have also come in of political pressure on police officers preventing them from arresting VHP and Bajrang Dal leaders mentioned in first information reports by eyewitnesses.

THE HINDU

6/3/2002

CONGRESS REJECTS PM APPEAL TO SUPPORT POTO

BJP dangles Cabinet carrot for Mamata

Sudesh K Verma in New Delhi

March 25. — The Congress today rejected the Prime Minister's appeal to support Poto at tomorrow's joint session of Parliament, even as the BJP warned the Trinamul that its chances of getting into the Union Cabinet would be undermined if it didn't support the Bill.

Mr Vajpayee said in Shimla that Opposition parties, particularly the Congress, should give up their "politically motivated resistance" to Poto because the country was waging a war against cross-border terrorism. The Congress stand is not in the national interest, he added, expressing confidence over the passing of the Bill.

Rejecting the Prime Minister's plea, the Congress said it (the appeal) "lacks sincerity and is aimed at propaganda. If Mr Vajpayee was sincere he wouldn't have placed the Bill in its present form, or have rejected our appeal to refer it to a select committee..." Mr Jaipal Reddy said after a meeting at 10 Janpath. The party issued a whip to its MPs to attend tomorrow's session and vote against the Bill.

During the day, the Prime Minister brushed aside Miss Mamata Banerjee's objections to the Bill, while admitting he understood her compulsions. Senior BJP leaders, however, said Miss Banerjee would undermine her chances of getting a Cabinet berth if she didn't stand by the NDA now. The minister of state in the PMO, Mr Vijay Goel, reportedly spoke to her yesterday in an attempt to persuade her to vote for the Bill.

NDA floor-managers are not so concerned about numbers as they are about the embarrassment that the Trinamul may cause

to the alliance by voting against the Bill.

Mr Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani had taken exception to the National Conference supporting the Bill in the Lok Sabha but opposing it in the Rajya Sabha. Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Mr Farooq Abdullah has, however, assured them that his MPs would support the Bill at the joint session.

If the NDA leadership could be tough with Dr Abdullah, it wouldn't take much time to isolate Miss Banerjee in case of

Muslim leaders' plea

NEW DELHI, March 25. — Muslim leaders have appealed to MPs not to vote for Poto at the joint session. They've also urged them to ensure defeat of the "black law" to protect the "values of the Constitution".

In a joint appeal to the MPs, they said: "We urge you to listen to the call of your conscience and vote against this draconian, tyrannical and black law unanimously in the joint session of Parliament." The 11 signatories to the appeal include members from the Muslim Personal Law Board and the Milli Council. Leaders of the two organisations said there were fears regarding "belligerent use of this law against political adversaries and minorities". They also felt it would provide infinite powers to the police. — SNS

negative vote, a BJP leader said. Both Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani are reportedly angry with her for having criticised the Union Budget. Also, at a recent NDA meeting, the Prime Minister had snubbed Miss Banerjee, asking her to explain the need for floating a forum within the NDA.

More trouble for Miss Banerjee came from her *bete noire* Mr Ajit Panja, who today extended his support for Poto. He said he is in favour of Poto, too, because the country and West Bengal needs a "strong law" to fight terrorism.

Mr Panja ridiculed Miss Banerjee's decision not to attend the joint session, saying, "it's like procuring a false medical certificate for a fake illness".

He demanded a "high-level inquiry" into why Miss Banerjee and Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay had chosen to stay in Kolkata after forcing all other party MPs to remain in Parliament on 13 December. He distributed a copy of the whip issued by Mr Bandopadhyay asking all MPs to be present in Parliament on 12 and 13 December, when the terror Bill was originally scheduled to be moved.

Editorial: Poto finish, page 4
More reports on page 6

THE STATESMAN

26 MAR 2002

Vajpayee, party strive
for right balance

Search for Ram and power mix

25/3
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FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 24: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is keen that the BJP national executive — to meet at Panaji from April 12-14 — should reinforce the message that his government will complete its full term and adhere to the NDA's common minimum agenda which steers clear of Ayodhya.

After pledging to his allies that he would not pander to the Sangh parivar to try and get a reprieve for his coalition, BJP sources said Vajpayee has indicated to the party that the Panaji meeting should not get into the "claptrap" of Hindutva versus governmental compulsions.

But going by the BJP's mood, it may not be easy for Vajpayee to push his wish-list through.

"The Prime Minister has just weathered a crisis which was mostly created by the VHP. The last thing he wants is that his party should resurrect Ayodhya and other issues which are red rags for our allies," sources said.

However, by the sources' own admission, because the VHP's agenda is backed by a large section of the BJP, the political resolution is expected to be worded more tactfully and say that while the party is still committed to its original ideology, the coalition cannot be dicated by it.

Besides, neither the BJP nor Vajpayee will abdicate their "re-

sponsibility" of running the nation mid-term just because some quarters want to put the Ram temple on the political map.

"We are in a bind," conceded a national executive member. "If we don't mention the word ideology in the resolution, our cadre would get restive again."

The other concession the BJP has apparently made towards the hardliners is not to take action against Vinay Katiyar and Mahant Adityanath who had a spat with NDA partners in Parliament nor even isolate them, though Vajpayee was in favour of both.

The BJP's predicament is all the more acute because the session will also take stock of the recent poll results. Given the drubbing it suffered, sources said questions would be raised if this happened because the party had jettisoned Hindutva. "In such circumstances, we cannot ignore ideology altogether," they said.

The balancing between "ideology" and coalition compulsions was evident in an address Vajpayee made at a rally in Shimla today. Agencies quoted him as describing the Godhra incident as "most unfortunate" and the fallout as "regrettable". He said while the Godhra culprits would be dealt with according to the law, a panel had been set up to inquire into the ensuing violence. He said the "senseless" killings, in both cases, had tarnished the country's image.

USE COPY ...
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Cautious Centre toys with
give-and-take formula

Govt chisels Ayodhya

29/3
model ✓

FROM SEEMAGUHA

New Delhi, March 23: The Centre has shaped the broad contours of an Ayodhya settlement plan but, given the charged political temperature, is wary of pursuing it in public.

The scheme takes off from the Kanchi Sankaracharya's formula, which was rejected by the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board on the ground that it had nothing to offer the minorities.

This time round, the government wants both Hindus and Muslims to make a few compromises and hammer out a solution on the basis of give and take.

The government is also keen to involve the Supreme Court in the final settlement as a non-partisan authority which will be respected by all the parties involved in the dispute.

The new plan aims to persuade the Muslims to allow the Centre to hand over the undisputed land for the construction of the Ram temple.

In return, the VHP must submit the blueprint of its temple plan to the court and abide by any modification the judges suggest.

The judges would ensure that the temple plans do not block access to the critical 2.77 acres of disputed land on which the Babri masjid stood. The VHP and the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas can begin construction so long as they follow the blueprint approved by the court.

The Muslims must wait till the title suit is finally cleared by Allahabad High Court. The Lucknow bench of the high court has already upheld the Centre's petition to hold daily hearings to speed up the case. If the pace actually picks up, the statements of witnesses can be recorded within a year or so.

The title suit will decide if the disputed land belongs to the Muslims or the Hindus.

If the courts decide that the disputed area should go to the Muslims and the community wants to rebuild the mosque, the apex court-approved temple plan will ensure that access is not blocked.

The plan is on hold at the moment as the government wants passions to cool. Senior members of the Cabinet will discuss the plan and suggest modifications.

But the Centre does not want to be directly involved in test-firing the plan. The government is in search of a Muslim petitioner to put the plan before the court, but has not yet found anyone willing to take the risk.

Even if one is found, there are many ifs and buts, primary among them being the reaction of the VHP.

Though the government is optimistic about prevailing upon the VHP to consider the plan, there is no guarantee that the VHP and the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas will accept a verdict that goes against them.

THE TELEGRAPH

24 MAR 2002

VHP yatra is off as PM cracks the whip

By Smita Gupta
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The Vajpayee government—grappling with a militant Vishwa Hindu Parishad, insistent on an 'asthi yatra', and belligerent allies, not to mention disgruntled BJP MPs—moved into damage control mode on Thursday night.

Shortly after BJP and National Democratic Alliance MPs clashed in the Lok Sabha and almost came to blows, the Prime Minister rang up Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi and told him to ensure that no asthi yatra (in which the ashes of the Godhra victims were to be taken across the country) should be permitted from the state. Anyone who attempted to do so should be arrested. Government sources said the PM told Mr Modi in no uncertain terms that the situation in the country was still not under control and he did not want the yatra to create communal tensions either in Gujarat or elsewhere.

The Prime Minister told Mr Modi to convey this to the local VHP leaders with whom the chief minister has a close personal rapport. Subsequently, on Friday, VHP leaders camping in Ayodhya, in a surprise move, denied they had ever wanted to launch an asthi yatra.

VHP general secretary Praveen Togadia categorically denied that the VHP had even talked about the asthi yatra. He claimed that the VHP had at no stage discussed or taken any decision on the matter. The VHP leader also denied

make light of the issue, saying that the opposition, NDA allies and the media had made a mountain out of a molehill, BJP spokesperson V.K. Malhotra was told that he should call off the daily party briefing. On Thursday, he had justified the asthi yatra roughly in the same language used by Mr Togadia, who had said that the situation in the country could not be worse when people were prevented from immersing the ashes of the dead.

In another development, BJP Rajya Sabha MP B.P. Singhal, brother of VHP chief Ashok Singhal, was served with a show-cause notice by party leader in the Rajya Sabha, Jaswant Singh. Mr Singhal had publicly demanded the resignation of the Prime Minister on the Ayodhya issue.

However, no action is likely against BJP Lok Sabha MPs Vinay Katiyar and Adityanath for their conduct in the house on Thursday. Indeed, a senior minister justified Mr Katiyar's conduct, saying that the allies should not have provoked him. BJP sources said that as long as the Prime Minister himself was not attacked, the leadership was willing to be indulgent, especially as BJP members across the board shared Mr Katiyar's outburst that the allies could leave the NDA if they wanted.

Allies repose trust in PM

NEW DELHI: The partners in the ruling NDA government asserted on Friday night that the government must function on the basis of the agreed agenda and expressed full confidence in the leadership of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Emerging from a two-and-a-half-hour meeting held in the backdrop of a growing rift between the BJP and its allies on the Hindutva issue, NDA leaders Mamata Banerjee, Vaiko and P.C. Thomas said that all efforts should be made to strengthen the alliance through better coordination and regular meetings. (PTI)

reports that the organisation's Gujarat unit had made an announcement in this regard. The VHP denial came a day after the issue had rocked parliament.

But even as BJP leaders sought to

THE TIMES OF INDIA

23 MAR 2002

Why the capitulation?

The threat of violence looms large

The Vajpayee government's capitulation to the pressure tactics of the VHP by promising to lift restrictions on *kar sevaks* going to Ayodhya in return for Ashok Singhal's ending his fast unto death, bodes ill for the future. It was obvious from the moment that Singhal sat on his fast that the drama was being enacted in order to gain concessions from the Government which has been firm in upholding the Supreme Court order on 15 March. The loss of face suffered by the VHP was obviously hurting Singhal and co. More to the point the disillusionment of the VHP cadres who had been mobilised to travel to Ayodhya in the guise of *kar sevaks* could have long term repercussions on the VHP's capacity for future mischief. Singhal's fast was undertaken with this end in view. But with the Centre's all too quick response — giving in to the demands for freedom to create mayhem within 24 hours, of the Prime Minister's expression of anxiety over Singhal's health and the Home Minister sending a personal message through the former UP chief minister — one can ask whether the entire farce was being enacted with the covert consent of the BJP.

By cowing before Singhal the Government have legitimised his tactics and emboldened VHP cadres even further. By lifting the restrictions against travelling to Ayodhya they have opened up a Pandora's box. There is no fear that there will be a repeat of December 1992 when thousands of these same types converged on the small temple town and destroyed the Babari Mosque in one day — construction cannot be completed in one day. They would like to be seen as abiding by the Supreme Court order and at this juncture the VHP cannot afford to endanger the "friendly" government. What is to be feared is the havoc the VHP cadres can create as they travel through the country en route to Ayodhya. Their trademark tactics of travelling in huge groups without tickets or reservations, inconveniencing other passengers, teasing female passengers, raising provocative slogans, looting food stalls and terrorising minorities will have to be endured until the VHP's 100-day yagna is over. Did the Central Government not anticipate this when they lifted the restrictions or again does it have their tacit consent? Perhaps the BJP hopes to reap the benefits from the VHP's actions. Is it just a coincidence that the VHP's yagna is being held at the same time as the 60 days within which the parties in UP have to form a coalition government or face fresh elections? If the BJP is hoping that the Ayodhya card will again bring electoral rewards, it is up to the UP electorate to prove that the Hindutva card has been well and truly spent.

THE STATESMAN

22 MAR 2002

Govt licks its wounds as POTO stalled in RS

■ Sibal's resolution wins 113-98 ■ NC, BSP and Tohra abstain

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, MARCH 21

THE Vajpayee Government's attempt to push through the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Bill suffered a major setback tonight when a determined Opposition, led by the Congress, stalled it in the Rajya Sabha.

The House adopted a statutory resolution moved by Kapil Sibal of the Congress and others by 113 to 98 votes, disapproving POTO, promulgated by the President on December 30 last year. One member abstained from voting.

The huge margin of victory for the Opposition was due to abstentions by the National Conference (3), Bahujan Samaj Party (4) and rebel Akali Dal member G S Tohra.

The Bill seemed doomed from the time it was introduced in the Rajya Sabha today by Home Minister L. K. Advani whose plea not to attach any "motives" was lost in the Opposition clamour of POTO being "a draconian piece of legislation, one which can be misused, used selectively."

The defeat of the Bill will put the Government in a bind. Although Parliamentary Affairs Minister Pramod Mahajan had been sounding out Opposition parties about holding a joint session of Parliament on March 26 if the Upper House rejected the Bill, there were indications this evening that the government had not taken a final decision on it.

Government circles seemed taken aback by the ferocity of the Congress party's opposition to the controversial legislation, underlined by the enormous effort it put in to mobilise its Rajya Sabha MPs, including those who

were indisposed, for today's vote.

The government had proceeded on the assumption that the Congress would cave in if its bluff was called and allow the Bill to be passed. This assumption was based on the belief that the Congress being a party of governance would not oppose an anti-terrorism law.

Today, Advani was frank enough to admit his error of judgement. "I made a wrong assessment about how the Congress would respond to this Bill. I knew the response of the Left parties but not the Congress," he told the House.

Official sources said the Government would take a final view

Ally changes mind

NEW DELHI: In an apparent rebuff to the Vajpayee government, the National Conference, a constituent of the ruling NDA, took a last minute decision and abstained from voting on the POTO Bill in the Rajya Sabha tonight.

Three NC members — Sharifuddin Shariq, Mirza Abdul Rashid and Kaushak Thiksey — skipped the voting although they remained present during the major part of the discussion. Significantly, the NC had supported POTO earlier. — UNI



on calling a joint session only after discussing the implications of the move. The fact of the matter is a joint session is seen as an admission of the government's failure to evolve a consensus and carry Parliament with it.

There is another factor troubling the government. Law and order is a state subject and with Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijay Singh announcing yesterday that his government would not implement POTO even if it is

passed by Parliament, there is a strong possibility that other non-NDA ruled states will follow suit. This makes a virtual mockery of Parliament's authority. The Centre will, therefore, have to carefully consider how far it wants to take the confrontation that has built up over POTO.

While introducing the Bill in the Rajya Sabha today, Advani defended the POTO promulgation saying existing laws were inadequate to fight growing terrorism. He assured the House that all safeguards had been incorporated to prevent misuse of the new measure.

Although he did remark that a democratic set-up did not need laws of this nature, he objected to the Opposition charge that the Bill had been introduced with some ulterior motives. "Please do not attach any motives... please do not question the bonafides..."

But Congress member Kapil Sibal, who moved the statutory resolution asking the House to disapprove POTO, attacked it as a "draconian piece of legislation" that could be misused against the citizens. "POTO is a weapon which can be used selectively for jingoism in the country. We tried to enter into a dialogue with the government on the issue but unfortunately the government has not cooperated," he said.

Quoting John Adams, the second President of the United States who was of the view that "in politics, there is no middle way," Sibal said, "you have chosen your way, we have chosen ours."

He said this law, even in the hands of an ordinary police officer, could make "victims" out of ordinary citizens. When it was first used, a Jammu family's property was attached.

INDIAN EXPRESS

MAR 21 2002

SECRET

HC accepts Centre's plea on Ayodhya

Press Trust of India

LUCKNOW, March 20. — Accepting a plea by the Centre, the Lucknow Bench of the Allahabad High Court today ordered a day-to-day hearing of the Ram Janambhoomi-Babari Masjid title suit and said a commission would record evidence to facilitate speedy disposal of the case.

The Bench, comprising Mr Justice Sudhir Narayan, Mr Justice SR Alam and Mr Justice Bhanwar Singh said the recording of the evidence and statements by witnesses would be done either by it or through the proposed commission.

The Centre had filed a petition on 6 March for a daily hearing when efforts were under way to defuse the situation arising out of the build-up to the 15 March religious ceremony at Ayodhya.

In an attempt to avoid delays in recording of evidence, the Bench, while citing a judgment of the Supreme Court, said it would continue even in case of objections, which could be referred to the judges later.

"Recording of evidence on a day-to-day basis is possible only when it is recorded by the commission on the date when the Bench is not holding the court," the order said.

The court, while remaining silent on the maintainability or otherwise of the government's petition, observed that as a receiver of the acquired land, the Centre could give suggestions for speedy disposal of the matter. The court also referred to its order on 12 July 2001 for recording evidence daily but noted it could not be done for some reasons.

THE ST. NEWS

21 MAR 2002

Delhi to break 24-year lull to save terror law

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 19: The Vajpayee government is set to convene a joint sitting of Parliament on March 26 so that it can rustle up a majority to pass the anti-terror Bill, which seeks to replace the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance.

If held, it will be the third combined session of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. The first was convened on May 6, 1961, to vote on the Dowry Prohibition Bill. The second joint session, held 24 years ago on May 16, 1978, was called to pass the Banking Commission repeal law, which was adopted by the Lok Sabha but rejected by the Rajya Sabha.

It would also be the first time that a Lok Sabha Deputy Speaker would preside over the session as the late Speaker, G.M.C. Balayogi, died in a recent air crash.

As Rajya Sabha chairman Krishan Kant is the country's Vice-President, he will not be a part of the joint sitting. Deputy chairperson Najma Heptullah

is out of the country. So P.M. Sayeed would have to chair the session.

Official sources said the joint sitting, if convened, would be telecast live to ensure that the members maintain decorum and discipline.

Last night, the Lok Sabha passed the anti-terror Bill with 264 voting for and 148 against it. The Bill will be taken up by the Rajya Sabha on Thursday but is sure to be rejected as the National Democratic Alliance is in a minority in the Upper House. Under Article 108, a joint sitting of both the Houses can be convened only after the Rajya Sabha rejects a Bill.

Official sources said the government is likely to send a request to President K.R. Narayanan on the night of March 21 itself once the Bill is defeated in the Upper House. In the Rajya Sabha, the government would fall short by about 25 to 30 members in getting the Bill passed. A joint sitting will have 781 members. One Independent Rajya Sabha MP died in a road accident today.

Though Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress is likely to abstain, NDA leaders are hoping to get around 425 votes with the support of the 18-member ADMK.

Sources said the government's managers are working on Mayavati's Bahujan Samaj Party and Sharad Pawar's Nationalist Congress Party for their backing.

Political parties have issued whips to their members in both Houses to be present if a joint sitting is held, Parliament sources said.

In the Rajya Sabha, the NDA block comprises 49 BJP MPs, 13 Telugu Desam MPs, nine DMK members, the Shiv Sena's five, the Akali Dal's four, three members each of the Biju Janata Dal and the National Conference and two of the Indian National Lok Dal.

The Asom Gana Parishad, the Samata Party, the Haryana Vikas Party, the Janata Dal (United) and the Loktantrik Congress Party have one member each. Four are Independents.

■ See Page 6

THE TELEGRAPH

THE TELEGRAPH

20 MAR 2002

'NO ALTERNATIVE TO HARSH ECONOMIC DECISIONS'

Singhal may be taken into 'protective custody': PM

HD-1
19/3

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, MARCH 18. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today asserted that Ayodhya was fast returning to normality and came close to holding out a threat to arrest the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) international working president, Ashok Singhal, in case the latter persisted with his fast (undertaken to demand that restrictions in Ayodhya be removed).

Dismissing Mr. Singhal's fast as unnecessary, the Prime Minister argued that the Government was contemplating a gradual easing of the restrictions, imposed in the wake of the VHP's threat to perform 'shila puja' on March 15.

Replying to the debate on the motion of thanks on the President's address, Mr. Vajpayee wondered why Mr. Singhal had undertaken the fast. Perhaps he wanted to keep Parliament occupied with the Ayodhya issue, but as Mr. Vajpayee saw it, enough arguments had been put forth and there was perhaps need for a verbal ceasefire.

Expressing concern about his health, the Prime Minister served notice that Mr. Singhal may have to be taken into "protective custody" if his health deteriorated.

Mr. Vajpayee said the Government wanted to facilitate the return of Ayodhya to its ways of "prayer and dedication", but noted that since Uttar Pradesh was under President's rule, the Centre was keen on seeking the cooperation of all political par-

ties in maintaining peace and harmony.

In a speech marked by an absence of rancour or partisanship, the Prime Minister devoted considerable time to impress upon the House that there were political costs in taking hard economic decisions and that no political formation could afford to take a narrow view. Admitting that the recent rollback in the price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) was a bow at the altar of populism, Mr. Vajpayee wanted all political parties to come to a consensus on harsh economic decisions.

He argued that if the process of economic reforms had to be re-energized, political leaders would have to take tough measures. "If the paradigm has to change, then we must be prepared to take unpopular decisions. We will have to choose between popularity and performance," he said, and noted that his Government had tried to have a mix of the two and had predictably performed fitfully. And, curiously enough, he observed that even though his Government had lasted four years, any alternative government too would have to bear the

same burden of having to carry with it disparate — and demanding — elements in a national coalition.

Addressing himself to the apprehensions voiced by the senior Congress member, Arjun Singh, over the reported direct financial assistance some States were getting from foreign governments, he clarified that all such transactions had been routed through the Centre. At the same time, he cautioned against doubting the intention and patriotic credentials of his Government.

Advice to judiciary

Mr. Vajpayee had a word of advice for the judiciary. On the reported remarks of the Supreme Court bench on the functioning of Parliament during hearing on the Ayodhya matter on March 13 — that the court was not Parliament and its proceedings should not be disturbed — he said that it would be better if various organs of state structure confined themselves to their spheres. He asserted that the Government was committed to initiating the much-needed judicial reforms.

Interestingly enough, Mr. Vajpayee began his reply by ticking off his own party MP, Mahesh Chandra, who had initiated the discussion. He said that Parliament was hardly the place to debate a change in the national flag, as had been suggested by Dr. Chandra. After the Prime Minister's reply, the House passed the motion of thanks without amendments.

PM, Advani condemn vandalism

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 18. Both the Prime Minister, Mr. A.B. Vajpayee, and the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, today cut a sorry figure over the Vishwa Hindu Parishad vandalism in the Orissa Assembly on Saturday. Both condemned the incident in unequivocal terms. In the Rajya Sabha, during the course of his reply to the debate on the motion of thanks on the President's address, Mr. Vajpayee noted with regret that the vandals were heard shouting "Atal Behari zindabad". He would rather do without such salutations and, instead, would prefer to die than to live the day when his name was invoked by vandals. "Mai mar jaana pasand karunga," he said.

In the Lok Sabha, it was left to Mr. Advani to apologise for the VHP vandalism. He told the House that he was ashamed by the fact that some members belonging to organisations associated with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh were involved in the storming of the Orissa Assembly.

"I was pained by the December 13 attack on Parliament, but this incident has ashamed me," he said in his reply to the debate on the adjournment motion on the Orissa incident.

Promising all possible help to the State Government in its efforts to hunt, locate and punish those responsible for the attack, Mr. Advani said exemplary punishment must be meted out to all those involved "even if they belong to my party". Significantly, he did not respond to the demand by Opposition parties for a ban on the VHP and the Bajrang Dal.

THE HINDU

19 MAR 2002

MONDAY, MARCH 18, 2002

SCANDALOUS DECISION ON LPG

THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION, taken under pressure from within the NDA and from the Opposition, to roll back by 50 per cent the recent price hike of LPG reflects a scandalous distortion of priorities by the political class. First, there was no case whatsoever to moderate the price hike since the LPG subsidy has long outlived its original purpose. Second, and more serious, if at all there was any case for a moderation of the reduction of subsidies, it was that of kerosene — which is the cooking fuel of the poor. But kerosene prices have not been touched for the simple reason that the Government was more interested in meeting the NDA and Opposition demands made on behalf of the vocal urban middle and upper middle-income classes. As if this was not enough, the Opposition has now demanded a total withdrawal of the LPG price hike. The Government's latest decision will increase the annual subsidy bill by Rs. 700 crores and as global prices rise the subsidy too will grow. It is not the burgeoning of the subsidy outlay that is important, but what the decision says about the eagerness of the Indian political class to protect LPG subsidies, even as it prefers to be quiet about policy measures which have a bigger impact on the welfare of a much larger population.

The LPG subsidy dates back to the early 1960s when households needed to be encouraged to switch over to what was then a new cooking fuel. That motive for a financial incentive has disappeared, but the subsidy continues. Periodic efforts since the mid-1980s to do away with the subsidy have always floundered on one touchstone — that it will hurt India's poor. Nothing could be farther from the truth. While the consumption of LPG has been increasing very rapidly in recent years, the overwhelming majority of India's homes still does not use LPG. Two-thirds of India's households use instead either kerosene or, worse, biomass of one kind or the

other. The LPG subsidy has continued for so long because it is zealously guarded by the powerful urban salaried class and its representatives in Parliament. The decision in the budget to only halve the subsidy now and phase it out over a period of two to three years was evidently not enough for the so-called champions of the poor. At this rate the LPG subsidy can never be removed. Compare the hue and cry about the LPG subsidy with the very muted concern expressed about the irrational and short-sighted decision taken in the budget of 2000-01 to raise the prices of subsidised rice and wheat, a decision which did in fact hurt the poor. If there was no rollback then of food prices but there has been one now of LPG prices, it only shows which class exerts a greater influence on Government decisions. It is, of course, also possible that the Government knew it would be forced to take a step back and so announced a larger price hike than it wanted to effect. If that is the case, it speaks more of cynical decision-making than of a Government determined to take hard decisions.

Kerosene, unlike LPG, is the poor housewife's fuel, and progressive price increases in recent years have hurt her badly. But the problem is more in kerosene supply than price. A large proportion of kerosene meant for the PDS is either diverted to the open market or smuggled to neighbouring countries. That does not mean a cut in the kerosene subsidy does not matter. It does matter if the limited amount of kerosene legally sold through the PDS is going to be more expensive as well. The challenge here then was to maintain supplies and target the subsidy to consumers who depend on this cooking fuel for their household needs. However, the forces that have been successful in pressuring the Government on LPG prices cannot be expected to recognise the subtle differences between LPG and kerosene subsidies or between the importance of the subsidy on kerosene and its supply through the PDS.

THE HINDU

18 MAR 2002

5F-6 ✓ **Ayodhya:** 16/3 W

(Continued from page 1)

termed as an unruly organisation which does not believe in law and order. It could also now tell its cadres outside Ayodhya that it succeeded in its mission of offering *shiladaan* and *puja*. Only the people of Ayodhya and those who braved the police were angry.

In Delhi, the VHP took the credit for the Vajpayee government finally bowing before "Hindu sentiments" and accepting *shiladaan*.

After opening the locks of the temple, *shilanyus* under Rajiv Gandhi and demolition of the Babari structure, the shiladan was a major landmark in the temple construction movement, the VHP general secretary, Mr Pravin Togadia, said. Today's event would mark a continuation of the effort that would culminate in construction of the Ram temple, he said while stressing that besides resolution of the dispute through court and negotiation, the path of legislation is also open.

The VHP would launch a mass awareness campaign to mobilise public opinion in favour of temple construction through legislation, Mr Togadia said. On Ram Navami, Hindus across the country would hoist saffron flags in their houses to strengthen their resolve to construct the temple, he said. They would also continue "*Ram nam jap*" and hold *Ram sankirtan* on a weekly basis, he added.

Tension gripped Meerut and Aligarh even as the *shiladaan* went off peacefully in Ayodhya. //

16 MAR 2002

THE STATESMAN

'Ayodhya build-up ends in tame 'shila daan'

Paramhans softens stand; temple plan legitimised by Centre, says VHP

Times News Network & Agencies

AYODHYA: Ram sevaks on Friday performed a symbolic and peaceful puja for the proposed temple here after a touch of last-minute drama involving the despatch of a special emissary by the Centre to receive two carved stones.

Climaxing the year-long campaign of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas-VHP combine to begin the process of Ram temple construction, RJN chief Mahant Ramchandra Das Paramhans made a sudden climbdown on Friday by agreeing to conduct the 'shila daan' ceremony outside the acquired land, away from the disputed site.

However, the mahant, assisted by VHP leaders including Ashok Singhal, forced the Centre to send Shatrughan Singh, who is in charge of the Ayodhya cell in the cabinet secretariat, by a special aircraft here shortly before the ceremony, which took place at 3:30 p.m., an hour and 15 minutes behind schedule.

The symbolic handover of the two carved stones was done at Digambar Akhara, the residence of Paramhans, after a brief puja, but not before administration and police officials put their foot down on the procession going any further towards the acquired land around the disputed site.

Mr Singh later handed in the slabs to the additional district magistrate (ADM) city, Faizabad, Narendra Kumar Patel, with the directive that they should be kept in safe custody in consultation with commissioner Anil Kumar Gupta.

When a sizeable crowd of sadhus and Ram sevaks, who had collected in the Digambar Akhara compound heard about the 'shila daan', they were angry and began heckling Ashok Singhal, the working president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, who had

a tough time pacifying them. To divert the anger of the crowd, Paramhans came down to where the slabs were and performed the puja. In the meantime, Ashok Singhal began ordering media-persons to leave the venue, stating that he wanted to address the crowd, which did not appear to be ready to listen to him.

In a related development, VHP vice-president Acharya Giriraj Kishore and two BJP MPs were among the 31 persons arrested in Lucknow while they were proceeding towards Ayodhya, the police said. Besides Chinmayanand and Brij Bhushan, both MPs, the others arrested included senior VHP leader Shirish Chandra Dikshit.

Shortly before commencing his road journey to Ayodhya, Mr Kishore said the group was embarking on the trip in a peaceful manner. "We have only one slogan. We will go to Ayodhya and build a temple there," he said. Asked whether he had got permission for this purpose, Mr Kishore shot back, "We do not need any permission. It is our birthright."

In Delhi, the VHP said the acceptance of a carved pillar by the Centre's special representative at Ayodhya was a clear indication of the government's acknowledgement in principle of the demand for the construction of a Ram

temple on the disputed land. After the puja, the Paramhans and some of his followers sneaked out to Bara Sthan, a place near Hanumangarhi. One of the slabs was furtively placed on a vehicle. It was later learnt that the Paramhans had gone to perform a proper puja there.

From the Bara Sthan, he was learnt to have been taken to the makeshift temple where he offered puja from the legally permissible distance.



HARD TALK
VHP international working president Ashok Singhal addresses a crowd after two pillars for the proposed Ram temple were carried through the streets of Ayodhya on Friday.



Ramchandra Das Paramhans, chairman of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas (centre), hands in a stone for the proposed Ram Temple to Shatrughan Singh, the Prime Minister's envoy (right), at the Digambar Akhara temple in Ayodhya on Friday.

Violence grips Gujarat towns

Times News Network
AHMEDABAD: One person was killed and six others were injured as violence erupted in many places in Gujarat during the Vishwa Hindu Parishad-sponsored 'Ram dhun' programme to mark the temple campaign in Ayodhya. Curfew was reimposed in parts of Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Bharuch and in the smaller towns of Petlad and Balasinor in Kheda district.

In Vadodara, mobs razed two places of worship near Baroda Medical College and the Buddhadev colony near Kareli Baug. Another place of worship belonging to the minority community was set on fire at Pratap Road late on Friday night. After pitched battles in the Raopura and Pantgate areas in the afternoon, violence spread to areas like Salatwada and Nagarwada. Mobs armed with swords and pipes roamed the streets, looting shops belonging to the minority community. In Raopura, the police fired tear-gas shells to disperse rival mobs.

According to Ahmedabad police chief P.C. Pandey, the curfew was imposed as a precautionary measure. Paramilitary forces and the army, which had arrived after the riots two weeks ago, have been positioned in the sensitive areas of the city.

3 students stabbed in Hyderabad

Times News Network
HYDERABAD: Three school children sustained minor stabbing injuries after being attacked by a group of miscreants in the Lal Darwaza area on Friday, even as tension built up in the rest of the old city following Ayodhya developments. The students were returning home after the SSC examinations at Venkatrao Memorial High School.

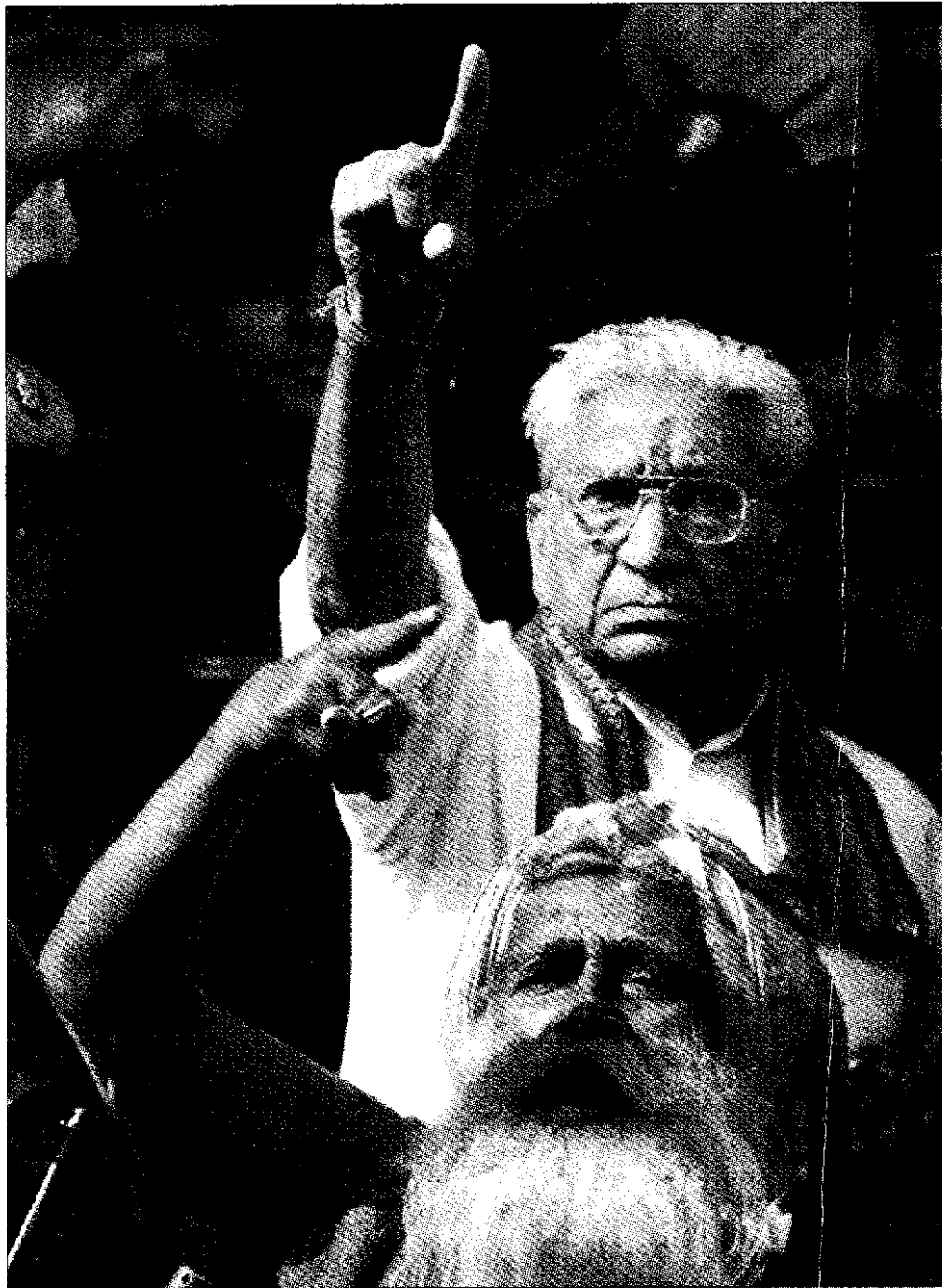
Additional police commissioner K. Aravinda Rao said the boys received superficial wounds and their condition was "very much safe". He said the police would soon apprehend the attackers involved in the crime.

Mumbai remains peaceful

Times News Network
MUMBAI: No untoward incidents were reported from any part of the state and Mumbai was also peaceful on Friday. But the tensions over the Ayodhya crisis were reflected in poor attendance in schools and offices. Strict police vigils will continue in the city and the state for some more days.

► Detailed report on Page 3

Govt takes the fizz out of



All sound, no fury: Mr Ashok Singhal and Paramhans Ramchandra Das at Ayodhya on Friday. — AP/PTI

Sanjay Singh in Ayodhya

March 15. — Administrative substance today prevailed over religious symbolism as the VHP handed over two pillars in a ceremony that, by standards of Ayodhya, was remarkably peaceful.

The only "surprise" was that Mr Shatrughan Singh of the PMO's Ayodhya cell was the receiver. He replaced the Faizabad commissioner, Mr Anil Kumar Gupta.

The government's security arrangements in pursuance of the Supreme Court's interim order ensured that the frustration and anger of VHP cadre and kar sevaks didn't boil over. They had to remain content with abusing their own leaders. Most of their verbal attack was directed against Mr Ashok Singhal. The pillars were handed over to Mr Singh around 3 p.m. at a place which is about 500 yards from Ramkot, outside the boundaries of the 67 acres on which status quo prevails.

Even as limited puja continued to take place in the makeshift Ram temple and 14 temples located on the 67 acres, there were some blips in the smooth progress of the main event. A crowd of about 500 people, led by Mr Singhal, Mahant Ramchander Das Paramhans and the Faizabad MP, Mr Vinay Katiyar, became restless when it reached Digambar Akhara at 2.30 p.m. The procession started from the VHP workshop at 2.15 p.m. amid shouts of *Jai Sri Ram* and *Mandir wahin banayenge*. The two shilas were carried on a rickshaw trolley.

As the *shiladaan* procession moved, locals, including women and children who

had lined up on either side of the designated route, began joining it. The VHP functionaries became more aggressive with such participation. The people responded with equal enthusiasm and spewed venom at the administration.

At Digambar Akhara, about 500 yards from Ramkot, where, according to the deal with the government, the *shiladaan*

had to be performed and where Paramhans had stopped for a *shilapujan*, followers began smearing each other with *gula*. It was expected that about a thousand more could join the procession on the way and there was every sign of it getting out of control.

Another deal was struck between the administration and the VHP leaders that the *shiladaan* would be performed at Digambar Akhara. The *shilas* and four senior leaders, Paramhans, Mr Singhal and two other VHP functionaries, were escorted to Ramkot where a puja was performed. They were also taken to the makeshift Ramlala temple at the disputed site.

The security arrangements in the twin cities of Faizabad and Ayodhya were unprecedented. The administration

ordered that all shops and business establishments be shut down. Even roadside vendors were chased away by policemen. The government was successful in keeping kar sevaks away from Ayodhya.

A few hundred of them were arrested in the morning. Police and reporters were only allowed to move about. The administration is satisfied that the incident passed off peacefully, while the VHP is happy that it could no longer be

Timeline

- 7 a.m. — Ayodhya quiet but tense.
- 8 a.m. — Police arrest 49 kar sevaks trying to sneak in.
- 9 a.m. — Mr Chandra Shekhar calls up Paramhans, who lambasts Mr Vajpayee.
- 9.30 a.m. — Paramhans indicates deal has been struck; withdraws suicide threat.
- 11 a.m. — Mr Ashok Singhal and Paramhans in "closed door" meeting. Mr Vinay Katiyar joins them five minutes later.
- 2.10 p.m. — Mr Singhal and others arrive at VHP workshop with two stone slabs. Procession starts, reaches Digambar Akhara at 2.30 p.m.
- 3 p.m. — OSD, PMO's Ayodhya cell, arrives.
- 3.05 p.m. — Shilas handed over to the OSD; puja begins.
- 3.15 p.m. — Crowd restive, starts abusing Mr Singhal.
- 4 p.m. — Mr Singhal and Paramhans leave for Ramjanambhoomi site to offer puja.

Turn to page 6

How the deal was struck

Statesman News Service

AYODHYA, March 15. — The deal between the government and the VHP was struck last night. The Hindu outfit's brinkmanship proved successful. The suicide threat by Ramjanambhoomi Nyas chief Ramchander Das had its required effect. His telephone didn't stop ringing and, by his own admission, he spoke to Mr LK Advani, Mr Murlidhar Manohar Joshi, Miss Uma Bharti, Mr Chandra Shekhar, Mr Rajnath Singh and others. He got calls from the PMO and Mr George Fernandes but did not attend them.

By the time Faizabad MP Mr Vinay Katiyar reached at the VHP workshop at 9.30 p.m. today where Ramchander Das had been staying since he started the *shiladaan* puja on Monday, a compromise formula had almost been

worked out. The former Faizabad district magistrate, Mr Navneet Sehgal, a special messenger of the Uttar Pradesh Governor, Mr Vishnu Kant Shastri, who has excellent personal relations with the aging Nyas chief, emerged as the key player in the negotiations between the Mahant and the administration.

Sources said the deal was the VHP wouldn't violate the Supreme Court order. It would control its supporters and manage them at any cost. The government in return would allow them to offer puja and hand over the shilas peacefully to the divisional commissioner or a government representative.

The government would thus carry out its constitutional obligations both ways — implementing Supreme Court order in letter and spirit and also not hinder the citizens' right to perform puja peacefully. Also as part of the deal,

the Faizabad divisional commissioner, Mr AK Gupta, and the district magistrate, Mr BP Mishra, would be made to "pay the price" for the hyper restrictive security arrangements and would be transferred to some less sensitive postings in the next few days.

Ramachander Das also said he would not like to meet and hand over the shilas to the incumbent commissioner and receiver of Ramjanambhoomi site. It suited the government also for a receipt signed by the receiver could have been used by the VHP in court as a claim on the disputed territory and might have invited accusations from the Opposition. An alternative was promptly found. Mr Shatrughan Singh an OSD of the Ayodhya cell in the PMO was specially sent from Delhi this morning to receive the shilas from VHP leaders. He gave a receipt which has no legal sanctity or repercussions.

One killed in Gujarat

GANDHINAGAR, March 15. — A person was killed and nine, including three women, were injured in violence in the city today. Curfew was immediately clamped on Karang, Shahpur and Kalapur areas.

Nitish Kumar Parmar, nephew of Congress MP Mr Pravin Rasthapal, was stabbed to death in Shahpur, police said. The condition of one of the injured is reportedly serious. Violence erupted in some parts following Friday prayers and the *Ram Dhan* performed by VHP members. In Naranpura, a bus was set on fire.

The number of people arrested was not available until late evening.

Godhra accused: A local court today remanded in police custody Mohammed Hussain Kalota, dismissed Godhra Municipal Council president and one of the prime accused in the Godhra carnage, and 19 others till 30 March. — SNS & UNI

16 MAR 2002

STATE NEWS SERVICE

15.1. — Deen Dayal Upadhyay turns stadium into arena Rao

Shiladaan

PMO left holding the pillar



VHP prayer: One of the two pillars handed over to the administration on Friday. — AP/PTI

Nalova Roy Chaudhury in New Delhi

March 15. — The government today heaved a sigh of relief after the present crisis was resolved. Nevertheless, it is now left with a more concrete problem — holding the consecrated shilas carved to form part of the proposed temple.

Mr Shatrughan Singh, IAS official of the Uttar Pradesh cadre who heads the Ayodhya cell in the PMO, accepted the carved stone pillars.

The district collector couldn't accept them because, legally and technically, he is the receiver of the 67 acres and his involvement could have been interpreted as a violation of the status quo ordered by the Supreme Court.

"The Ayodhya cell was created by the government last October to settle the issue," a PMO official said. "So he (Mr Singh) accepted the shilas."

"In no way can this be construed as the government giving legitimacy to construction within the disputed area," the official said, countering the VHP general secretary, Mr Pravin Togadia, who said "the acceptance of the *shila* by Mr Shatrughan Singh has paved the ground in principle for the construction of a grand temple."

"It is nobody's case that the Ram temple should not be built in Ayodhya," the PMO official said.

What happens to the pillars will reflect how the issue plays itself out. For the time being, the pillars will be kept in the custody of the Faizabad district administration,

maybe in the district collector's office, till the Ayodhya dispute is resolved either through a judicial verdict or through mutual agreement, a PMO official said.

"If wisdom prevails and they (the VHP) decide to build the temple outside the 67 acres, the pillars will be handed over to them immediately," the official said.

After handing over the pillars to Mr Singh, Mahant Ramchander Das Parmhans said the two stones were kept in the acquired land. District officials, however, denied the claim, saying the stones were in the administration's "safe custody."

The Opposition criticised the government for deputing one of its officials to receive the shilas. Congress spokesman Mr Jaipal Reddy said: "Technically, it's a violation of the spirit of the Supreme Court order. We are not against the shilanyas outside the acquired land, but this act could have been done by a private citizen or a religious leader, not a government official."

"The action is not per se illegal, in that it was not violative of the court's orders," said Mr Amarendra Sharan, senior advocate of the Supreme Court, "but it compromises the government's secular credentials. The matter has more political significance than any legal significance in that it was for the greater good and prevented communal frenzy."

Meanwhile, the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board feels the VHP could have taken this midway approach earlier by offering the shila outside the 67.7 acres.

Other reports on page 6

Ruta let off in IMM case

GOVT CONSIDERING COMPROMISE FORMULA

Suicide threat by Paramhans

Sanjay Singh in Ayodhya

SPI 15/3

9- vds gmt

March 14. — The Ram Janambhoomi Nyas chief, Mahant Ramchander Das Paramhans, today made another strategic move that had senior government functionaries telephoning him frantically in an attempt at some backroom manoeuvring.

The Mahant threatened to commit suicide tomorrow between 2.15 p.m. and 3 p.m. if the government did not allow him to carry out a *shiladan* near the makeshift temple.

The Supreme Court prohibited for the moment any kind of puja in the 67 acres and transfer of land to the party concerned, but it didn't ban Ramlala's darshan, Paramhans said.

After a meeting of the Nyas, he said: "We've decided that at 2.15 p.m., sants and temple movement sympathisers would peacefully march for a darshan of Ramlala amid chanting of Vedic mantra. I'm an Ayurved doctor and thus know how to mix herbs that could kill a person within minutes of its consumption and have also mastered *sadhana*. More sants would follow me on the same path after I commit suicide and the government would have to face the consequences."

He said his dream was to see Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee as the country's Prime Minister, but now he was feeling betrayed. He even called the Faizabad DM in the evening to hand over his will.

Senior government functionaries, including Mr LK Advani and Mr George Fernandes, tried to mollify the Nyas chief. Mr Advani called Paramhans around noon and told him that his action would put them in an extremely precarious situation. The home minister tried to persuade him not to do any such thing. The Mahant, however, remained unmoved. He told Mr Advani that the government should let him die for a cause dear to his heart.

Sources said the government was considering a compromise formula to avert the repercussions of the Mahant carrying out his threat. Keeping in view the Supreme Court order, thrashing out a formula is going to be a tough task. During negotiations between the administration and VHP functionaries, the government is so far willing to ask the divisional commissioner of Faizabad to accept the *shiladan* as the receiver of the Ram Janambhoomi site and give a receipt to the outfit at some place outside the precincts of the acquired land. The VHP leaders have been asked not to violate prohibitory orders under Section 144 that have been imposed here.

The VHP and the Mahant were yet to agree on a formula. The suspense will be over only after tomorrow afternoon.

Ayodhya arrests

LUCKNOW, March 14. — Uttar Pradesh police today arrested those trying to enter Ayodhya. They included BJP MP Yogi Aditya Nath of Gorakhpur. He was on his way to Ayodhya with his supporters when he was stopped on the national highway.

"We are not allowing anybody to Ayodhya without the permission of the Faizabad District Magistrate", a home department official said today. Home secretary Mr Naresh Dayal said VHP kar sevaks can do "shila puja/dan (donation)" outside the restricted area. The commissioner (Faizabad Division) could accept *shiladan* from anybody but it would not be as the "receiver" of acquired property. — SNS

Details on page 6

In Delhi, the VHP asserted that the *shiladan* was not prohibited by the Supreme Court. The VHP's international general secretary, Mr Praveen Togadia, said if the Nyas chief or anyone else is arrested or fired at by security forces, it would launch a mass campaign across the country.

Turn to page 6

THE STATESMAN

15 MAR 2002

Vajpayee vows to uphold court order

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 14: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today assured both the Houses that his government will follow in "letter and spirit" the Supreme Court's order to maintain status quo at Ayodhya. He also ruled out seeking a review of the directive.

He assured a worried Opposition in the Rajya Sabha that "all arrangements have been made to maintain law and order" at Ayodhya tomorrow. "The situation is totally under control. I don't expect any untoward incident to happen."

The Centre, however, has not

formulated any action plan to deal with any eventuality tomorrow. Vajpayee said there was no need for one.

"*Abhi jo action hai, woh kya kam hai?* (Are the steps already taken not enough?)" the Prime Minister asked.

Reading from a prepared speech in the Lok Sabha, Vajpayee said: "I wish to assure the House that adequate preparations have been made to maintain law and order in Ayodhya and to ensure that the March 13 order of the Supreme Court is adhered to."

The Prime Minister admitted that after the Supreme Court's order, the entire 67.703 acres had become disputed.

"Because of this development, a new situation has arisen and the undisputed land has become disputed," he said, implying that no activity would be permitted in the area.

Vajpayee also ruled out issuing any directive to attorney-general Soli J. Sorabjee — "the question does not arise", he said.

He stood firmly behind Sorabjee who had come under fire for suggesting that the court allow a symbolic puja on the undisputed land.

"It is the constitutional duty of the attorney-general to interpret a law or a judgment of the court, when asked by the court to do so," Vajpayee said.

He stood by the NDA stand that Ayodhya was not part of the ruling alliance's agenda, but added a rider: "Just because the BJP has joined the NDA ... (does) not mean it has left the Ayodhya issue altogether," Vajpayee said.

In his quintessential style, he took on the Opposition for frequently alleging that the VHP was influencing the government's actions.

"The amount of excitement generated about the VHP itself went to show that it indeed has a *locus standi*." He said it was not necessary for all organisations to contest in elections to prove their popularity.

"Certainly not the religious organisations," he added.

organisations," he added. The Prime Minister underlined the need for a dialogue between communities, saying it was absolutely necessary to encourage non-political organisations to take part in the process as the government alone could not tackle all the problems confronting the country.

He said there were two ways of resolving the Ayodhya dispute. One, through a mutual agreement, and two, through a judicial verdict. He also lauded the efforts of the Sankaracharya of Kanchi.

"We should encourage the path of tolerance and cooperate with organisations which promote it," he added.



Vajpayee

THE TELEGRAPH

15 MAR 2002

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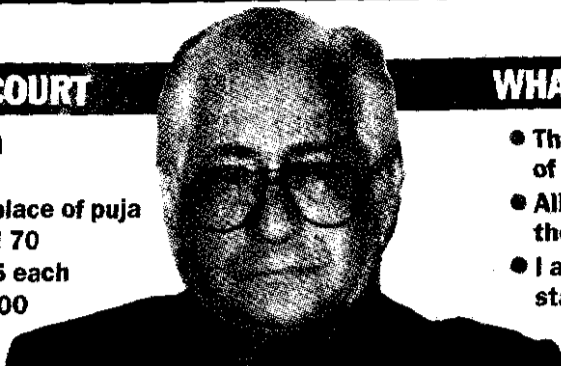
WHO WAS SORABJEE SPEAKING FOR?

WHAT SORABJEE SAID IN COURT

- The government can allow a puja for a limited period of time
- Ram sevaks will not be allowed to enter the place of puja
- Number of sants will be kept between 50 and 70
- Other visitors will be allowed in batches of 25 each
- 45 companies of paramilitary forces plus 5,000 policemen will safeguard the place

WHAT SORABJEE SAID

- The views do not represent the views of India but only of the VHP
- All these suggestions are off the cuff, on the spur of the moment
- I ascertained the views of the government stand, what was the government's stand, what was the government's stand, what was the government's stand



Court rises above

Singhal signals forward march

FROM ANAND SOONDAS

Ayodhya, March 13: Leading a motley crew of supporters to the temple workshop at Karsevakpuram, a triumphant-looking Ashok Singhal today announced that the Supreme Court verdict had gone in the VHP's favour and the March 15 programme would go on as scheduled.

However, the decision on what the future course of action will be has been left to sants belonging to the temple construction committee, which will meet tomorrow.

"Court ka faisla mere khilaf nahi gaya hain (the verdict has not gone against me)," the VHP leader said, adding that the court has not stopped them from "going where we wanted to go". Neither has the court given any direction to the Centre to stop *kar sevaks* from performing puja at the undisputed site, Singhal said.

Turning the Supreme Court judgment — which categorically said that no religious activity could be performed on the 67,703 acres of acquired land — around to interpret it as a green signal to the VHP, Mahant Ramchandra Das Paramhans added: "*Hum wahan challenge, challenge, challenge* (We will go there)."

Singhal and Paramhans warned that dark clouds could gather over the March 15 sky if the Centre tried to prevent them.

The Supreme Court has not stopped "us", but the "*Hitler-shahi*" government could, added Paramhans, who is also chairman of the Mandir Nirman Samiti and president of the Ram Janmabhoomi Trust.

Having interpreted the verdict as "VHP friendly", Singhal said that if the government insisted on stopping them on their way to the undisputed site, the mahants and *kar sevaks* would have no option but to court arrest. "As the court has now cleared the way for us, we will tomorrow talk to the government and the (Faizabad) commissioner to discuss the modalities," Singhal said.

If the government insisted on disallowing the VHP from proceeding to the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid area, "a decision would be taken accordingly", Singhal said.

The VHP has announced that it will proceed to the "undisputed site" with 2,000 *kar sevaks*, 500 *sadhus* and 50 vedic scholars to perform a "full-fledged puja" for three hours from 2.15 pm.

Paramhans, who struck out at the Prime Minister, warned that if the government tried to obstruct his "peaceful programme" to donate pillars to Lord Ram, he would answer it in "the same manner that families of those killed in Godhra reacted in Gujarat".



Paramhans in Ayodhya. (AFP)

Verdict gives Atal a shield

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, March 13: Judicial intervention saved the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government from performing on its own the unpleasant task of having to stop a determined Vishwa Hindu Parishad from offering a symbolic puja in Ayodhya.

The Supreme Court today prohibited "religious activity of any kind by anyone" anywhere on or near the Ayodhya land, including the undisputed portion, the Centre had acquired through the Ayodhya Act, 1993.

In a balancing act in two stages — in and outside the court — the Prime Minister also managed to keep Sangh parivar hardliners happy while at the same time not making members of his ruling alliance so unhappy as to threaten a pullout.

Sources close to Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee hailed the ruling as a godsend because with one stroke it has allowed the BJP's allies to continue backing the government and taken care of the VHP for the moment.

If the VHP still insists on performing *bhoomi* puja for the Ram temple on any undisputed portion of the land, the government can crack down on the strength of the court directive without having to take an independent administrative decision, which would have been

far more unpopular not only among VHP activists but also sections of the BJP.

A bench of Justices B.N. Kirpal, G.B. Pattanaik and V.N. Khare said in an interim order: "We direct that on the 67,703 acres of land located in revenue plot Nos. 159 and 160 in village Kot Ramchandra, which is vested in the Central government, no religious activity of any kind by anyone either symbolic or actual, including *bhoomi* puja or *shila* puja, shall be permitted or allowed to take place."

The court also barred the Centre from handing over any part of the land until it had dealt with the petition. The orders came on a petition by Mohamad Aslam alias Bhure who sought a directive to deploy the army to prevent the symbolic puja the VHP plans to perform on March 15. After passing the interim orders, the case was posted to a larger bench (a five-member full Constitution bench).

Through attorney-general Soli J. Sorabjee, the Centre told the court it had the right to put the acquired land to "any temporary use" and contended that the sants could be allowed to perform puja under certain conditions. Sorabjee listed these conditions, but the court rejected them.

When Sorabjee argued that "with definite conditions and regulated restrictions", the Centre could allow the use of the land

QUOTE

There is no question of being happy or unhappy. We have to abide by the order

AB VAJPAYEE
on the Supreme Court order



A vehicle of a temple-movement supporter

"for a temporary period", the judges said the 1994 judgment ordering "status quo" did not intend this to happen.

By claiming that the land originally belonged to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas, the counsel for the VHP, Rama Jois, provoked the judges to question the locus standi of the VHP itself. "Who is VHP...? What is your (VHP's) legal status...? Who are you? We don't recognise you!" the judges said.

For the record, the government tried its best through the

attorney-general to build a case for allowing a symbolic puja.

"No one can now accuse the government of not wanting to go ahead with the *bhoomi* puja. Even hardliners in the Sangh parivar, who have been extremely critical of the Prime Minister, will have to acknowledge that the government tried its best. There is nothing the executive can do when the Supreme Court gives its ruling," a senior government official said.

The effort did not go unrecognised. VHP international presi-

Centre loses right to handover

FROM R. VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, March 13: The clock struck 1994, Soli Sorabjee notwithstanding.

The three-judge bench today added an extra paragraph to its order, curbing the Centre's right to determine the use of the 67,703 acres it had acquired under the Ayodhya Act of 1993. In 1994, a Constitution bench had upheld the validity of the Act.

The court today said: "... no part of the aforesaid land shall be handed over by the government to anyone and the same shall be retained by the government till the disposal of this writ petition nor shall any part of this land be permitted to be occupied or used for any reli-

gious purpose or in connection therewith."

Today's ruling virtually reopens the 1994 judgment. A larger bench will now hear the interpretations to the 1994 judgment. Then a five-member full Constitution bench will be set up in 10 weeks. Almost every paragraph of the judgment with the nuances of expressions will be debated.

The court — which today issued notices to all parties, including the Centre and the VHP — ordered for counter-affidavits to be filed within four weeks and rejoinders within another four weeks.

According to Section 6 of the Ayodhya Act, "... the government may impose or direct by notification in the official

gazette that the right, title and interest or any of them in relation to the area or any part thereof instead of continuing to vest in that authority or body or trustee of that trust..."

Stripped of legalese, this means the Centre could hand over the acquired land to the rightful owners or any trust, body or association.

Today, attorney-general Sorabjee argued against this provision being annulled. "M'lors," he told the court, "do not rak up the past but redeem the future." His contention was that "this is not the issue in today's debate."

In 1994, the Ayodhya Act was challenged as unconstitutional and *ultra vires*. However, it va-

lidity was upheld with a clear direction that the acquired land could be handed over to the rightful owners, after the title suit — original petition for the land — between Hindu and Muslim groups was settled.

According to the Act — as Sorabjee explained in court — if the Muslims won the title suit, the government would give a few acres of extra land adjacent to the disputed land of 2.77 acres. This would also be the case if the Hindu groups won the case. This was to facilitate construction of the mosque or temple, after the title suit was determined. However, 47-odd acres — part of the acquired land — were to be given back to the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas.

Govt gets across pro-puja views without written commitment

Sorabjee reads master's mind

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 13: Attorney-general Soli Sorabjee, whose puja submission generated as much heat as the Supreme Court verdict, denied that he had sought the judges' permission to allow the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas to perform a *bhoomi* puja on the acquired land on March 15.

He also stressed the Centre had not "directed" him to make a submission to this effect. "We did not ask permission for *bhoomi* puja, in fact we did not ask for permission at all. There was no written submission or affidavit," he told reporters this evening.

Sorabjee said the judges asked him what his stand was. "It was a question of law but when court asks the attorney-general or the senior counsel for his interpretation, I said my reading of the judgment (of the Supreme Court's verdict of 1994) was permission to use land temporarily for use of puja did not violate the judgment."

While emphasising that he made it clear that the permission would be given only under "well-defined conditions and restrictions", Sorabjee said he discussed the matter with Rama Jois, the VHP's lawyer who was also present at today's hearing. "I ascertained from Rama Jois 'what's your stand, what are your views' because there were conflicting reports about the VHP."

The operative part in Sorabjee's submission was that "even if puja was not prohibited by virtue of any previous judgment of the Supreme Court, the same would not be permitted except under well-defined conditions and strictions".

Sorabjee said the only discussions he had with the government before the hearing were on "actual matters related to law and order". "As for the interpretation of law, they (the Central ministers) said 'we leave it to you'."

He also claimed that the conditions — under which puja could be allowed — he listed court were made "off the cuff, on the spur of the moment".

But the Opposition, which alleged that seeking consent for a puja had "exposed" the Centre's "hidden agenda" of allowing the VHP to surreptitiously starve construction, found the conditions too precise and comprehens to be off the cuff.

The "off-the-cuff" conditions suggested by Sorabjee were:

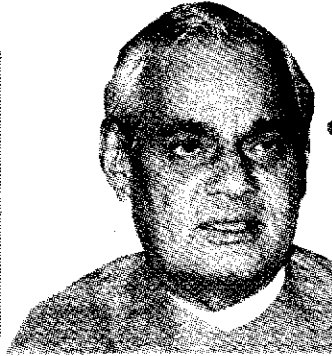
- The government has right under Section 6 of the Ayodhya Act to allow a group to perform puja for a limited period of time
- Ram sevaks or *kar sevaks* will not be allowed to enter the place of puja
- The total number of sants attending and performing the puja will be between 50 and 70

CONTINUED ON PAGE 6 ►

raph

JEE SAID OUTSIDE

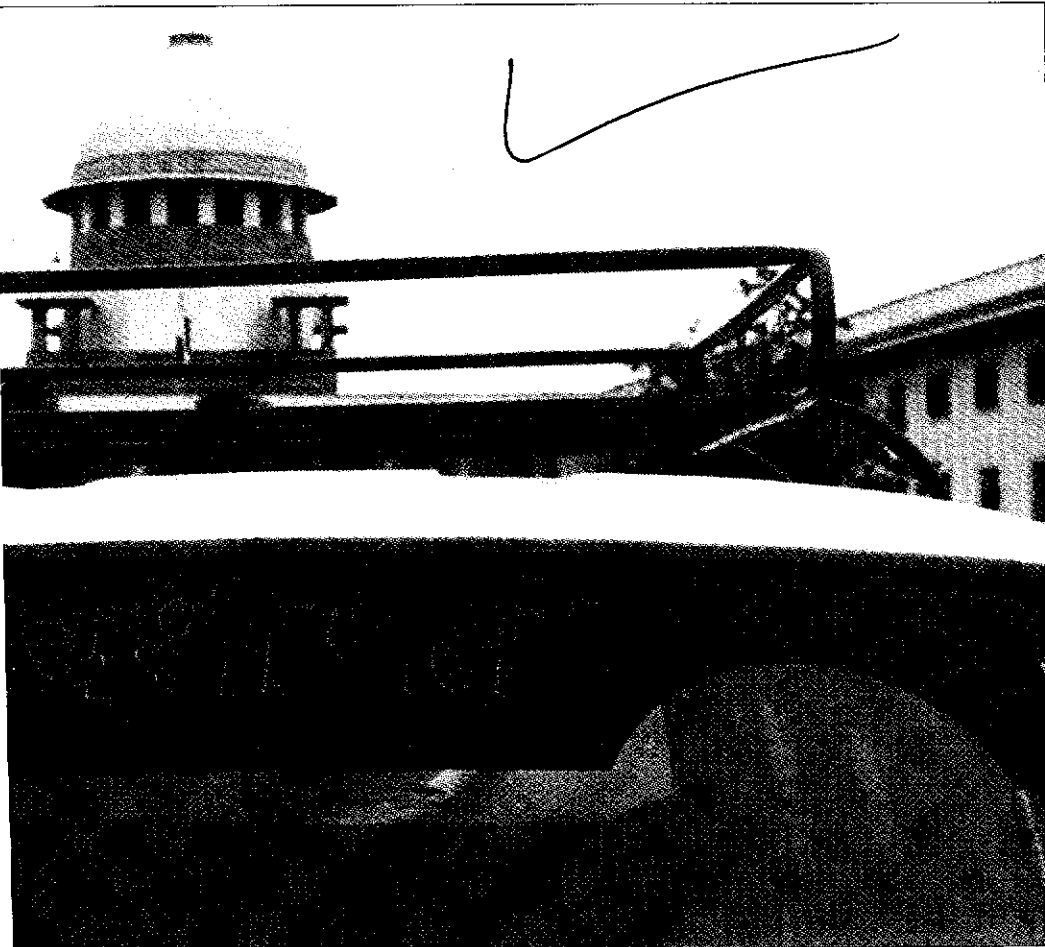
represent that of the Government one gave me instructions estions were mine and made off spur of the moment rom the VHP lawyer what was his is his view because there were reports



PM'S POSITION

● Sorabjee's submission that a puja could be permitted was the same as the government's. The submission was not given in writing

ove Ram



Outside the Supreme Court on Wednesday. (PTI) ■ The Ayodhya judgment, Page 6

dent Vishnu Hari Dalmiya said: "The court did not allow, so what can the government do?"

Some others were even reading in the government's gesture the return of the prodigal Vajpayee to the Hindutva fold. "The Ram mandir agitation was just the right moment for Atalji to reaffirm his commitment to the Sangh's ideology. There was increasing pressure on him to prove he was ready to put the party above power. And he seems to have done just that in today's hearing," said a hardliner from

Madhya Pradesh.

Sorabjee's submission that a token puja could be allowed made Vajpayee's "secular" allies angry. Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee did not even attend an NDA meeting in the evening. But the damage control began in earnest, with Vajpayee agreeing at the NDA meeting to make a statement in Parliament tomorrow on the government's position. BJP sources, however, said the government took the chance with the Sorabjee submission because it did not

believe the allies would push the coalition over the brink.

Vajpayee claimed the allies left the meeting "satisfied". "They thought we had submitted a written document, but there was no need for this. But when the attorney-general was asked by the court to clarify the government's viewpoint, obviously he could not keep quiet."

The Prime Minister stuck to the view submitted by Sorabjee, though. "Performing a puja would not have altered status quo ante," he said.

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Uma Bhatia
Uma Bhatia

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MORE CLASSIFIED ADVERTISEMENTS ON PAGE 4

We will go ahead with puja, says Singhal

By Srawan Shukla
Times News Network

AYODHYA: Unfazed by the supreme court verdict, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) working president Ashok Singhal said that VHP members would go ahead with their 'shila daan' and also 'pujan' programme on March 15 at a site within the Ram Janmabhoomi complex.

Holding a joint press conference, the VHP working president and Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas chairman Ramchandra Paramhans Das said that the SC order had prohibited any puja or activity at plot nos 159 and 160 on the 67

acres of land, and that they were free to hold any programme on the remaining land within the Ram Janmabhoomi complex where the apex court order was not applicable.

Both leaders claimed that the apex court order was not against their March 15 programme as the VHP had never planned to hold a programme on plot nos 159 and 160. "We had announced holding our programme only on the undisputed land."

Even though they showed the map of the RJB complex, they did not clarify on which land they would hold their programme. "The place will be in close proximity of the site where artefacts and other articles are lying within the complex," Mr Singhal said.

After changing its stand every day, the VHP on Wednesday returned to its original plan, saying that there was no difference between 'shila daan' and 'shila

pujan' and that it would now hold both programmes as scheduled earlier.

"We respect the court verdict and will not hold any programme on plot nos 159 and 160. About 2,000 Ram Sevaks, including 500 local seers, saints and sadhus will participate in the three-hour-long programme. About 50 vedic scholars from Varanasi and Ayodhya will perform the puja as per vedic rituals," Mr Singhal said.

Welcoming the apex court judgment, the VHP has put the ball in the Vajpayee government's court, saying that it was up to the Centre to allow the puja or arrest them.

However, Mr Singhal said the 51-member Mandir Nirma Samiti that is scheduled to meet on Thursday in Ayodhya would review the SC verdict and take a decision on the March 15 programme as well the temple construction plan.

► Related reports on Page 7



THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 MAR 2002

Atal takes responsibility for law and order

FROM RADHIKA
RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, March 12: As the VHP and the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas gave conflicting signals on what they would do on March 15, the Centre spent much of the day preparing for tomorrow's hearing in the Supreme Court.

The Prime Minister, who began his day by giving a clean chit to the Gujarat government on the way it handled the riots, wrapped it up by sending a message of assurance to the minority community.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee told a delegation of Muslim leaders from Uttar Pradesh in the evening that he did not represent a particular community but the entire nation. He also made it clear that it was his responsibility to maintain law and order and would abide by the court's directive on the proposed puja.

However, the government is worried over the VHP's insistence on handing over the pillars to the government's receiver inside the makeshift temple in the presence of Ram Lalla.

The anxiety found formal expression at night with the Uttar Pradesh government declaring that the stones would not be allowed to be taken out of the VHP workshop, 3 km from the disputed site, "under any circumstances".

The Uttar Pradesh principal secretary (home), Naresh Dayal, said in Lucknow prohibitory orders now in force prevent the movement of the stones. "If the VHP wanted to hand them over to the commissioner of Faiz-

abad, it could do so at the workshop itself," he added.

But officials in Delhi remained sceptical. "On the face of it, we cannot prevent anyone from entering the temple as devotees. But if there is a large gathering, we fear there may be trouble. We can't regulate the number of devotees because they will say if you allow 20, why shouldn't another 50 be permitted?" said an official.

"They (the VHP supporters) are unpredictable people. They say one thing one day and another the next day," he stressed.

RSS sources said the VHP's change in strategy was essentially intended at keeping an alternative alive in case the court gave an "unfavourable" verdict. If the court ruled that no puja would be allowed, the "shila daan" would be a good enough "face-saver".

VHP leader Vinay Katiyar said tonight the organisation might opt for a puja on the premises of one of the 10 temples on the acquired land, instead of its earlier plan to carry it out near the disputed site.

Reports that several batches of *kar sevaks* have started for Ayodhya from various parts of the country are also keeping the government on its toes. Trains are

not being allowed into Ayodhya and Faizabad, which have been sealed, but the government is worried about the possibility of "loose cannons" sneaking in and igniting a showdown.

At a Shivratri rally in Ayodhya tonight, attended by VHP leader Ashok Singhal, some *kar sevaks* surfaced and raised slogans seeking removal of the restrictions on temple construction.

Vajpayee met home minister L.K. Advani, law minister Arun Jaitley and attorney-general Soli Sorabjee in the evening to formulate the government's response to the petition seeking army deployment to maintain status quo in Ayodhya.

Official sources said it was decided that the government would not make any *suo motu* submission but restrict itself to answering the court's queries. But the government will also emphasise that "utmost priority" would be given to maintaining law and order and nothing would be left to chance.

At a morning function organised by the Arya Samaj, Vajpayee said the country was going through a "transitional" phase but it was not as if everything had come to an end. "Sometimes people think that everything is going topsy-turvy and they feel everything is coming to an end. But there is no reason to believe that as we have faced such a situation in the past, too," he said, without referring to the Ayodhya crisis.

Vajpayee said the BJP and its allies were "punished" in the Assembly elections because of their "shortcomings".

■ See Page 6

QUOTE

Sometimes people think that everything is going topsy-turvy and they feel everything is coming to an end. But there is no reason to believe that...

AB VAJPAYEE

THE TELEGRAPH

13 MAR 2002

'ADEQUATE SECURITY IN AYODHYA TO MEET ANY CONTINGENCY'

No 'puja' without SC permission: PM

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, MARCH 11. The Vajpayee Government assured Parliament today that no "puja" would be allowed in Ayodhya without the permission of the Supreme Court. While the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, gave the assurance in the Lok Sabha, the External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, made a similar commitment in the Rajya Sabha, even as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad continued to insist on performing the "puja," irrespective of whatever view the apex court takes on March 13.

Mr. Vajpayee's assurance came after a 40-minute exchange between the members of the Opposition and the ruling NDA. The issue came up for discussion when an adjournment motion was moved by the former Prime Minister, H. D. Deve Gowda, and the Samajwadi Party leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, who voiced "serious concern" over the situation in Ayodhya. Mr. Vajpayee said his Government was determined to maintain peace and law and order in Ayodhya. He was committed to the NDA agenda which clearly stated that the issue would be resolved either through negotiations or a court verdict, he said.

Ayodhya was a "complex and serious issue" which had eluded solution, but a window of opportunity had opened following a change in the attitude of the VHP which had committed itself to accepting the verdict of the court even if it went against it. Mr. Vajpayee said his Government was also exploring the possibility of finding a negotiated settlement to the vexed problem and appealed to all sides to help in the endeavour.

Lauding the efforts of the Kanchi Sankaracharya, Mr. Vajpayee said he had achieved a "great deal" by initiating negotiations with both the parties to the dispute. "His intervention has certainly improved the overall atmosphere, we should take advantage of this and try and help resolve the issue."

The Prime Minister also clarified that as far as his Government was concerned, the issue of the proposed "puja" in Ayodhya would be decided by the courts on March 13. Steps had been taken to expedite the hearing of the title suit pending be-

fore the Allahabad High Court. The Centre had also taken all precautionary measures possible and had put in place adequate security personnel in the temple town to take care of any contingency.

Giving details of the security arrangements, Mr. Vajpayee said over 3200 personnel of para-military forces, 1800 from the Provincial Armed Constabulary and 400 policemen had been deployed.

The issue was raised by Mr. Gowda and Mr. Yadav as soon as the House assembled in the morning. Voicing serious concern, both leaders demanded that the Government take Parliament into confidence on the measures it proposed to take to prevent a repetition of the events of December 6, 1992 (when the Babri Masjid was demolished).

Mr. Gowda referred to the surcharged communal atmosphere in the country and urged the Government to prevent kar sevaks from assembling in Ayodhya. Mr. Yadav said Ayodhya was boiling and demanded that the city be handed over to the Army. He also accused the Government of being "hand-in-glove" with the VHP.

Mr. Singh told the Rajya Sabha that the Government was committed to maintaining the status quo — "it will not allow any activity there till the Supreme Court decides on the matter."

PTI reports: The SP members trooped into the well of the Lok Sabha twice demanding that their leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, who had given a notice for adjournment motion, be allowed to speak on the issue.

Mr. Yadav, who was pulled up by the Deputy Speaker, P. M. Sayeed, twice for taking affront to the Chair, demanded that the 'karsevaks' be arrested and those issuing inflammatory statements also be put behind bars. He was supported by the CPI(M) leader, Somnath Chatterjee, and some Left party members.

Mr. Yadav and his party colleagues repeatedly clashed with the members of the Shiv Sena, the BJP and other NDA constituents. Mr. Sayeed disallowed the adjournment notices given by Mr. Yadav and the RJD leader, Raghuvansh Prasad Singh.



The Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas president, Ramchandra Das Paramhans (left), performing puja at Karsevakpuram in Ayodhya on Monday. — AP

'Only donation of pillars'

AYODHYA, MARCH 11. In a major climbdown on the Ayodhya issue today, the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas (RJN) president, Ramchandra Das Paramhans, virtually dropped the plans for a "bhoomi puja" near the disputed site and announced a scaled-down programme for March 15.

"We had thought the Ramjanmabhoomi would be handed over to us by March 12 and we would go there on March 15 with "shilas" (carved stone pillars) to begin the construction work... but the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has failed to hand over the land," he said here, adding "we will not go to others' land for *sangarsh* (struggle) or take law into our hands."

Echoing Paramhans' views, the Bajrang Dal founder-president and Bharatiya Janata Party MP, Vinay Katiyar, said in New Delhi that no "bhoomi puja" would be performed on March 15 — only a donation of pillars would take place.

Earlier, the RJN and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad launched the programme for the March 15 "puja" by conducting a prayer at the workshop where "shilas" were being prepared.

After conducting the 90-minute prayer, in which leaders of the VHP and the BJP participated, the RJN said the "shilas" would be donated at the Ram

Janmabhoomi site on March 15.

"I have pledged to donate stones at the 'garb griha' (sanctum sanctorum) of Lord Ram and I am going to donate them there," Paramhans told reporters.

"I will take a receipt from the receiver (Faizabad Divisional Commissioner) and it will be his responsibility to ensure the protection of the stones." (The Divisional Commissioner, A. K. Gupta, said he could accept the "donation" only after receiving a nod from the Centre). — PTI

'No change in puja plan'

By Our Special Correspondent

LUCKNOW, MARCH 11. There is no change in the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's programme of performing "symbolic puja" of carved stones in Ayodhya on March 15, its leader, Ashok Singhal, said today.

Mr. Singhal, who arrived here on his way to Ayodhya, told

newspersons at the airport that at no point of time had his organisation agreed to abide by the court verdict in this regard. And there was no mention of any "commitment" on the part of the VHP to accept the court verdict on "puja" in the formula proposed by the Kanchi Sankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswati, to initiate negotiations with Muslim organisations, he claimed.

Driving straight from the airport to Raj Bhavan to meet the Governor, Vishnu Kant Shastri, Mr. Singhal spent an hour with him. He left for Ayodhya with Mr. Shastri's permission, the Principal Secretary (Home), Nareish Dayal, said.

The administration continued to enforce restrictions on the entry of visitors to the pilgrim town. Mr. Dayal confirmed that the authorities in 18 districts around Faizabad had been directed to set up temporary jails to lodge "Ramsevaks" who could be arrested while proceeding to Ayodhya.

Court to decide on puja: Atal

Scramble to save Ayodhya talks

FROM RADHIKA
RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, March 9: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today initiated measures to dispel the minority community's misgivings that threatened to snarl the Ayodhya talks, saying the government would abide by a court verdict on whether the temple trust could hold a puja on the "undisputed" land.

His defence minister, too, tried to calm nerves by raising the possibility of army deployment in Ayodhya. But the announcement drew a clarification from the Uttar Pradesh Governor that he wanted the force to be put only on alert. (See Page 6)

The "confidence-building" measures came less than 24 hours after the VHP signalled a possible go-ahead for a "symbolic" *bhoomi puja* in Ayodhya on March 15. The Supreme Court is scheduled to hear a petition on the issue on March 13.

Official sources said the government was keen to create a "conducive" ambience for tomorrow's meeting of the All India Muslim Personal Law Board. The Centre wanted to ensure that the Kanchi Sankaracharya's proposals were not rejected out of hand as this would mean going back to square one, they added.

When a delegation of the All India Organisation of Imams called on the Prime Minister this evening, he said: "The government would do as per the directive of the Supreme Court, which is hearing the matter on March 13.... Whether we like it or not, we have to abide by the court's verdict."

If the court negated the puja proposal, a "new chapter" would begin. But if the court ruled that it was only a question of a one-day puja, "efforts to resolve the old issue will have to be continued", Vajpayee added.

The apex court will hear two petitions, one seeking contempt proceedings against VHP leaders on charges of violating status quo ante in Ayodhya and the other calling for army deployment.

Official sources said the Prime Minister's statement was a response to apprehensions voiced by minority leaders that sanctioning a puja may allow the VHP's *kar sevaks* a chance to access the disputed spot and provoke a law-and-order problem.

Board members like Syed Shahabuddin had reacted adversely to an out-of-turn announcement by the Kanchi seer yesterday that the government had given the green signal to the puja. The board almost considered calling off its Sunday meeting until the Sankaracharya stepped in and dispatched a set of written assurances.

NDA allies like the Trinamul Congress and the Telugu Desam Party have protested against the puja proposal. Desam, which was slated to hold a meeting of its politburo today to finalise its candidate for the Speaker, has deferred it by a day to await the board's response. Coalition con-

vener and defence minister George Fernandes is scheduled to leave for Hyderabad to pacify Desam.

However, in its attempt to send a reassuring signal by bringing the army into the picture, the Centre seems to have tied itself in knots. Fernandes revealed at a seminar this morning that he had received a written request from the Uttar Pradesh government for army deployment.

Official sources said the statement was meant to assure the minority community that the army's presence would deter the VHP from assembling a big mob on March 15. But in the evening, Governor Vishnukant Shastri issued the clarification at a news conference.

BJP as well as official sources said the confusion arose as the state administration did not want to take any chances with the VHP. But some senior colleagues of Vajpayee were against army deployment for fear that it might further antagonise the hardliners.

The Prime Minister, however, sounded optimistic before the Imams, saying the Ayodhya issue was "now on the road to resolution". He added that a congenial atmosphere had been created because of the VHP's commitment to honour a court verdict and the Sankaracharya's mediation. "Swamiji came from far away Kanchipuram as a messenger of peace. I am happy that representatives of the Muslim community had candid talks with him," Vajpayee said.

But VHP spokesman Vireshwar Dwivedi asserted that the puja would take place as planned.

QUOTE

Whether we like it or not,
we have to abide by the
court's verdict

AB VAJPAYEE

THE TELEGRAPH

10 March 1992

FM to meet Vajpayee on LPG price

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA

NEW DELHI, March 9. —

In what is seen as a climb down, the finance minister, Mr Yashwant Sinha, today said he would discuss the issue of rollback of LPG and kerosene price hike with the Prime Minister apparently under pressure from various political parties, including the BJP.

Mr Sinha, who had earlier ruled out any roll-back of LPG price increase of Rs 40 a cylinder in the budget, said today "I am neither ruling in the possibility nor ruling out the possibility." Asked if it was true that Prime Minister has agreed for a discussion on the issue as announced by petroleum minister, Mr Ram Naik yesterday, Mr Sinha said "I have also read in the newspaper.

"I will discuss the matter with the Prime Minister. Whatever has to be done would be announced on the floor of either House of Parliament," Mr Sinha told reporters on the sidelines of a seminar on globalisation here.

To a question on what was his view on the rollback, Mr Sinha said "I have no opinion of my own. The Budget I have presented is the decision taken by the government of India. Whatever is announced is the government's decision."

Mr Sinha voiced concern over the mounting fiscal deficit and said the strength of

the economy lay in strong macro economic fundamentals. "A large fiscal deficit has the problem of spilling over to the external sector and create a balance of payment crisis.

The largest import bill is in petroleum products, which has the potential of destabilising the economy," he said.

Justifying the hard decisions taken in the budget, he said "while poverty elimination would be our main goal, we must manage our affairs and also learn to make sacrifices.

Those who do not learn to make sacrifices will be heading towards the doors of IMF." Citing the examples of Brazil and Argentina, Mr Sinha said the comfortable forex reserve of \$50 billion could evaporate in no time if the external sector was not managed well.

Brazil, which had a comfortable \$75 billion forex reserve witnessed an outflow of \$25-\$30 billion within 15 days forcing it to approach IMF for structural adjustment loans.

"You never know when the tornado hits you. You should be guarded," he said, adding when there is a "run", it should be controlled.

Unlike Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, Mr Sinha said India was in a "commanding position" as it no longer took loans from IMF and was able to discuss issues as "equals" in the multi-lateral fora.

THE STATESMAN

10 MAR 2002

PM defends UP governor's move

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: Defending Uttar Pradesh Governor Vishnu Kant Shastri's recommendation for imposing President's rule in the state, Prime Minister Vajpayee on Friday said that the governor had



A. B. Vajpayee

no other choice.

In response to strong protests from the Samajwadi Party and Left members over the UP development, Mr Vajpayee told the Lok Sabha that it was not possible for the governor to leave the field open for horse-trading.

He said it was clear that the arithmetic of the new assembly was not in favour of the Samajwadi Party. "It did not offer any solu-

tion," he said.

"It was clear that the majority of the members did not want the Samajwadi Party to form the government," he said replying to persistent SP-Left demands that following the convention the single largest party should have been invited to form the government.

In an oblique reference to the Congress position in this regard, the Prime Minister observed that some parties had written to the governor saying they would not support the SP. Turning to the SP members he remarked that even with the Congress support they would not be able to form the government.

Interrupted by Congress chief whip P. R. Das Munshi, who wanted to know whether the BJP had already decided to support a BSP government, the Prime Minister said his party had decided to sit in

the opposition.

Referring to the precedent of the single largest party being invited to form the government, Mr Vajpayee said he was in favour of setting up such a convention. Earlier, opposition members had repeatedly mentioned how Mr Vajpayee himself had been invited by President S. D. Sharma to form the government without the requisite numbers in 1996.

They also recalled Mr Vajpayee's censure motion as leader of opposition against Romesh Bhandari's action as UP governor. Akhilesh Singh (SP) said that Mr Vajpayee himself had staged a dharna against Mr Bhandari's decision. The PM responded by pointing out that motives had been imputed to the President's decision to invite him. He said if there was a consensus on the issue, fresh efforts could be made for a new convention.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

29 MAR 2002

Govt. agrees to 'symbolic bhoomi puja'

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 8. The Vajpayee Government has started surrendering to an intractable Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP). It has agreed to permit a "symbolic bhoomi puja" on the undisputed land in Ayodhya on March 15, which, technically, would amount to changing the "status quo".

The Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, has come under increasing pressure from within the Sangh Parivar to dilute the commitment the Government gave — in the President's address to the joint session of Parliament — to maintain the status quo.

While there was no official word of the modalities of surrender to the VHP, two pronouncements — one in Chennai and the other in Faizabad — gave the game away. In Chennai, the Kanchi Sankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswati, announced that a "symbolic puja with one stone" would be performed on March 15 and that by June 2, some portion of the undisputed land would be handed over to the Ramjanmabhoomi Trust for

"construction".

Since the Sankaracharya has been interacting with the Government, the VHP and the Muslim groups, it is presumed that he has made the announcement with the Government's consent.

The second concession to the VHP was the announcement by I.D. Swami, Minister of State for Home Affairs. He declared that the restrictions on the movement of 'kar sevaks' towards Ayodhya would be eased. Wanting to pre-empt the possibility of a large congregation taking place in Ayodhya on March 15, the Centre had put in place a number of restrictions, making it difficult for the 'kar sevaks' to reach Faizabad. Today, Mr. Swami announced that the train services would be restored.

The VHP, as well as a section of the BJP leadership, was unhappy over these restrictions. Many BJP MPs, led by Mahant Adityanath, had met the Prime Minister to demand the easing of restrictions and facilitation of the 'puja'. Even Mr. Vajpayee's seniormost Ministerial colleagues were reported to be extremely displeased that "our

own people" were being prevented from travelling to Ayodhya.

In fact, the decision to send Mr. Swami to Ayodhya was taken at a meeting at the Prime Minister's residence on Thursday night. It was attended by the Home Minister, L.K. Advani, the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, and BJP and RSS leaders. The consensus was that the VHP willingness to obey the law of the land should be seen as a "concession" and, in turn, it should be allowed "a face-saver of a symbolic puja".

These unilateral concessions, which amount to a change in the status quo, have been reported even before the Muslim Personal Law Board could formally respond to the Kanchi Sankaracharya's proposals. The Muslim leadership now finds itself presented with a fait accompli.

Yet another VHP functionary's pronouncements today created doubts about its credibility and sincerity. Its president, Vishnu Hari Dalmia, reiterated the oft-repeated stand that the court had no role to play in matters of

faith, but almost immediately accepted that the organisation was bound to honour its verdict in the pending Ayodhya case.

At a press conference, Mr. Dalmia said that the VHP was confident that the court verdict would favour the majority community. In the event of it being otherwise, "dharamacharyas" (religious leaders) would decide the future course of action.

Asked whether the VHP was willing to alter the temple plan or shift the 'sanctum sanctorum' if the title suit pending before the Lucknow bench of the Allahabad High Court went against

Contempt action sought against VHP leaders

NEW DELHI, MARCH 8. The Supreme Court today fixed for next week hearing on two petitions — one seeking contempt of court proceedings against the VHP leadership, including Ashok Singhal, for violating the order to maintain the status quo at Ayodhya, and another seeking the deployment of the Army at the disputed site to control the situation.

The petition seeking deployment of the Army and seizure of the stones, lying at Karsevakpuram in Ayodhya and Pindwara in Rajasthan and meant for use at the proposed Ram temple, by the district administration would come up for hearing on March 13. — PTI

Train services to be restored

By J.P. Shukla

LUCKNOW, MARCH 8. The Union Minister of State for Home, I.D. Swami, today announced that the trains diverted in the wake of the restrictions on 'kar sevaks' from entering Ayodhya would be restored from Saturday.

Mr. Swami, who visited Ayodhya at the invitation of the BJP MP, Vinay Katiyar, to study the ground situation, acknowledged that the common man in Faizabad and Ayodhya had been put to a lot of trouble.

Local newspapers carried reports of severe constraints on the life of people for the past several days. The restriction on the movement of trucks has resulted in a sharp rise in prices. According to one report, the price of wheat flour had gone up to Rs. 13 a kg and that of potatoes to Rs. 9. A severe shortage of petrol and cooking gas has also been reported.

In Lucknow, no senior State Government official was available to give a correct picture of the situation. Presspersons made frantic efforts to contact the Chief Secretary and the Principal Secretary (Home) to verify the reports from Ayodhya but failed to get their version. The Secretary (Home), A.K. Bishnoi, who was directed by his Principal Secretary to brief presspersons, said he had no information from Ayodhya or Faizabad.

Sankaracharya returns

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, MARCH 8. The Kanchi Sankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswathi, who returned by a special

aircraft this morning, said a simple 'Bhoomi puja' — with a single stone — would be performed at the 'undisputed site' in Ayodhya on March 15. And work on construction of a Ram temple would start before June 2, also at the 'undisputed site', with the consent of all the parties to the dispute.

Speaking to the media at the airport here on arrival, the Sankaracharya said all arrangements were being made to go ahead with the function legally and peacefully.

The local municipality, the Uttar Pradesh Government and the Centre had been informed. Requisite permission and sanctions would be obtained for the conduct of the ceremony. A "no-objection" certificate would be issued by some of the Muslim bodies to proceed with the puja and "peace and harmony" would be ensured in Ayodhya.

The Sankaracharya, who has played a mediatory role in trying to resolve the impasse between the two communities was hopeful that an amicable settlement would be reached between the Ram Janambhoomi trust, the Muslim Personal Law Board and the Centre. "What has happened in the past must be set aside as a bad dream and we must look to the future where we can live in peace and harmony," he said.

The Acharya said he expected a favourable decision from all quarters and expressed the hope that some important developments would take place on March 10 and 13. Only with the cooperation and consent of all parties to the dispute and the goodwill of both the communities, a peaceful solution could be reached.

it, he said, "It is upto the religious leaders to consider."

Mr. Dalmia said that the VHP was of the opinion that the on-going case should be decided on the basis of evidence rather than on the testimony of the 109 odd witnesses the minority community had sought to produce. He claimed that the VHP was in possession of "irrefutable" evidence that a temple existed at the disputed site. He expressed hope that a verdict would be possible within a year once the case was heard on a day-to-day basis.

He said that the VHP had made "several concessions" and was hopeful that the Government would reciprocate by lifting the restrictions on 'kar sevaks' and by permitting 'puja' at the undisputed site.

THE HINDU

9 MAR 2002

Puja will be symbolic, Kanchi seer assures PM

Centre lifts curbs on pilgrims, residents of Ayodhya

By Smita Gupta
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The BJP-led central government has begun exploring the possibility of permitting a *bhoomi puja* at Ayodhya. The government began considering this after the Kanchipuram Shankaracharya on Thursday night promised a high-level meeting chaired by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee that, if allowed, he would ensure that the ceremony would be "symbolic, without building materials, carved pillars or concentration of kar sevaks".

Meanwhile, minister of state for home I.D. Swami, who has gone to Ayodhya to assess the security situation, on Friday announced the lifting of curbs on the residents of Ayodhya, permission for pilgrims (not kar sevaks), and resumption of trains within a few days. When a government official was asked how the police would distinguish between pilgrims and kar sevaks, the reply was that "Pilgrims come singly, kar sevaks come in groups. In fact, given the situation, no pilgrim will come".

The Shankaracharya has already conveyed his assurance to the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and said that the question of handing over the so-called undisputed land would be dealt

with after March 15. But there has been no response from the board. Government sources said that besides ensuring that the security situation in Ayodhya was conducive, Muslim approval was essential to "sell" the puja to the BJP's allies and the opposition.

Meanwhile, Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) cadres have not taken kindly to Ashok Singhal's promise in

his capacity as managing trustee of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas (RJN) that the court verdict in the Ayodhya case will be obeyed. The promise has made it possible for the government to consider allowing the puja, but VHP cadres see it as a sell-out.

And so, on Friday, the VHP's international president, V.H. Dalmia, took two steps back. He said the VHP would obey the court verdict, but if it went against the RJN, the dharmacharyas would decide the

next step. When asked if he was not contradicting Mr Singhal's statement, made on Thursday, that if the verdict went in favour of the Muslims, the *garbha griha* (sanctum sanctorum) location would be changed, he evaded a direct reply. He only repeated that he was certain the verdict would be favourable to the RJN.

He emphasised that since many Hindus were disturbed that a "matter of faith" was to be decided by the courts, he wanted to tell them that the court was only deciding whether a temple had been destroyed to build a mosque, which was a "matter of fact, not faith". When it was pointed out that the court was only deciding the ownership of the disputed land, not its historicity, he refused to concede the point.

Much effort is understood to have been logged behind the scenes by spiritual leader Sri Sri Ravi Shankar. The guru reportedly held extensive discussions with Mr Singhal and persuaded him to give the clearest possible commitment in writing that his organisation would abide by the court verdict. Sri Sri Ravi Shankar is also said to be holding parleys with a cross-section of Muslim leaders to find a durable settlement to the Ayodhya dispute.

PILGRIMS' PROGRESS



Union minister of state for home affairs I.D. Swami (right) with Mahant Ramchandra Das Paramhans in Ayodhya on Friday.

Temple trust will abide by SC verdict

Govt may allow symbolic puja on March 15

By Smita Gupta and Narayani Ganesh
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The Vajpayee government breathed a sigh of relief on Thursday after international working president of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) Ashok Singhal, speaking in his capacity as managing trustee of the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas (RJN), gave a commitment to abide by the court verdict in the Ayodhya case.

The commitment came even as the Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram declared that the VHP should stay out of the dispute and the government should deal only with the RJN. In an interview with TNN, the Kanchi seer said that the RJN would definitely abide by the supreme court verdict—whatever it may be—and not just 'await' it. He also clarified that the VHP "has no right to speak on behalf of the Hindu community or to sit in judgment over the Ayodhya Ram temple issue".

In reply to a question of what the RJN would do if the court verdict went against it, he said the plan for the temple would be altered. The original temple blueprint has the *garbha griha* (sanctum sanctorum) located on the disputed site. The Shankaracharya said if the plan had to be altered, the *garbha griha* could be shifted outside the disputed site as Ram was present everywhere, "even outside the disputed site".

These developments have now re-opened the possibility of the government allowing the *bhoomi puja* on March 15. However, government sources said that it had been made clear to the RJN that the *bhoomi puja*, if permitted, would have to be a symbolic affair. Building material or carved pillars would not be allowed in and neither would the *kar sevaks* be allowed to assemble.

The crisis has put the Prime Minister in a major dilemma. On the one hand, his NDA

allies, barring the Shiv Sena, are distinctly uncomfortable about an item not on their agenda taking centre stage. On the other, many of his younger ministerial colleagues, some of whom met Union home minister L.K. Advani on Tuesday, made it clear that if the government did not accede to the VHP's demands, then there was no sense in its continuing in power. A minister said that the BJP leadership had lost credibility with its cadres, and "has to do something to end that alienation first".

The government, which has to deal with two major demands in the current crisis — permission for the *bhoomi puja* and handing over of the undisputed 42 acres of land—has decided to first tackle the former. Government sources were upset that an entire day had been lost because of the VHP's hesitancy in giving an undertaking that it would abide by the court's verdict. They pointed out that the Muslim Personal Law Board (MPLB) and the allies would also need to concur. The MPLB leaders had

told the Shankaracharya they would not object to a token puja provided an undertaking was given that the VHP would abide by the court verdict. However, if some of them were to challenge this in court and get a stay, then the entire negotiations could get derailed, they feared.

BJP sources say that of the NDA allies, only the Telugu Desam Party needs to be persuaded. They say the Shankaracharya has been asked to speak to Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu. NDA sources in the TDP and non-TDP parties say they will await the MPLB's verdict before saying anything. But NDA sources said the allies had some questions about the implications of the government's decision to deal only with the RJN.

► Q&A with the Kanchi Shankaracharya, Page 10



Priests march in Lucknow on Thursday to protest against the violence in Gujarat.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

8 MAR 2002

Cabinet recommends President's rule in U.P.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 7. The Union Cabinet today decided to recommend to the President to accept the Uttar Pradesh Governor's recommendation that the State be brought under the President's rule and that the State Assembly be put under suspended animation.

The Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, who briefed the press after the Cabinet meeting, said it was decided that the recommendation to the President be made under Article 356 (1) of the Constitution.

A Presidential proclamation, bringing Uttar Pradesh under President's rule, to this effect was expected later tonight. Mr. Mahajan noted that the Centre would require two months to

secure parliamentary ratification of the proclamation.

The Governor, Vishnu Kant Shastri, had sent his report last night to the President stating that in his judgment no stable government could be formed, given the fractured verdict.

Mayawati quits LS, to focus on U.P.

By K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, MARCH 7. In an apparent bid to form a government in Uttar Pradesh, the Bahujan Samaj Party today sent its vice-president, Mayawati, to play an active role as the Legislature party leader in the State. As a result, Ms. Mayawati today resigned from the Lok Sabha.

The BSP's move came a day after the Uttar Pradesh Gover-

nor, Vishnu Kant Shastri, recommended the imposition of President's rule on the ground that no political party was in a position to form the next government. Significantly, both Ms. Mayawati and the BSP chief, Kanshi Ram, who addressed a press conference here, welcomed the move and were also soft in their comments on the BJP.

"We are the second largest party and would try to form a government in U.P.," the BSP chief said. In the same breath, he said the party was not afraid of facing new elections, if a solution to the present stalemate could not be found.

Neither Kanshi Ram nor Ms. Mayawati was willing to explain how the BSP hoped to form the government given the fact that the party has just 98 MLAs. The

BSP leaders reminded that even in 1996, Central rule was lifted after Ms. Mayawati became the Chief Minister with the BJP's support. They were reluctant to say whom they were talking to, except ruling out the possibility of either supporting the Samajwadi Party or taking its help.

Ms. Mayawati's decision to shift to U.P. politics is being seen as a signal that the party is not willing to fall for any bait at the Centre that the BJP is said to be offering. It is also said to be a move to ensure that the BSP MLAs stick together and tell them that Ms. Mayawati is in control of the situation.

Ms. Mayawati said the party would take a decision on the basis of its principles and in the interest of the community it represented.

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Vajpayee wins a breather

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, March 7: Who has gained and who has lost from the Ayodhya battle of nerves?

In the short term, Atal Bihari Vajpayee has saved his "gaddi" by "salvaging" his government's "secular credentials" and sparing his NDA allies embarrassment. From the long-term viewpoint, Sangh sources insisted that the undercurrent of resentment among the cadre, including those of the BJP, would increase and reopen the battle between hardliners and moderates by the end of the year, closer to the Gujarat elections.

As Vajpayee weighed the legal and political pros and cons of permitting the VHP to perform its token *bhoomi* puja on a

portion of the acquired "undisputed" land, BJP sources said a storm was brewing in the hardline ranks. Some senior ministers are believed to have told their mentor and home minister L.K. Advani that if the Centre kept pushing the VHP to the wall, they would have no choice but to resign.

The VHP general secretary, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, said sports and youth affairs minister Uma Bharti had "assured" him she would quit if the government rebuffed the VHP's demand.

BJP sources said Advani was in favour of allowing the VHP and the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas to perform their puja on the acquired land and permitting the Ram *sevaks* to move freely, but Vajpayee would not hear of it.

The decision to involve the Kanchi Sankaracharya as the principal mediator was apparently taken entirely by the Prime Minister's aides and the home ministry was kept completely out of it. The PMO took full charge after Vajpayee got the feedback that the BJP and some of his Cabinet ministers were not too keen on an early resolution, which would end up "compromising" the VHP's position. Even the RSS, which initially offered to intervene, did not "have its heart fully in it", said sources.

"There was a feeling that beyond a point it would not help us to have this government around for too long," said a Sangh source. "It has failed on all counts — governance, the economy. What's left is Hindutva and if this, too, becomes a point of con-

frontation, what's the use of having Vajpayee around?"

Alienated from his own party, BJP sources said Vajpayee finally played the "Brahmin" card by enlisting the support of some of the who's who from the community. R. Venkataraman, Ranganath Mishra, Brajesh Mishra and, of course, the Kanchi Sankaracharya were thrown into the negotiations.

But if the Ayodhya issue has been resolved, if only temporarily, BJP sources said the Kanchi seer and VHP working president Ashok Singhal would share the honours equally. The former for taking the risk of earning the label of a "political sant" from the Hindu clergy and Singhal for conceding more in the bargain than the VHP had initially calculated.

...in the interest of Narmada agitation

THE TELEGRAPH

6 MAR 2002

Atal works on VHP moderates

FROM RADHIKA
RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, March 6: The Centre is trying to isolate VHP hardliners and coax the "moderates" into giving a written assurance to honour the court verdict on the Ayodhya dispute even as the outfit stuck to its official position of no written commitment.

BJP sources claimed that VHP working president Ashok Singhal had given in writing that the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas would abide by the court verdict even if it went in favour of the other camp.

But VHP general secretary Acharya Giriraj Kishore disputed the claim. "We merely stated that *status quo ante* would be maintained on the disputed site pending the court's verdict," he

said, quoting an "assurance" from Nyas convener Mahant Ramchandra Das Paramhans yesterday to Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi.

The All India Muslim Personal Law Board tonight threatened to pull out of negotiations if the VHP "backs out" of the commitment to honour a court verdict.

BJP and RSS sources maintained that the Sankaracharya — who is mediating between the VHP and the Muslim Personal Law Board to hammer out a solution on the Centre's behalf — accepted the brief only on condition that the former would agree to honour the judgment. Singhal had promised to do so, too, they said.

The Kanchi seer had said the assurance was the "mini-

mum" that Muslims would expect to "amicably" resolve the dispute and even consider handing over portions of the acquired land considered "undisputed" by the VHP.

Government sources said Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee also felt no formula would work unless the VHP stopped acting tough. They said it was not only the Muslim law board, which wanted the assurance but the Opposition and NDA allies as well.

Vajpayee has asked the Sankaracharya to speak to the VHP leaders again. The seer, who was to leave for Chennai today, postponed his trip by a day. Vajpayee also asked NDA convener and defence minister George Fernandes to brief the allies on the developments.

The government's endeavour to sew up the loose ends reportedly threatened to come apart when the Sankaracharya spoke much more than he was mandated to at yesterday's news briefing, which was telecast live.

"He was only authorised to read out an appeal issued jointly with the Muslims and mention a proposal that was in the offing without giving away the contours. But after spilling the beans, both the VHP and some Muslim leaders upped the ante," sources said.

Apart from the strategy to "marginalise" the hardliners, the government's perception is that the VHP deliberately upped the ante to extract its part of the bargain before committing things in black and white.

■ See Page 6

THE TELEGRAPH

7 MAR 2002

VHP agrees to wait for supreme court verdict

But Kanchi seer says puja should be allowed on March 15

By Smita Gupta
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: After a series of whirlwind meetings with government ministers, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) and Muslim leaders, Swami Jayendra Saraswati, the Shankaracharya of Kanchipuram—the latest mediator on the Ayodhya issue—said that the VHP had agreed to await the verdict of the supreme court on the disputed site.

But if this appeared like some movement forward, he also seemed to present the nation with a fait accompli by endorsing the VHP stand that 'bhoomi puja' be permitted on March 15 on the land acquired by the Centre in 1993 and that this land should be handed over to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas (RJN) well before June 2, when the 100-day yagna in Ayodhya ends. He asked the Muslim Personal Law Board to give its approval for handing over the acquired land.

What is being presented as a 'concession' — in a letter the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas wrote to the Prime Minister on Tuesday — is that until the title suit about the disputed 40 by 80 feet spot on which the Babri Masjid stood is decided, that area will not be

touched.

However, the VHP does not say it will accept the court verdict if it goes against it. Senior government sources indicated they did not expect any court verdict on the title suit for many more years.

The Shankaracharya emphasised that the Ram idol would remain "virajman" at the sanctum sancto-

Muslims, even if the title suit is decided in their favour. This is because the master plan for the construction envisages the disputed spot as the sanctum sanctorum.

Apart from his well-publicised meeting with the Prime Minister on Monday night and the Muslim Personal Law Board representa-

tives on Tuesday, the Shankaracharya met Vice President Krishan Kant, MP Syed Shahabuddin, defence minister George Fernandes and home minister L.K. Advani. The Shankaracharya, in his meeting with Muslim Personal Law Board representatives, asked them to agree to the government handing the acquired land to the RJN, if possible by March 11. The Muslim leaders have said they will discuss this among themselves. Sources say they are not inclined to respond positively. The Shahi Imam has castigated the board for even agreeing to consider the proposal.

BJP sources said that the presence of two independent observers—former President R. Venkataraman and former CJI and Congress MP Ranganath Mishra—at the meeting was meant to appease the Congress.

► See Edit: Respite in Ayodhya, Page 10



BROKERING PEACE

The Shankaracharya of Kanchi, Jayendra Saraswati, is offered a seat by Babri masjid committee member Abdul Nizadi (left) as fellow member Nizamuddin Wahmji looks on in New Delhi on Tuesday.

rum and the daily worship would continue while the title suit was pending in the court. Observers say this means that if construction begins on the adjacent acquired land, there will be no way that the area can ever be restored to the

Sants blink, give Atal 3 months



Sadhus listen to radio in Ayodhya. (PTI)

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, March 4: After keeping the country on tenterhooks for over a month, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad today backed off and agreed to give the Centre three months to hand over the "undisputed" land in Ayodhya.

A meeting of the VHP's Marg Darshak Mandal — its apex decision-making body — decided that on March 15, the deadline it had set for starting temple construction, a "symbolic" puja of the carved stone pillars will be performed.

The new deadline will expire on June 3 after the 100-day Poor-na Ahuti Yagna is over.

VHP working president Ashok Singhal, however, denied that it was a climbdown on the part of his organisation. "The Prime Minister never asked me to withdraw any *andolan* (agitation)," he told reporters after the meeting. "We started a *yagna* and not an *andolan*."

Singhal claimed that the VHP had never intended to begin work on the temple from March 15. "We said we would start the task on any auspicious date after March 12. It could be in April, May or June," he said.

Though Singhal said he expected the land to be handed over to the temple trust within 100 days, he emphasised that no construction would begin till this was done. "There will be no forcible takeover of land," he said.

Singhal said his outfit still hoped it would be permitted to tow the pillars to the "undisputed" land. However, sources close to him said if that was not possible, the leaders could agree to a puja on the Karsevakpuram campus, which is 3 km from the contentious site and is used as a training centre for the VHP cadre.

The pillars and other parts of the temple were carved and chiselled in a workshop close to this place.

The VHP apex body's decision apparently came after the Sankaracharya of Kanchi, Jayendra Saraswathi, offered to intercede with the VHP on the Centre's behalf and persuade the sants and *dharma*charyas to settle for a token ritual.

The Sankaracharya is meeting Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee over dinner tonight and is expected to get back to Singhal and the sants tomorrow. Sources said Vajpayee, at the "exploratory" meeting, would candidly explain to the Kanchi seer the constitutional and legal difficulties of handing over even a small portion of the land the VHP calls "undisputed".

"The Prime Minister is bound by his presidential ad-

dress and the commitment he made at the all-party meeting in which he stated that in no circumstance would status quo ante be disturbed. Whether it is March 15 or June, this position would hold good," sources close to him said.

The Sankaracharya's involvement came after the RSS' efforts at mediation failed. "The RSS had its limitations because its leaders were as much a part of the temple movement as the VHP," said BJP sources.

The sources also said Vajpayee would convey to the Sankaracharya that if the VHP gives a commitment that it would stop *kar sevaks* from congregating in thousands at Ayodhya by March 15, as the leaders had threatened, it would be allowed to hold a token puja at Karsevakpuram.

Sources close to Vajpayee said the government could even consider lifting the curbs placed on the movement of *kar sevaks* to and from Ayodhya.

The Centre is still keeping its fingers crossed about March 15. Though VHP leaders were thinking of courting arrest as an "honourable face-saver", sources close to Vajpayee said it would cause "needless tensions and perhaps pave the way for another bout of confrontation".

Official sources said the law ministry was still "examining" the status of the various categories of land that come within the Ayodhya site.

Seer sounds minority board

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, March 4: The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board has received feelers from the Sankaracharya of Kanchi for talks tomorrow to explore the possibility of a negotiated settlement of the Ayodhya dispute.

Board sources said they were willing to meet the seer. "We are open to an exchange of views. In a democratic polity, the doors for dialogue should never be shut," a board representative said. He, however, added that a breakthrough was unlikely at this juncture.

The talks are likely to be held between the Sankaracharya and Qasim Illyas Rasool, who is a member of the board's sub-committee on the dispute.

Board sources said they still viewed a court verdict as the most acceptable way of finding a solution. "We are also keen on a negotiated settlement but our experience is that the VHP is unwilling to concede an inch. When they say a masjid near the temple, they mean it should be *panchkosi* (5 km) away. Such an offer is no offer at all," a board member said.

QUOTE

There will be no forcible takeover of land

ASHOK SINGHAL

Shankaracharya plays third party in Ayodhya temple talks

■ Takes potshot at PM and at VHP, meets both, says efforts on for breakthrough

ANITA SALUJA
NEW DELHI, MARCH 4

WITH few signs of a breakthrough in the deadlock between the VHP and the Government over its March 15 deadline, all eyes are now on Kanchi Shankaracharya Swami Jayendra Saraswati who has stepped in to mediate.

The Shankaracharya met Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee this evening after he met VHP chief Ashok Singhal, senior Vice-President Giriraj Kishore, and General-Secretary Praveen Tugadiya. He also met Ramjanmahoomi Nyas President Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das earlier in the day.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, the Shankaracharya said efforts were on to find an "amicable solution to the complex" problem. And that he could say something "definite" when "something concrete" emerges from his ef-



Mahant Paramhans with VHP top brass on Monday. Express

forts.

He said that if the undisputed land of 42 acres could be handed over to the VHP, a solution could be found. He, however, added: "It is for legal experts to give their opinion on what can be done with it."

The PM has made it clear that his mandate is to maintain the status quo in Ayodhya. And therefore he can't allow the sants to bring the "carved pillars" to the undisputed site. Moreover, the

Government is of the view that any "concession" has to stand legal scrutiny.

The Shankaracharya took a pot-shot at the Prime Minister saying Vajpayee was aware of everything and he could find a solution but was "deliberately ignoring" the issue. "Jo neend main ho, unko uthana mushkil hai, par jo jag kar bhi so rahein ho, unko jagana aur bhi mushkil hai," he said. (It's difficult to wake someone who is asleep but it's extra difficult to wake some-

one up who's awake and asleep at the same time.")

He didn't spare the VHP either criticising them for their inconsistent stand. "Subah woh kuch bolte hain, shaam ko kuch," he said. ("In the morning they say something, in the evening, something else)."

But the VHP is banking on the Shankaracharya who it feels can convince Vajpayee to transfer the undisputed land. For their part, their programme of March 15 stands as scheduled. In 1990, too, emissaries of the V P Singh Government had met the Shankaracharya in connection with the Ayodhya dispute.

Meanwhile, VHP leaders once again declared today that they would move the carved pillars to the undisputed area of the land acquired by the Centre. And that if they were prevented from doing so, they were ready to court arrest.

Paramhans and Singhal also said they would continue

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

INDIAN EXPRESS

- 5 MAR 2002

Srb Gujarat: 4/3

(Continued from page 1)

the Army to Gujarat. Mr Advani, who visited riot-hit areas, said what took place in Gujarat was a "kalank". This can make only terrorists happy, he said.

Mr George Fernandes met Mr Modi tonight to discuss the situation. Pakistan TV has been banned but the ban on Star News lifted. The news network was suspended because they mentioned "Hindus and Muslims." "They have promised to rectify this in future and hence the suspension has been lifted," Mr Modi said. 9-07-02

In Rajasthan, a person was stabbed as fresh violence erupted in a town in the Sirohi district.

Curfew was imposed on three police station areas of Aligarh in UP following arson and violence, adds SNS from Lucknow. Tension gripped the town after a body was recovered, officials said.

In Karnataka, two places of worship were ransacked at Hosur in Belgaum district last night.

Muslim leaders and scholars demanded that Gujarat be declared disturbed area. They asked the government to immediately restore calm in the state, "otherwise Muslim organisations would stage a dharna at the Prime Minister's residence."

4 MAR 2002

THE STATESMAN

4 MAR 2002

Govt, VHP look for face-saver

Sudesh K. Verma
in New Delhi

March 3. — The VHP today appeared to be cracking up, though it asserted that it would go ahead with its temple construction plan.

While the Centre is keen to give the VHP a face-saver without violating the consensus at the all party meeting, the major concession has to come from the latter, as it has to climb down from its stand of performing puja at the site acquired by the Centre in 1993.

The Centre is ready to lift the ban on the 15 March kar seva, promise expeditious legal opinion on the acquired land's status and also urge the court to try the

case on a daily basis. It, however, wants the VHP to ensure that the kar seva would be symbolic and performed outside the 67-acre land.

The understanding is that the legal opinion wouldn't come before 15 March.

The sants involved in the temple movement rushed to Delhi at the RSS bidding and had a marathon meeting at the RSS office to find a face saving formula. RSS leaders Mr HV Seshadri, Mr Mohan Bhagwat and Mr Madan Das were present along with the VHP working president, Mr Ashok Singhal, and the Ramjanambhoomi Nyas president, Mr Ramchander Das.

The RSS wants the government to meet the sants and urge them to defer construction. This

may not happen till Tuesday as the Prime Minister and other leaders would be busy with Mr Balayogi's cremation. Meanwhile, the government said the flow of kar sevaks to Ayodhya has stopped putting further pressure on the VHP.

On 27 January, Mr Ramchander Das had told the Prime Minister that he wouldn't meet Mr Vajpayee again on the issue. The problem the Centre may face is to make him climb down on his stand without hurting his ego.

One way suggested by the government is to allow the sants to meet Mr LK Advani, sources said. Mr Singhal today said the sants would meet the government's representatives only if they were invited honourably. That they have come to the cap-

ital ostensibly to attend tomorrow's VHP meeting indicates they're willing to discuss the issue.

Signs that the VHP was getting isolated was visible in the call of the Union sports minister, Miss Uma Bharati. She asserted that the Ram temple should be constructed through a national consensus, on the lines of the Somnath temple. The VHP should defer its decision to start construction though it could go ahead with its religious programmes and yajna, she said.

Mr Singhal, however, didn't leave the hardline posturing and asserted the VHP's claim to the undisputed site. He also distributed copies of the memorandum that the sants had submitted to the government on 27 January.

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THE STATESMAN

7-11-1993

■ GUJARAT CITIES CALM BUT VILLAGES TENSE ■ TOLL 434

State won't be handed over to Army: Advani

Statesman News Service and Agencies

GANDHINAGAR, March 3. — Mr LK Advani today ruled out handing over Gujarat to the Army while the communal violence in the state showed some signs of abatement.

"I don't understand this, the Army has another role to play and it can be called only in extreme circumstances to help the civil authorities," Mr Advani said at a press conference in Ahmedabad.

The chief minister, Mr Narendra Modi, said the violence was on the wane. Officials said cities remained peaceful, but the mayhem spread to more rural areas in Sabarkantha, Banaskantha and Panchmahal districts.

The death toll mounted to 434 as more bodies were recovered from the debris of the charred houses. The toll in Ahmedabad itself is 213. Six people died in violence at Deodhar village in Banaskantha district overnight. Two were killed in police firing while four in mob violence, police said. More than 10 trucks were torched in Aslali village. Violence erupted at Heral

village in Panchmahal district and among the victims were five women. Twenty-four people with weapons were arrested in Arad and Rajgadh villages.

Godhra prime suspect arrested

GODHRA, March 3. — The prime suspect in the Godhra carnage case, Mohammed Hussain Kolota, local Congress leader and president of Godhra Municipality, and four others were today arrested. Kolota, convener of the city Congress minority cell, was picked up from the house of one Iqbal in Polan Bazar area during a combing operation around 4 a.m., police said. Kolota, 45, has been evading arrest since the attack on the Sabarmati Express. Two municipal councillors have already been arrested and police are looking for another two, Bilal Haji and Farookh Bhana. — PTI

In a sudden flare-up in Surat, six people were killed, two of them in police firing.

With no major incident reported from Ahmedabad in the past 24 hours, police have decided to lift curfew in Kalupur, Shahpur, Shaherkotda and Madhavpura areas and relax it in the remaining areas from tomorrow. However, the city witnessed anxious moments when mob threw stones at vehicles. A press van was attacked near Indira

bridge.

Curfew was imposed on Mehsana after 29 people were burnt to death in a village yesterday. Forty towns and cities in 14

when a vehicle overturned, he said: "We saved 400 people by reaching the village in time. A mob had gathered there to create more mischief."

Mr Advani did not agree with reports that inaction on the part of police led to riots during the bandh. "Many people were killed in police firing on the first day itself."

Regarding the attack on the Sabarmati Express, Mr Advani agreed with Mr Modi that the incident "was premeditated and a terrorist act". He refused to elaborate as the matter was under judicial inquiry. He suggested that the purview of inquiry into the Godhra mayhem could be extended to its fallout. The role of "foreign hands" would also be probed. "The doubt is always there, the needle of suspicion does point to certain people," Mr Advani said when asked if "foreign hands" were behind the attack.

The communal violence could be subject to judicial inquiry, but "I do not want the two to be linked," Mr Advani said.

He denied delay in sending

Turn to page 6

THE STATESMAN

4 MAR 2002

How George averted a bloodbath

Swati Chaturvedi
New Delhi, March 2

TEMPERS RAN high on Friday as Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi and Defence Minister George Fernandes were on a virtual collision course on adequate Army deployment in riot-hit Gujarat.

It now appears that innocent lives may have been saved if the Gujarat administration had not completely collapsed.

Information on the worst affected areas in and around Ahmedabad, such as Naroda and Bapunagar, was not made available to the Army and the police almost refused to cooperate to restore order. Subsequently, nine columns of the Army could only be deployed around noon and flag marches began only in the evening. Even after



George Fernandes

Narendra Modi

the Army was deployed, reports say that the killing continued unabated till midnight with the administration not setting up any control rooms to monitor the situation.

Sources say that Fernandes was left with no choice but to wade in to the mobs and try and restore order.

Sources say that it was only after Fernandes lost his temper with some officials that the police were forced to act in the worst affected pockets. Senior officials say that Fernandes was vulnerable to any kind of security threat since at certain points he was under threat from the rioting mobs with no security at all.

Fernandes was forced to take action despite, not wanting to trespass on the authority of the State Government once it became clear that Modi's Government was utterly paralysed say officials.

Says a senior Home Ministry official: "Modi's refusal to allow the administration to take any action is not in doubt anymore. Take the case of the Defence Minister's personal safety, even there the district administration failed."

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

3 MAR 2002

Fernandes discusses situation with Modi

By Manas Dasgupta

HD-11
2/3
AHMEDABAD, MARCH 1. The Defence Minister George Fernandes, who arrived in violence-torn Ahmedabad late on Thursday night, held detailed discussions with the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, and later with the State Cabinet this morning to finalise the programmes of the army flag march and deployment, if necessary, in the affected areas.

He also visited some of the affected areas and talked to the local people before returning to Delhi in the afternoon.

Mr. Modi denied that the flag march by the army was "delayed" and claimed that the army was on the streets "as soon as" the route and other necessary details were finalised with Mr. Fernandes.

While condemning the Meghanagar and Naroda incidents and claiming that the perpetrators of the heinous crimes would not be "spared," Mr. Modi said the incidents were "provoked" by the minorities. In Meghaninagar, a mob attacked the houses of minority commu-

nity members after the former Congress member of the Lok Sabha, Ehsan Jafri, fired from his private revolver injuring at least three persons. Three more were killed and 13 persons injured in 92 rounds of firing by the police to disperse a violent mob. The Naroda incident was sparked when a tempo driven by a minority community member deliberately crushed to death one person and injured two others. Mr. Modi also claimed that Mr. Jafri had opened fire during previous communal riots also.

Mr. Modi said the police had so far fired 311 rounds and burst over a 1,000 teargas shells in the affected areas and arrested over 1,100 persons, more than half of them in Ahmedabad alone. He, however, could not say if any VHP leader was among the arrested. No specific complaint against any VHP volunteer had so far been received, he claimed.

Mr. Modi has called an all-party meeting tomorrow in an effort to bring peace to the riot-torn State.

THE HINDU

- 2 MAR 2002

Centre moves against VHP top brass

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 28

IN A bid to prevent a repeat of the Gujarat incidents in Uttar Pradesh, already tense with the presence of over 20,000 Ram *sewaks* in Ayodhya, the Centre today issued fresh advisories to all States to arrest the top-rung VHP leaders.

There are indications that preventive arrests and detention of some of the VHP leaders would start from tomorrow. It is learnt that at yesterday's meeting between Prime Minister A B Vajpayee and VHP's international president Ashok Singhal, Home Minister L K Advani had made it clear that if the VHP made any attempt to start construction of the Ram temple at Ayodhya on March 15, the Centre would have no option left but to arrest some key leaders.

It was at this that Singhal, who rejected Vajpayee's call to put off the temple construction plans, walked out of the meeting in a huff. Sources said that all State Governments have been asked to carry out preventive arrests and detention of VHP leaders.

UP Chief Secretary Nareshwar Dayal told a private television news channel that "if necessary, *kar sewaks* who have already congregated in Ayodhya will be arrested".

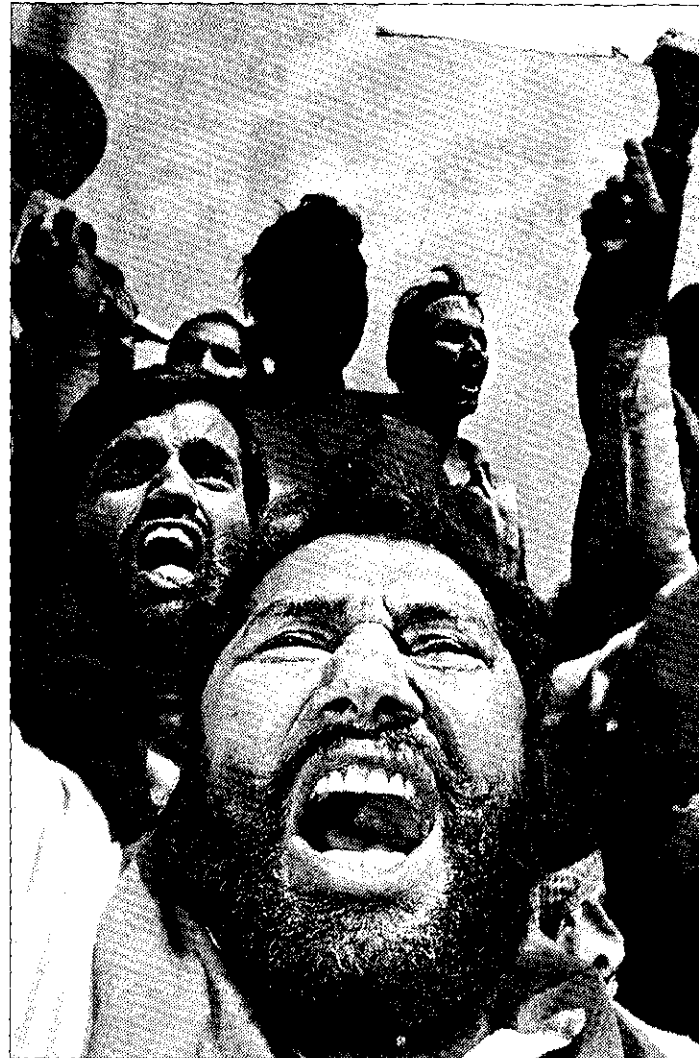
The Centre has despatched 11 companies of paramilitary forces to Gujarat where communal clashes and violence continued since yesterday's incident at Godhra. An Intelligence report received by the Home Ministry has said the Sabarmati Express

was torched by a frenzied mob in a "planned and organised manner". The report says that two Congress councillors were among some who instigated the mob into torching the train.

Fearing a communal spillover in UP, the Centre also despatched 68 companies of paramilitary forces to Ayodhya. This will be besides the 16 companies already deployed around the disputed site. While 20 of the 68 companies reached Ayodhya today, the rest are in the process of taking up position. To check influx of Ram *sewaks* and *kar sewaks* into Ayodhya, orders have been issued to the Railway Board. They have been asked to ensure "pre-destination termination" of trains to Faizabad. All trains reaching Faizabad via Lucknow will be terminated at Lucknow. Likewise, trains for Faizabad via Allahabad will stand terminated at Akbarpur and those via Allahabad will not go beyond Sultanpur.

VHP to stick to schedule

The VHP on Thursday rejected the Prime Minister's appeals to postpone the temple construction, a PTI report said. VHP leader Praveen Bhai Togadia said the schedule was unchanged and the transport of carved stones would begin soon. He said the temple construction programme was decided by seers in the country. The VHP was not worried over the fate of any Government. "We would wait for the Prime Minister to resolve the issue by March 12. Otherwise, we will go ahead with construction."



Shiv Sena members shout anti-Muslim slogans in New Delhi on Thursday following the Godhra massacre.

AP PHOTO

RSS chief urges Singhal to go slow

New Delhi, February 28

RSS CHIEF K S Sudarshan tonight met VHP international working president Ashok Singhal as part of "mediatory efforts" to defuse the situation in Ayodhya and Gujarat.

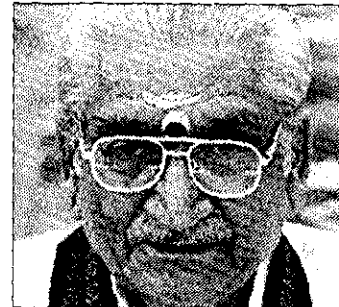
The meeting at the Jhandewalan headquarters of the RSS followed a meeting between Sangh leaders and Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The VHP is determined to move carved pillars meant for a Ram temple to the Ram Janambhoomi site. The Government, meanwhile, has asserted that status quo should be maintained in Ayodhya. Hence the deadlock.

Union Human Resources Minister Murlu Manohar Joshi, BJP MP Balasaheb Apte and some senior Government officials also met Sudarshan before the meeting.

What transpired at the meeting is not known but it is believed that RSS leaders urged Singhal to "soften" his hardline approach in view of the prevailing situation in the country, sources said.

After the meeting with the Prime Minister, RSS joint general secretary Madan Das Devi, who is also in charge of BJP affairs, said: "Both sides will make efforts to thrash out a solution."



ASHOK SINGHAL

We will speak to VHP leaders. Vajpayee will also speak to them. Our immediate efforts would be to maintain law and order situation across the country."

The RSS delegation that met the PM included another joint general secretary H V Seshadri. The Government was represented by Vajpayee and Home Minister L K Advani. BJP president Jana Krishnamurthi was also present. The Prime Minister later held a meeting with Shahi Imam of Jama Masjid Syed Ahmed Bukhari.

UP Chief Minister Rajnath Singh today held talks with Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas leader Ram Chandra Paramahans at his residence. Both declined to say what transpired at the 45-minute meeting.

PTI

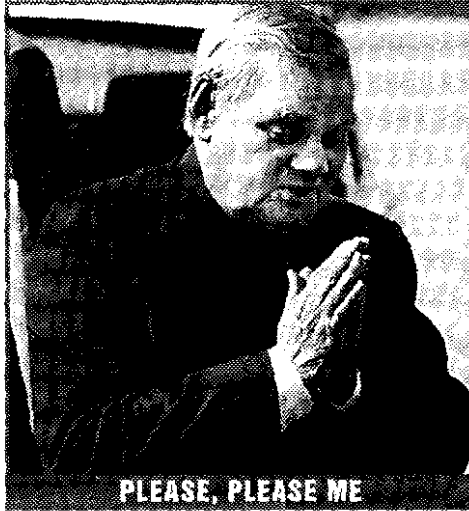
Atal, VHP on collision course

New Delhi
27 FEBRUARY

THE VHP and the Centre appeared heading for a showdown on the contentious Ram temple issue with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Wednesday urging the outfit's leaders to suspend their stir and resolve the matter through court verdict and the former rejecting it and announcing the "muhurat" for beginning the construction process from March 15.

During a 30-minute meeting at his residence, Mr Vajpayee asked Sangh Parivar leaders including RSS general secretary Madan Das Devi and VHP working president Ashok Singhal to resolve the issue through the courts and suspend their ongoing agitational programme at Ayodhya, the parishad's senior vice-president Acharya Giriraj Kishore said.

"We are determined to go ahead with the plan to shift the carved pillars to the Ram Janambhoomi site at 1415 hours on March 15,"



PLEASE, PLEASE ME

he said. The Prime Minister's meeting with the Sangh leaders came a day after the government

assured the opposition that the status quo would be maintained at Ayodhya.

Earlier in the day, home minister L.K. Advani warned that the Centre would not hesitate to take action to maintain law and order in the temple town even as the home ministry directed the Uttar Pradesh government to take strict measures to check the pouring in of "Ram Sevaks" into Ayodhya.

"This is a threat and not an appeal. Advani has forgotten his 'rathayatra' from Somnath to Ayodhya. If he wants to behave like the home minister and test us, then we will respond to him as home minister," an angry Mr Kishore said. The Prime Minister voiced serious concern over the attack on Sabarmati Express in Gujarat and said the government will take all steps to ensure peace and communal harmony in the country.

"I appeal to VHP to stop their agitation and help the government in maintenance of peace and brotherhood in the country," he told reporters here. — PTI

The Economic Times

28 FEB 2002

Centre runs into temple wall

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 27

THE CENTRE'S efforts to make the VHP postpone its temple agitation made no headway even at a meeting between Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the RSS-VHP leaders here this evening.

At the meeting lasting over 30 minutes, both sides reaffirmed their known positions — the PM citing the prevailing tense situation to exhort the Parishad's Ashok Singhal to defer the temple construction programme and the latter seeking transfer of the undisputed land for commencing work for the proposed structure.

Singhal was accompanied at the meeting by the RSS' deputy general-secretary Madan Das Devi. From the

Government side, the PM was assisted by Home Minister LK Advani, Defence Minister George Fernandes and Law Minister Arun Jaitley.

PMO sources said the discussions were held at the request of the VHP. But Devi's presence at the meeting was significant in the light of stern warnings the PM and the Home Minister had delivered to the Parishad earlier during the day.

Vajpayee's statement on the sidelines of a meeting with Afghan leader Hamid Karzai came amid reports of the attack on the Sabarmati Express in Gujarat. Voicing serious concern over the Godhra incident, he assured the people that the Government will take all the necessary steps to ensure peace and communal harmony across the country.

However, the PM's exhortations had no impact on the VHP, which rejected his appeal saying that it had no authority to postpone the temple construction programme in Ayodhya.

The disturbing developments in Gujarat just a day after an all-party meeting the PM had convened on the Ayodhya issue sent alarm bells ringing in Delhi's political and Government circles. The Home Ministry sent out alerts to all States and Union Territories to be vigilant against outbreak of communal riots.

LK Advani spoke to Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, directing him to take action against the culprits responsible for the killings of kar sevaks.

Related reports on Page 6

THE TIMES OF INDIA

7 FEB 1992

98.8

Mixed signals 2712

Nitish Kumar's Reforms Express is off to a shaky start

THERE'S a certain symbolism about presenting the railway budget and the economy's annual audit, the Economic Survey, on the same day in Parliament — both the economy and railway finances are hopelessly off-track. As the Survey points out, and as we have argued consistently, the economy is poised at the edge of disaster with investment levels today much lower than they were even a decade ago, and savings rates not much higher. This year's higher GDP number, as the Survey points out, is on account of a sharp hike in farm growth but that, in the absence of structural reforms, is hardly sustainable — agricultural growth in India has been following a cycle of one good year followed by one bad, one indifferent. As for the railways, the less said the better. For too long now, successive governments have run the railways off track, over-subsidising passengers and over-charging on freight rates — this cross-subsidy, the Survey tells us, is a whopping Rs 4,000 crore. As a result, the railways have lost their share of the freight market to roads (that is a macro-economic disaster since railway carriage is much cheaper over long distances). Worse, with even its reserves not enough to bankroll this extravagance, the railways resorted to the familiar ploy of cutting other expenses. As committee after committee set up accident after accident has made clear, the railways are spending too little on the maintenance of tracks and signals and on modernisation. And too much on new trains and new stations, usually at the newest rail minister's home town.

To that extent, today's offerings by railway minister Nitish Kumar are welcome, though inade-

quate. Raising passenger tariffs by around 8-10 per cent (to net Rs 910 crore) is certainly a good measure and will help reduce the cross-subsidy of passenger traffic by overcharging on freight — by the way, the freight burden ultimately also hits the common man as these charges get factored into the prices of dal and atta. Of course, Nitish Kumar has muddied his record by carrying on with populist splurges of the kind associated with his predecessor, Mamata Banerjee. A whopping 25 new trains have been announced apart from 16 special inter-city super-fast shatabdis — Mamata announced only 24 last year — free meals are to be provided to children below the age of five on certain trains, special food plazas are to be set up, and the railways are even to provide their own brand of drinking water. And, yes, thanks to 'rationalisation' of fares, freight rates are to go up further by another Rs 450 crore — that is clearly not the way reforms were meant to go.

While it is always foolish to speculate on what all this means for the Union Budget (or whether, for instance, as the Survey recommends, interest rates will be cut), today's developments do offer some pointers. After the debacle in Uttar Pradesh particularly, several felt the NDA government would lose its stomach for reforms — not that, mind you, the assembly losses had anything to do with reforms. Nitish Kumar's mixed record today confirms this possibility — there will be moves to get reforms back on track, but they are unlikely to be very bold ones. So now on to the next destination — Yashwant Sinha's Budget. Here's hoping that he will try harder to get things back on track.

INDIAN EXPRESS

27.12.2011

Govt vows status quo at Ayodhya

New Delhi, February 26

THE GOVERNMENT tonight assured the nation that it would not allow a repeat of 1992 but maintain status quo at the disputed and acquired site in Ayodhya.

The Centre's statement came this evening at an all-party meeting after the Opposition forced adjournments in both Houses of Parliament over the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's threat to begin temple construction from March 15.

Under attack from Opposition leaders that the Government was not taking adequate steps even as thousands of VHP activists keep pouring into Ayodhya, Home Minister L K Advani assured the meeting that it is the primary responsibility of the Government to maintain status quo at the disputed and acquired site and it was determined to fulfil it.

Reacting almost immediately, a defiant VHP said it would go ahead with its plans and that its workers were ready to face bullets or go to jail.

Advani told the meeting in Parliament House that "we are aware of what happened in 1992 (when the Babri Masjid was demolished) and we assure you that we will not allow 1992 to be repeated. We will not allow anything which will make us repent at a later stage."

The Opposition, however, was not convinced with the assurance. Expressing disappoint-



Ram sewaks shout slogans demanding the reconstruction of the Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya.

ment, Opposition leaders said the Government should come out clearly on what steps they were taking right now to stop the gathering of VHP activists in Ayodhya. The all-party meeting was called yesterday by the Prime Minister after leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi wrote to him asking for one.

In Ayodhya today, security was tightened, especially around the disputed site and near the makeshift Ram temple complex.

VHP defiant: The VHP tonight said it was determined to go ahead with the construction of

the Ram temple in Ayodhya from March 15 "at all costs" notwithstanding the Government's resolve to maintain status quo at the disputed site and not allow a repeat of 1992. "We will go ahead with the process of construction from March 15 as announced earlier. We are ready to face bullets or go to jail," VHP senior vice-president Acharya Giriraj Kishore said. He said the Prime Minister's calling of the all-party meeting and the assurance the Government gave the Opposition were attempts at being "popular".

PTI

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 FEB 2002

Nitish chugs off populist track

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 26

RAILWAY PASSENGERS can expect a 10 to 15 per cent fare hike, that has been proposed in the Railway Budget for 2002-2003 by Railway Minister Nitish Kumar on Tuesday.

The proposed fare hikes, which will mainly hit Second Class Sleeper and AC Chair Car categories, are expected to yield an additional income of Rs 910 crore. However, there will be no change in Rajdhani and Shatabdi Express fares.

The Rail Budget has also proposed a modification in the freight rate structure, reducing the number of categories from 59 to 32 to generate an additional income of Rs 450 crore. The proposed rationalisation was deemed necessary because the freight rate for the highest class of commodities is eight times that of the lowest class. Now the highest rates will be 3.3 times the lowest rates.

Kumar said the hikes were necessary to ensure that the Railways are financially viable. Passenger fares had not been raised in the last two Railway Budgets.

The budget talks about introducing 16 Jan Shatabdi Express trains with mainly non-AC Second Class Chair Car coaches. Costs for facilities like catering will be factored into the fares, which will be in the same range as those in existing Shatabdi trains. Twenty-five other express trains will also be introduced.

Demonstrating the Railways' will to follow financially sound principles, the budget proposes paying the Centre the complete dividend liability to the tune of Rs 2,696 crore in 2002-2003. The Railways deferred paying large sums under this head during the current and last fiscal years.

The Railways' annual plan for 2002-2003 has been kept at Rs 12,330 crore including Rs 2,210 crore to be drawn from the Special Railway Safety Fund for new projects. The central budgetary grant component is Rs 5,840 crore as against Rs 5,738 crore last year.

The Railways' earnings during 2001-2002 has been estimated at Rs 11,400 crore from passengers and Rs 24,610 crore from freight traffic.

Computer-based ticketing

The Railways will soon devel-



Railway Minister Nitish Kumar and his deputy, Digvijay Singh, entering Parliament to present the Budget.

AJAY AGARWAL/HINDUSTAN TIMES

op a computer-based ticketing system under which passengers will be able to buy unreserved tickets even from locations other than the boarding station. Announcing this, the Railway Minister said the system will be able to issue monthly and quarterly season tickets as well.

A pilot project for this purpose is scheduled to be launched during 2002-03 in connection with the 150th year of the Indian Railways.

RPF personnel for security

Concerned over terrorist attacks, the Government is considering a proposal for amending relevant Acts to utilise the services of Railway Protection Force (RPF) personnel in providing security to passengers on running trains and stations.

Announcing this in his Budget speech, Nitish Kumar said the RPF Act and the Railway Act would be amended to help maintain better liaison and co-

ordination with state police authorities. This coordination was required since law and order and control of crime in railway premises was the responsibility of the State, he said.

Stating that the railway track was a "visible symbol" of the Government across the country, Kumar said being a State-owned asset it became a ready target for terrorists.

Related report on Page 6

Only crumbs for 'developed' Bengal

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, February 26

NITISH KUMAR'S Railway Budget hasn't gone down well with zonal railway officials stationed in the city. Paying the price for being "one of the more developed States" in the country, West Bengal has little to look forward to in the Railway Budget tabled today. Two new Jana Shatabdi trains between Howrah and Bhubaneswar and Howrah and Malda Town and one bi-weekly New Delhi-Howrah Express is all that Bengal has got out of the annual exercise.

There is a catch, though. As a senior Eastern Railway official put it: "For practical purposes only two new Jan Shatabdi Express trains have been earmarked for Bengal. The proposed bi-weekly Howrah-New Delhi Express is actually the 231 Up/232 Dn Howrah-New Delhi Special train that is being run by ER. The Minister has removed the 'special' tag and made it a regular train."

Further, the authorities at the Metro Rail Bhawan are "totally confused". Having asked for an allocation of Rs 150 crore compared to the sanctioned Rs 115 crore last year, Metro Rail has been allocated a mere Rs 51 crore. Former Railway Minister Mamata Banerjee too took strong exception to this "drastic cut" in allocation for Bengal's prestigious project.

"The minister has humped up passenger fares for the second class between nine and 13 per cent. We are confused. In the absence of any mention of Metro in the budget, we are at a loss to understand the implications. We are yet to receive a formal statement, but going by what has been suggested if we are forced to increase Metro fares, it is going to boomerang on us," observed Prabir K Chatterjee, chief operating manager, Metro Railway.

What's more, the budgetary allocation would put a question mark on the future of the ongoing extension work of the Tollygunj-Garia section.

Kumar has made no concrete announcement on the Circular Railway project, though Eastern Railway sources said that electrification of the Princep Ghat-Majerhat section would be completed as per its earlier deadline of 2003. Moreover, laying of new tracks on the 28-km stretch between Bajkul and Contai of the Digha-Tamluk section would be completed by June. The Eklakhi-Balurghat section of ER too would be completed this year though no time frame has been set for that.

Commenting on Bengal's predicament, a senior South Eastern Railway official said, "It seems Bengal is paying for being one of the advanced states. Kumar in his Budget speech has said that new projects for respective States have been earmarked after taking into consideration the area of the State, population and the backwardness with weightage of 15, 15 and 70 per cent respectively. Bengal has emerged a major loser on the last ground where states like Bihar and UP have marched ahead."

Making no mention of the gauge conversion of the 90-km Bankura-Damodar River Railway Project and the 73.5 km Howrah-Amra section, Nitish Kumar has similarly not sanctioned any further amount for the Phase II construction of Shalimar with the aim of converting it to passenger terminal. "No funds have been allocated for the Bankura-Damodar and Bargachia-Champadanga section of Howrah-Amra Broad Gauge line. Shalimar too has escaped the minister's attention and the completion of these projects is in question," the SER official said.

See also reports on Page 3

PRESIDENT'S ADDRESS TO PARLIAMENT

Ayodhya: 'Govt. duty-bound to maintain status quo'

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, FEB. 25. Using the President's conventional address to the two Houses of Parliament at the start of the budget session, the Vajpayee Government today sent out a strong message to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad that it would not be allowed to take liberties with the law in Ayodhya next month.

"The Government of India, being the statutory receiver, is duty-bound to maintain the status quo at the disputed site in Ayodhya," said the President, K.R. Narayanan. He also reiterated the Government's position that the Ayodhya dispute could "be resolved, either through mutual agreement among all the parties concerned, or through a verdict of the judiciary."

On behalf of the Government, the President also undertook to "ensure that all necessary measures will be taken to ensure the preservation of law and order." This formulation is a significant statement, coming, as it did, within 24 hours of the elections results in Uttar Pradesh where the ruling BJP has received a comprehensive rebuff and in the context of the "mandir



The President, K.R. Narayanan, the Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, and the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, coming to Parliament for the budget session on Monday. — PTI

movement" leaders ascribing the defeat to the party developing political cold feet over the Ram mandir issue.

Apart from this indirect warn-

ing on the mandir issue, the President's address had a lacklustre tone to it, and reflects the Government's current uninspired mood. The President devoted considerable space to the familiar formulations on Pakistan's culpability in the cross-border terrorism.

Taking note of the December 13 assault on Parliament, which was described as "an audacious challenge to our sovereignty", the address accused the ruling establishment in Pakistan of inspiring this attack. "The investigation into this conspiracy has clearly revealed the hand of terrorist organisations, which have for long operated from Pakistani soil with the support of the ruling establishment of that country," he said and asserted that a commonality of "ideology, inspiration, resources and logistics" could be found between the perpetrators of the September 11 and December 13 terrorist attacks.

All-party meet today

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 25. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has called an all-party meeting tomorrow to discuss the Ayodhya developments, with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad threatening to start the Ram temple construction on March 15.

Only three days ago, the Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, had written to Mr. Vajpayee demanding such a meeting to "consolidate the opinions of all sane elements." The meeting would be used to build a view that nothing should be done to disturb the court-ordered status quo in Ayodhya. The non-BJP political parties are in an upbeat mood after the Assembly polls and they can be expected to put pressure on the Prime Minister to deal firmly with the VHP threats.

Among the Opposition leaders who have been invited to attend the meeting include Ms. Gandhi, the Samajwadi Party president, Mulayam Singh Yadav, the Bahujan Samaj Party leader, Mayawati, the CPI(M) leader, Somnath Chatterjee, and the Rashtriya Janata Dal parliamentary leader, Raghuvansh Prasad Singh.

THE HINDU

26 FEB 2002

'Remarks on Muslims blown out of context'

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 21

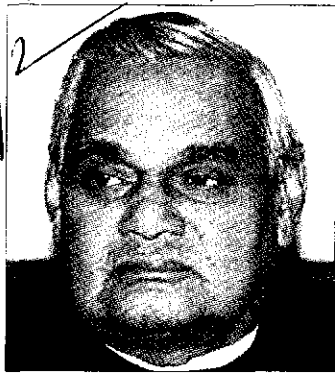
PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee today came out with a lengthy rejoinder to the Opposition's condemnation of his reported statement at a Varanasi public meeting that the BJP could win the UP Assembly elections even without the support of the Muslims.

Stating that many critics of the BJP have long excelled in painting scary scenarios for Muslims in the event of a BJP-led Government coming to power, the PM said he had only referred in his speech to the appeals made by political parties to Muslims to defeat his party. Vajpayee argued he had told them why they should not do it and that the BJP wanted Muslim support.

The PM said, "By no means does my statement indicate that the BJP does not need the support of Muslims. On the contrary, in one rally after another, I have stated that we would very much like them to support us on the basis of our performance and promise."

Quoting from the relevant text of his speech, Vajpayee said it was astounding that "those Opposition leaders who are criticising me have done so even without verifying my complete statement. Moreover, it is not that they do not know me. Never in my long life in politics have I played the communal card to win elections".

The Prime Minister clarified what he said at the Varanasi rally was this: "Many parties are telling our Muslim brothers that



ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE

they should defeat the BJP. Why? What has the BJP done? Our Government has been there at the Centre and in the State. There has been no discrimination, there is no insecurity — we have treated all sections equally.

"To urge our Muslim brothers to vote in such a way as to defeat the BJP connotes a very wrong way of thinking. For one thing, the BJP is going to win even if they vote against the party. But, my question is: Why should they vote against us? The way we have governed the country for the past two-and-half years is a testimony to the truth that we do not discriminate on the basis of religion."

Vajpayee said the "shrill propaganda that the BJP is anti-Muslim has indeed has some influence on Muslim voters in the past. But the situation is changing. Muslims in India have seen that the BJP has been growing from strength to strength despite our critics' barrage of lies about us."

Related report on Page 6

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 2 FEB 2002

Vajpayee caught between VHP and allies

FROM KAY BENE DICT

New Delhi, Feb. 18: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee will soon have to think up a strategy to calm allies who have taken serious note of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's 100-day yagna.

With VHP hawks having unilaterally started the yagna in the run-up to the proposed construction of the Ram mandir from March 15, many of the National Democratic Alliance's partners in government are frowning.

They feel the VHP has made a mockery of the coalition agenda that had set aside three con-

tentious issues — Ayodhya, uniform civil code and Article 370.

The allies — including the Telugu Desam, the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), the DMK and the Biju Janata Dal (BJD) — have, however, decided to hold their silence till the Uttar Pradesh results are declared on February 24. They feel that any outburst on their part could colour the election outcome.

The allies are likely to break loose during the budget session of Parliament beginning next Monday, a day after the Uttar Pradesh mandate is out. By then,

Vajpayee will have to keep an alibi or an action plan ready to answer their queries.

The Prime Minister has doubtless trouble on his hands as the heartland mandate is hardly likely to be heartening for the BJP.

If his party fails to bag enough seats to form a government in Lucknow, Vajpayee will have to face not only a belligerent VHP but some allies who could make his position vulnerable.

Alternatively, if a BSP-BJP coalition is set up with Mayavati as chief minister, the Prime

Minister's headache would lessen to a great extent.

Not only would the Sangh parivar hawks cool down, Mayavati's 14 MPs would back the NDA at the Centre and bolster the Prime Minister's strength.

An NDA source today said the alliance partners would mount pressure within and outside Parliament against the parivar hawks' bid to take the law into their hands.

"We would like the matter to be discussed at the NDA meeting slated for next week," the source said.

But allies like the Samata

Party and the Janata Dal (United), the Lok Janashakti have said they would wait for a few more days before deciding on the future course of action.

NDA sources said "in the event of a non-BJP government assuming power in Lucknow, the VHP is certain to seize the opportunity and create problems. If that be so, some of the supporting parties may also be forced to take a hard decision, whether to continue supporting a BJP-led government in Delhi."

An INLD leader, however, spoke from a different angle. He said that most allies had

a problem with the BJP's "big brother" attitude.

The INLD and the BJP had virtually parted ways in Haryana, he said, while the BJP and the BJP were contesting the panchayat elections against each other.

The DMK, he added, was peeved with the BJP's "covert understanding" with the ADMK. And the Desam was worried over the anti-incumbency factor that could arise if the Vajpayee government fell because of the Uttar Pradesh mandate or the VHP's belligerence on the tem-

THE TELEGRAPH

19 FEB 2002

Ayodhya efforts failed: Vajpayee



*Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee
in Lucknow. — PTI*

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

LUCKNOW, Feb. 16. — The Prime Minister today admitted that his efforts for a solution to the Ayodhya dispute had failed because of the "rigid" stand of the rival parties and said the matter could be settled only

in court now. His response was Caesarean when reminded of the VHP's threat that it would start Ram temple's construction on 15 March (Ides of March): "Let the deadline come".

(The VHP expressed surprise over the comments. "I've no knowledge where and how the talks have failed," said the organisation's president, Mr Ashok Singhal, PTI adds).

Addressing a press conference at Raj Bhavan, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said he didn't "feel bad" over the VHP's threat and there was no need to ban the organisation.

Worship of the stones to be used in the temple's construction would begin in Ayodhya tomorrow, said Mahant Paramhans Ramchandra Das, chairman of Ram Janambhoomi Trust, UNI adds.

THE STATESMAN

Cabinet gives reforms a big push

IBP, VSNL stakes sold; sugar, drugs decontrolled

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, February 5

DAYS BEFORE Budget 2002, the government on Tuesday took major steps to keep the second generation of reforms rolling, with a slew of decisions designed to provide an impetus to the privatisation process and improve the investment climate.

In its last meeting before February 28, decisions taken by the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs (CCEA) pointed to a greater push for reforms in the budget.

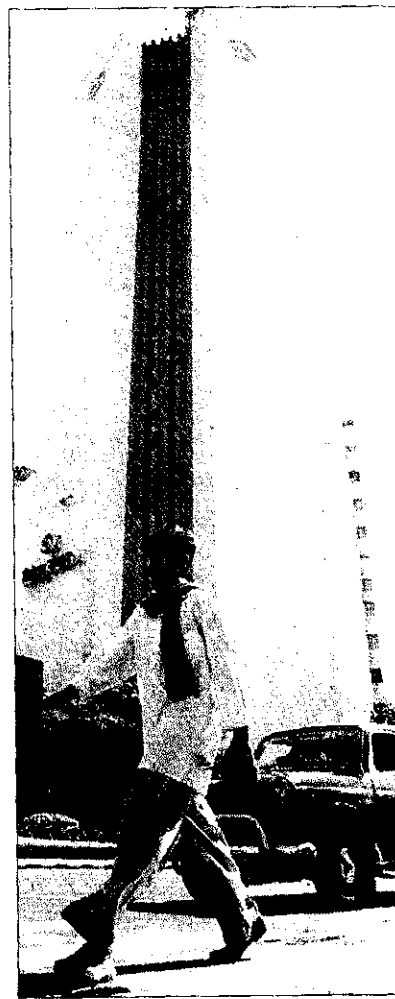
On the disinvestment front, the Cabinet Committee on Disinvestment (CCD) approved the sale of government equity in IBP and Videsh Sanchar Nigam Ltd (VSNL) to Indian Oil Corporation and the Tatas respectively. While these big-ticket sales will help reduce the fiscal deficit, the government remains nearly Rs 5,000 crore short of its disinvestment target for this fiscal.

Put together, the Government got nearly Rs 2,592.68 crore from these two deals. It also decided to sell four hotels - the Qutab and Lodhi in Delhi, Centaur in Mumbai and the Laxmi Vilas Palace in Udaipur - for just over Rs 202 crore.

At the same time, the Government also decided to put two more oil majors - Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd and Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd - on the block during the coming financial year.

The Government also decided

THE DECISIONS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS



VSNL's Mumbai headquarters: the Tatas now have controlling stake.



DISINVESTMENT

DECISION: Big ticket PSUs sold. IOC gets IBP for Rs 1153 cr, Tatas bag VSNL for Rs 1439 cr

IMPLICATION: Investment climate improves, move reduces fiscal deficit; PSU scrips on fire



SUGAR DECONTROL

DECISION: Starting April 2002 millers can sell their entire produce in the open market, they don't need to sell to the government

IMPLICATION: Millers get better prices, but they don't contribute to the PDS. Ration card holders, however, will continue to get their sugar at PDS rates

LIBERALISED MOVEMENT OF ESSENTIALS



DECISION: Restrictions on inter-state movement of foodgrains, edible oils and textiles scrapped. Producer can sell wherever he gets the best price

IMPLICATION: Foodgrain traders, medium and large farmholders win. If there's a glut in Punjab and a scarcity in Orissa, a Punjab producer can sell in Orissa without hassles



PHARMA POLICY

DECISION: Price controls reduced across the board. Price controls will henceforth apply to 25% of drugs, as opposed to 40% now

IMPLICATION: Don't worry. Drugs aren't likely to become dearer, market forces will ensure that

to fully decontrol sugar from April 1, 2002, lifting curbs on the direct sale of sugar by producers in the open market.

Another decision taken on Tuesday's CCEA meeting re-

moves 12 items from the purview of the Essential Commodities Act that currently covers 29 items. The Cabinet also approved a pharmaceutical policy that is expected to ensure

availability of essential drugs, provide a stimulus to research and development and attract more investments for the sector.

Related reports on Page 12

But Govt jobs safe despite VRS noises

Jay Raina
New Delhi, February 5

EXPERTS IN the government aren't enthusiastic about the new voluntary retirement scheme (VRS) announced on Tuesday. They are pessimistic on two counts. First, that no serious spadework has been done to identify the deadwood. And second, given the recessionary climate, few employees will go for the scheme.

The new scheme for employees seen as surplus to the central government's requirements offers them an ex gratia payment of 35 days' basic pay and dearness allowance for every year of service, with a 33-year cap.

The payment could also be subject to a minimum limit of Rs 25,000 or 250 days' pay calculated on the basis of the salary drawn at the time an employee opts to take voluntary retirement.

Sources said that the repackaged VRS could eventually turn out to be a statistical camouflage. Without actually cutting bureaucratic flab, the government could merely put out figures showing a decrease in manpower.

For instance, the privatisation of the telecom sector, freeze on fresh recruitments and the flight of doctors and nurses might be showcased as a major trimming achievement.

This could enable the government to claim a reduced workforce of 33 lakh, against the sanctioned strength of 42 lakh as of December 31, 2001.

But in actual terms, the downsizing would be restricted to unfilled vacancies and the retire-

VRS FOR GOVT STAFF

DECISION: Surplus government employees to be given golden handshake, but not if they are defence or railway personnel



IMPLICATION: Not much. No clear roadmap as to how this will be achieved. No figures as to how many people are affected. There's also no retrenchment clause in case an employee refuses VRS

ment of 3-4 lakh employees besides the 'reduction' of four lakh telecom employees due to privatisation.

Moreover, the only new element in the VRS package, experts pointed out, is the promised income tax rebate on a part of the ex-gratia payment. But the actual size of this concession is yet to be worked out.

Some experts say that for a better response, the scheme would need to be made more attractive by including the HRA and the city compensatory allowance to the aggregate ex-gratia payment.

The Centre will identify surplus staff, minus the railways and defence services, on the basis of the recommendations of the Geethakrishnan committee and the 5th Pay Commission Report.

The Geethakrishnan committee had proposed the downsizing of the bureaucracy by either shutting departments or drastically reducing their strength.

Centre explores ways to hand over land for Ram temple

By Smita Gupta
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The BJP leadership in the government is keen to find a way to hand over the so-called undisputed 67 acres surrounding the 'disputed site' in Ayodhya to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP), authoritative sources say. The reference the Prime Minister made recently to law minister Arun Jaitley was not an effort to buy time, but a serious move to push for a solution, they point out.

Simultaneously, defence minister and National Democratic Alliance (NDA) convenor George Fernandes has been asked to convince the BJP's alliance partners to agree to the handing over of the 67 acres to the VHP, NDA sources said. But he has been asked to do so only after Mr Jaitley gives his opinion. VHP chief Ashok Singhal has been meeting various NDA leaders to persuade them to accept the VHP view.

So, even as the BJP has officially announced that the Ram temple is not on its agenda till 2004 and the Prime Minister has seemingly adopted a tough and uncompromising line with the VHP leaders—going so far as to offer his resignation to the obdurate sants—the government is exploring ways of handing over land for the temple construction. A minister sought to justify this by saying that till the Ayodhya issue was resolved, the BJP could not get on with the "business of modernising India".

It is now learnt that the government is working out the timing of the law ministry's opinion—whether to receive it before February 14, the first day of the Uttar Pradesh polls, or immediately after judging that day's poll returns, or before March 12, the date after which the VHP says it will start temple work.

One view in the BJP is that the Ram temple issue will not secure

the party any votes. But another section, going by unfavourable intelligence reports on the party's projected performance and the fact that the battle against terrorism will not have the desired results, feels the temple issue may do the trick.

The courts are also likely to be advised to expedite hearings on the cases related to the Ayodhya issue. Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh sources said that a positive legal opinion on the 67 acres would help influence the courts.

Babri Masjid Action Committee leaders, however, said that the court had ruled that till such time as the title suit was decided, the Centre could not hand over the surrounding land. The logic is that once construction on the 67 acres begins, it is immaterial which way the verdict on the title suit goes since the disputed area will be made out of bounds for any kind of construction.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

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'UNDECLARED EMERGENCY-LIKE SITUATION ON BORDER'

We will never compromise on LoC: Vajpayee

By K. Balchand

PATNA, FEB. 3. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said the issue of return of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) would top the agenda of any talks with Islamabad, but it would not be a precondition for talks.

Talking to mediapersons after inaugurating three railway projects here, he ruled out the possibility of treating the Line of Control as the International Border emphasising that he would never compromise on the LoC.

The Prime Minister, however, said he was ready for talks with Pakistan provided it immediately gave up sponsoring terrorist and subversive activities in India, like the one in Hazaribagh where the American center was attacked.

He said India wanted good relations with all its neighbours as strained relations affected the people on either side of the border. "We are not at war with the people of Pakistan. It is the army which is ruling. But friendship cannot be one-sided."

To a question whether the United States was tilting towards Pakistan, he said both New Delhi and Washington were well aware of each other's

disposition and Pakistan would not come between them.

He described as "ridiculous, baseless and fantastic" the accusations of Pakistan regarding the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, and the alleged involvement of Indian officials in the kidnapping of the U.S. journalist, Daniel Pearl in Pakistan.

Mr. Vajpayee said the Government was actively considering bringing an amendment to give scheduled caste status to the most backward among Muslims.

The Prime Minister inaugurated the construction work on the Rs. 643 crore railway bridge over the Ganga connecting Patna with Sonapur, launched the commissioning of the Patna-Mughalsarai electrified route by flagging off a model rail engine called mainline electric multiple unit and also laid the foundation stone for electrification of the Patna-Gaya section — all with the touch of a button through multi-point teleconferencing from Gandhi Maidan.

'Desist from raising security-related issues'

PTI reports:

Addressing a public meeting here, the Prime Minister asked the Opposition parties to desist from raking up contentious security-related issues as the In-

do-Pakistan border stand-off had triggered an "undeclared emergency-like situation". "Emergency situations demand emergency measures.... We cannot continue to haggle infinitely over the prices of military equipment when the country's sovereignty is at stake," he said in an apparent reference to the recent controversy over the purchase of coffins for Kargil martyrs.

Referring to the Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf's handshake with him at the SAARC summit, he said no shaking of hands could end the chill in the two countries' ties "unless our hearts meet".

"I told General Musharraf after the famous handshake in Kathmandu that we have shaken hands many times in the past but what purpose can they serve unless our hearts meet too?"

On the Uttar Pradesh Assembly polls, he said Ayodhya was not an issue in the elections and no party should make it a poll plank. He favoured a settlement of the Ayodhya dispute through mutual agreement between the two groups or through a court verdict.

On whether the U.P. poll results would have an impact on national politics, he said the results would "have an impact

not only on national but international politics also".

Special package for Bihar

The Prime Minister rejected the Bihar Chief Minister, Rabri Devi's demand for according special status to the State, but assured that the Centre would provide a special financial package to Bihar to cope with the revenue losses due to its bifurcation for the creation of Jharkhand State.

He also refuted the Chief Minister's allegation that the Centre was discriminating against Bihar and suggested that the State utilise Central funds properly.

Earlier, Mr. Vajpayee arrived here on a five-hour visit amid unprecedented security in view of the threat perception. He was accompanied by the Union Ministers George Fernandes, Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain, C.P. Thakur, Vijay Kumar Goel, Ravishanker Prasad and Rajiv Pratap Rudi.

He was received at the airport by the Bihar Governor V.C. Pande, the Chief Minister, Rabri Devi, and the Railway Minister Nitish Kumar, among others.

After completing his engagements in the city, the Prime Minister left for New Delhi.

4 FEB 2002

4 FEB 2002

9 Feb 98
HD-10

Vajpayee's Prime Ministerial authority being tested

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, FEB. 1. Prabhat Kumar resigned late last night as the Governor of Jharkhand but not before coming pretty close to defying the Prime Minister's authority. Mr. Kumar had been left in doubt that the Centre wanted him out; but he probably calculated that Atal Behari Vajpayee could be pushed just a bit. A Governor commands no (political) armies and is hardly in a position to stand up to a Prime Minister.

However, the challenge to the Prime Minister's authority is not over. Two very active sources of irritation and inconvenience — the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the NDA crowd in Bihar — are at work. In both cases Mr. Vajpayee now finds himself pushed to the wall by those who are/were his ideological friends, and with whom he broke or continues to break political bread.

The challenge from the VHP crowd is to the constitutional order over which Mr. Vajpayee presides. The VHP crowd cannot be treated as different than any other group of trouble-makers, and have to face the wrath of the law of the land.

Mr. Vajpayee has to ensure that the VHP does feel encouraged to exploit the presumed differences in perceptions between the North Block and the South Block. The VHP is threatening a confrontation, perhaps having made the calculation that the BJP hard-core leadership would not like to annoy the "Hindu samaj" on the eve of the

U.P. elections. The Prime Minister and his aides have been aware of the need to deal firmly with this crowd even before Mr. Singhal and Company created the most recent rumpus. Even referring the "issue" to the Law Minister is seen as appeasing the sants, taking a leaf out of Mr. Narashima Rao's book on buying time. The mistake has been realised.

Having conceded a bit of legitimacy to their pressure tactics by agreeing to meet the VHP leaders, Mr. Vajpayee had to enlist the BJP president's help in telling the "sants" not to cross the "lakshman rekha".

Mr. Vajpayee does not have the luxury to

NEWS ANALYSIS

be seen as a Prime Minister who can be pushed around. Nor can he allow an impression to gain that while India is all too willing to denounce religious extremism in Pakistan, its political authority is so weak and enfeebled that it can not withstand the pressure from a religious cabal.

The second challenge to the Prime Minister's authority comes from the NDA siblings in Bihar, who are demanding that the Laloo Prasad-baiter, U.N. Biswas, who retired yesterday, finally, as the Joint-Director of the Central Bureau of Investigation be appointed a Governor.

Indeed, Mr. Biswas has been the Vajpayee Government's bug bear. The first

"most self-destructive" decision L.K. Advani as the Union Home Minister had taken in 1998 was not to proceed against Mr. Biswas, as recommended by the Dora Inquiry. Mr. Biswas was found guilty of overstepping his authority in summoning the Army to arrest Laloo Prasad Yadav in 1997. That single decision had put the bureaucracy's collective back up against the political leadership.

If Mr. Biswas is now accommodated in some Raj Bhavan, it would lend credence to the CBI's critics that the investigations in India are politically motivated. This, for example, is precisely the plea taken by the Italian businessman, Ottavio Quattrocchi in a Malaysian court, who is resisting extradition.

More than the possible advantage that may accrue to an accused, if Mr. Biswas is rewarded it would complete the process of politicisation of the Indian Police Service. The lesson would be that those officers who choose to become hatchet man of this or that political crowd, get promoted, secure extensions, and are given post-retirement protection and accommodation. This is the crux of the politicisation of bureaucracy and runs contrary to the promise of *sun-raj*.

The Prime Minister has to stand up for Constitutional proprieties and political norms. The Biswas case would be a fit test whether Mr. Vajpayee can resist blackmailing from his own political friends.

2 FEB 2002

2 FEB 2002

PM rejects VHP call to hand over land

By Smita Gupta
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) appeared to be in the mood for a confrontation with the government after Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, along with home minister L.K. Advani and defence minister George Fernandes, made it clear on Sunday that the Centre would not hand over the land around the sanctum sanctorum of the disputed temple in Ayodhya until the Ramjanmabhoomi issue was resolved, preferably through a national consensus. Mr Vajpayee made his stand clear during a three-hour meeting with VHP leaders.

According to sources, Mr Vajpayee, stressing that he had never promised to find a solution before March 12, claimed to have only said that there should be a negotiated settlement in which saints would have to be involved. He reportedly told the VHP leaders that any solution to the issue would have to be within the framework of the Constitution and should respect the rule of law, the NDA manifesto and the court verdict.

Although the Prime Minister said he would ask the law ministry to examine "the legal and constitutional aspects" of handing over the land, he made it clear that he was not making any commitment. He maintained that even if something could be done through an executive order or parliament, his first preference would be a "national consensus" on the issue.

The VHP has been mounting pressure on the Centre to release the land it had acquired in 1993. VHP international secretary Pravin Togadia said his organisation would not compromise on the issue and the Centre should immediately hand over the 67 acres of land it had acquired to the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas by Mahashivratri (March 12) for the construction of a Ram

temple.

Both Mr Vajpayee and Mr Fernandes told the VHP delegation that at a time when the government was fighting terrorism and the army was building up troops along the border, it would be wrong to start an agitation which could create a law and order problem in the country.

The Centre's stand has clearly left the VHP brass unhappy. Soon after the meeting, senior leaders of the outfit headed for a rally at the Ramila grounds and gave a "Ayodhya chalo" call. If the tone of the VHP leaders

SHOW OF STRENGTH



Sadhus express their support for the construction of a Ram temple at Ayodhya during a VHP rally in New Delhi on Sunday.

who spoke to mediapersons after the meeting was belligerent, the subtext of the speeches at the rally was no different. Among those who addressed the rally were VHP chief Ashok Singhal, Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas functionary Ramchandra Paramhans and leaders like V.H. Dalmia, Nriyagopaldas and Swami Mitranand. Stressing that the outfit had little faith in the Centre's ability to fulfil its demands, every speaker asserted that the construction of a Ram temple would begin on any suitable date after March 12. Nothing, they said, could stop "Ram bhakts" from gathering in Ayodhya from February 24.

Speaking to reporters, Mr Fernandes highlighted the fact that the Centre had agreed to examine the legal aspects of handing over the undisputed plots of land around the disputed site to the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas. However, at the VHP rally, most of the leaders conveniently chose to ignore the Centre's decision. In fact, only Paramhans made a cursory mention of it in his speech.

While the VHP has contended that the land acquired by the Centre is without legal encumbrance, the Babri Masjid Action Committee says the court has decreed that the government cannot hand over the land during the pendency of the title suit.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

28 JAN 2002

THE TIMES OF INDIA
THE STATESMAN

'SANTS' GIVE ULTIMATUM TO

PM to refer Ayodhya is

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JAN. 27. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today decided to refer to the Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, two points related to the Ayodhya dispute for his Ministry's consideration: to see if the Ayodhya court case could be expedited, and to look at "legal and constitutional aspects" of handing over the land acquired by the Government in 1993 to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad-controlled Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas.

The decision was in response to the seven-day "sant chetavani (warning) yatra" which culminated with a rally at the Rambila grounds where an ultimatum was served on the Government to hand over the land at Ayodhya or face a situation in which the "sants" would forcibly take it over and build a Ram temple. Among those seated on the dais was RSS leader, Madan Das Devi, who is the "link" between the BJP and the RSS.

The Government's decision came after a two-hour-long meeting with a VHP-led delegation of "sants". It runs counter to the views expressed by the National Democratic Alliance leaders on Saturday and is being seen as a move to buy time and get the Ram temple issue on to the NDA agenda through the backdoor.

The Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, and the Defence Minister and NDA convenor, George Fernandes, were present at the meeting. The "sant" delegation



The Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, the Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, the PMO, Vijay Goel, with the VHP leaders, Ashok Paramhans Ramchandra Das, in New Delhi on Sunday.

included VHP leaders, V.H. Dalmiya and Ashok Singhal, and Ramchandra Paramhans, Sri Visvesha Theertha of Udipi and Swami Saryamitrnanand.

Earlier in the morning, the Marg Darshak Mandal meeting of the VHP adopted a resolution demanding that the 67 acres of land, acquired by the Government in 1993, be handed over to the Nyas to enable it to start construction of a Ram temple at the disputed site "on any auspicious day after Shivratri of this year (which falls on March 12)".

It appears that the 11-member delegation, which met the Prime Minister, was at first told that the Ayodhya issue could be resolved only in two ways: through a negotiated settlement, or through a ju-

dicial verdict which must be accepted by both sides. That was in tune with what had been decided at the informal NDA meeting called by Mr. Vajpayee on Saturday.

However, there was intense pressure from the RSS, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad as well as Mr. Advani. Some leaders of allied parties recalled that yesterday it was Mr. Advani who suggested referring the matter to the Law Minister to see if a way could be found for handing over the acquired land to the VHP-controlled trust. But with strong opposition from the allied leaders, it was decided that the Prime Minister must firmly reiterate that the Ayodhya issue could be resolved through negotiations or a court verdict.

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At e sised beg or Gover upon Ayodh especi rather payee, the Pri the Ra; was no cuses to The we recreate agitation

Niketa was a symbol of resolve a year after many in her home state had practically lost their future in the devastating earthquake.

Speaking about the current situation in Ahmedabad and its outskirts, Niketa says that the people of the city have put the catastrophe behind and have come terms with life. "Time heals. Time now party, they have fun. But memories of the quake are etched deep in their hearts. When they look back, the sense of shame returns."

Is this her first visit to Chen? Technically no, but practically the last time was about 20 years ago. She loves the idly and the dosa along with sambar. "South Indian food is popular in Ahmedabad," she says.

By Saptarshi Bhattacharya

THE HINDU

28 JAN 2002

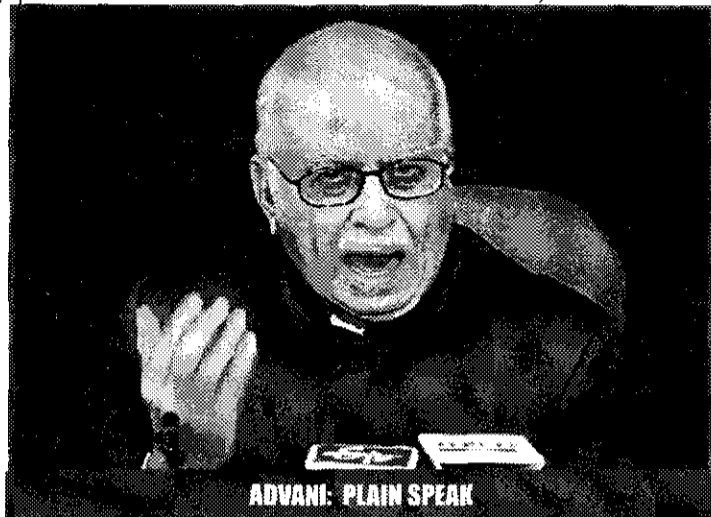
No troop rollback till demands are met

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 25 JANUARY

EVEN AS General Pervez Musharraf is desperately trying to impress his Western handlers that he would soon reform men with jehadi persuasion in his society, Union home minister L. K. Advani on Friday made it plain that the military ruler will have to meet New Delhi's demands if he wished to see the troops rolled back from the border.

Mr Advani, who had earlier said that nice-sounding words will not be enough to convince India, reiterated that turning over of Dawood Ibrahim, India's most wanted terror merchant, will be the chief factor that will dictate India's reflexes on de-escalation. The tough talking by Mr Advani coincided with reconciliatory noises from General Musharraf. While the General, who has been refusing to hand over New Delhi's most wanted criminals and terrorists, said that he is willing to sign a no-war pact with India, he has also promised to introduce his variation of democracy in Pakistan by October.

On his part, Mr Advani said that



ADVANI: PLAIN SPEAK

Pakistan was yet to do anything tangible for normalising ties with Pakistan. In other words, New Delhi will not go by his public assertions and that it has not changed its assessment of the General — that is, he is a charlatan and a dissembler. At a news conference, the home minister said the country will make its own assessment about infiltration from across the border. In what seemed a polite rejection

of the US stand that there has been some slowing down in infiltration after Mr Musharraf's speech, the home minister said the government cannot come such conclusions in a week or fortnight's time.

"It will take a couple of months to assess the situation on the ground," Mr Advani said, and added that the question of rolling back of troops will be decided by the government. "These are mat-

ters on which formal decision is taken by the government. At the moment, the present situation will continue." Meanwhile, chief of army staff Gen S. Padmanabhan has said the counter-terrorism operations in Jammu and Kashmir would be intensified further. "Our plan is to intensify our ongoing counter-terrorist operations and see that terrorists are put out of action wherever and whenever they may be encountered," he said.

"However, at the same time concerted military-civic action will also be undertaken to wean away the people from militancy," General Padmanabhan added. He said during winter, due to snowfall in upper reaches of Jammu and Kashmir, terrorists tend to gravitate to populated centres like Jammu region and lower reaches of the state. "We intend to deny them this avenue of escape from the rigours of winter." Further counter infiltration was being strengthened and force multipliers like electronic devices were being deployed, the army chief said, adding fencing along International Border (IB) should also help in counter-infiltration.

The Economic Times

1. 20. 2002

Cabinet okays extradition pact with Malaysia

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: India moved a step closer to a possible extradition of Italian businessman Ottavio Quattrocchi, one of the accused in the Bofors kickbacks case, after the Union cabinet on Tuesday approved an extradition treaty with Malaysia.

The proposed treaty would provide a legal framework for seeking extradition of fugitives, including economic offenders from Malaysia, an official spokesperson said.

Any person accused or convicted of an extraditable offence, wanted by either country, would be extradited whether the offence was committed before or after the treaty comes into force. The treaty will empower the Malaysian authorities to turn over Quattrocchi to India, bypassing the ongoing legal wrangles in Kuala Lumpur courts where an Indian request for his extradition has been challenged.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

23 JAN 2002

'The Indian Govt felt enough was enough'

Pankaj Vohra interviews L K Advani in New Delhi

Do you think that the chances of an armed conflict with Pakistan have reduced after your US visit?

First, this is a question to which my answer has been fundamentally different from what is expected. For the past month or so, ever since Indian Government decided to recall its High Commissioner from Islamabad and take a series of steps including the deployment of the armed forces in a big way on the frontiers, the question I have been asked is whether there will be a war. Let us realise that a war of a different kind has been inflicted on us by Pakistan for nearly two decades. After the attack on Parliament, the Government certainly considered whether our response to that should continue to be what it was before December 13. It was decided, after due consideration, that enough is enough and the situation calls for a different kind of response. That different response has been continuing.

In the meanwhile I had the opportunity to visit the UK and USA where I said our fight is not with Pakistan but against terrorism. So, if Pakistan abandon terrorism, because of our steps we have taken, international public opinion or America's opinion — whatever the reason — I do not think there will be any further conflict.

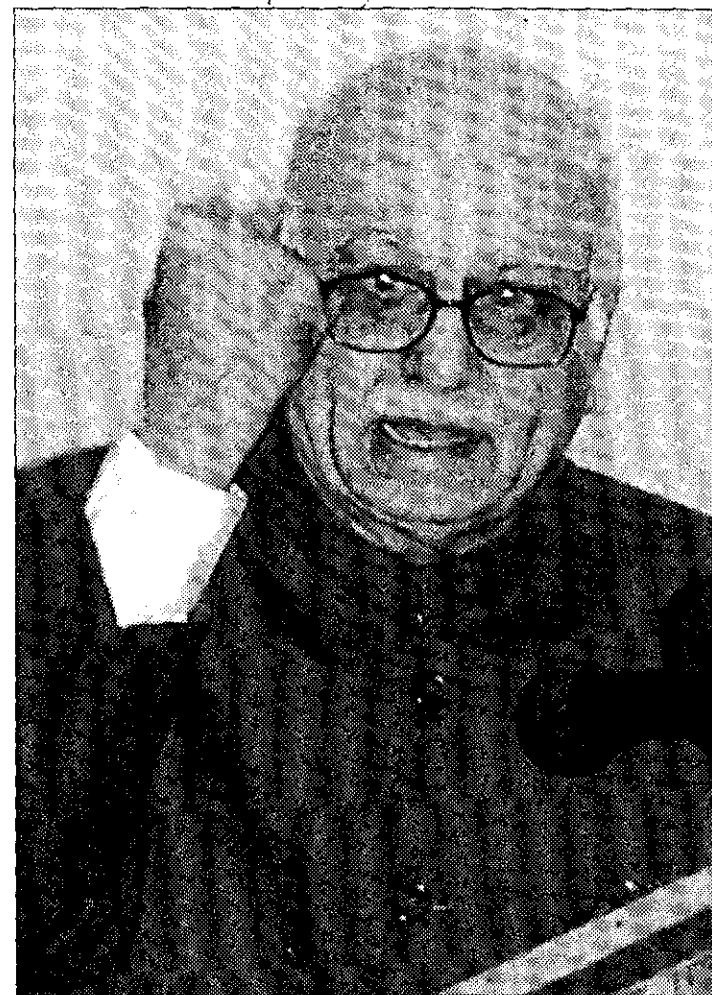
You are the first Home Minister to visit Washington to explain the Indian viewpoint. Was your visit necessary after the Prime Minister had made India's position clear during an earlier visit?

I think when the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister went there, they conveyed the problems relating to terrorism very precisely and emphatically. They visited the country after

America itself had experienced what a terrorist attack can be like. In my case, the visit was undertaken after December 13 and after India felt it was imperative to take a series of measures. It was, of course, in response to an invitation extended by the US's Attorney General and I therefore availed of the opportunity to explain India's point of view as best as I could. I met the President, the Vice-President, the Secretary of State, the National Security Advisor and the Attorney General and found them both understanding and appreciative of India's point of view. I do not recall a single instance when a statement of mine was contradicted by my hosts. All I was given was the impression that they wanted to see an end to terrorism in India.

Was there any marked change in Colin Powell's attitude during his visit to India as a result of your interaction with him in Washington?

I met him only a few days ago, but did not meet him when he came here. From what I gather from our Foreign Minister, he said that terrorism has to end. And therefore, India's stand that it would like to wait and see how Pakistan acts on what Musharraf stated in the course of his speech is justified. In fact, I have myself reacted to Musharraf's speech. His speech related to international situation and the problems that were being created in Pakistan itself by extremist forces. He was clear that these forces have to be suppressed and he has taken a series of steps in that direction. When he spelt out all this, he made a statement that no other Pakistani leader had made in the past — an outright denunciation of theocracy, highlighting the dangers inherent in religious fundamentalism.



L K ADVANI: Telling it like it is

But when it came to India, there was a sentence that stated terrorism would not be permitted in the name of the Kashmir cause. The statement, though brief, was to be broadly translated into the action I had spelt out during my US visit. We expect, one, no financing of terrorists. Two, no arming of terrorists. Three, no training of terrorists. Four, no infiltration of terrorists

and five, no asylum to terrorists. Today, I said I have been in government twice. First in the Morarji Desai government from 1977 to 1979-80 and the second from 1998 to date. There is a marked change in the security environment then and now.

The reason is not J&K, communal riots or war. If there is a change, it is because of the threat of terrorism. Terrorism has to

end and let us decide that as we decided at Shimla, that all issues between the two countries including the issue of J&K would be sorted out through dialogue.

Musharraf is primarily an American prop in Pakistan. In such a situation can we expect Washington to be absolutely objective in its dealings with India and Pakistan?

I'm not sceptical in that regard. There was a time when because of the Cold War, we were close to Moscow and Pakistan was close to Washington. In the last 2-3 years however, the American government and people have realised more and more that India and America are the two largest democracies in the world with a commitment to democracy, rule of law, pluralism and moral values. There is a growing proximity between the two countries. The Pakistanis felt they would benefit from supporting America in the battle against the Taliban. But, the Taliban was, after all, Pakistan's own creation and we in India, have known the terrorism inflicted on us by Pakistan working in tandem with the Taliban. We have mobilised world opinion against terrorism. And after September 11, the point we were trying to make has come home in an emphatic manner. The PM himself said let this become a decisive phase of our struggle against terrorism.

A secular and democratic socialist republic like India always had an advantage over Pakistan when it came to image. If Musharraf succeeds as a modernist, would he not be forcing a situation where a party like yours might have to reassess its Hindutva agenda?

I do not think so. I feel that those who think Pakistan has a better image have some kind of soft corner for Pakistan and its leadership essentially because of the contrast that he (Musharraf)

presents to Taliban. The fact that he made certain pronouncements more akin to democratic countries' approach to extremism in his speech is good. Good for him, good for us and good for the whole world. I do not grudge that.

The Americans seem to have secured for themselves an important role in South and Central Asian affairs. In such a situation and against the backdrop of Pakistan's distrust for bilateralism do you think they will be able to keep off the Kashmir issue for long?

Anyone trying to contribute an opinion or judgement on the resolution of the Kashmir problem would depend on us. Pakistan has wanted America to mediate for a long time. During my visit to the US, I told them that as far as the question of J&K is concerned India and Pakistan decided together in Shimla that this we would sort out bilaterally. I believe this is our national consensus and we do not need any mediation. Even China has endorsed our view.

It is believed in certain quarters that Kashmir was internationalised like never before after Pokhran II. In retrospect, do you think it was a mistake to go nuclear and give Pakistan a legitimate excuse to carry out counter tests at the Chagai hills and neutralise the conventional military superiority which India had?

I do not think so. For a long time, whenever an incident of violence occurred, J&K used to be internationalised. But then, because of our sustained campaign against cross-border terrorism and the different kind of war that India is facing, we found subsequently, it was not Kashmir that was internationalised, but terrorism. After September 11 things have radically changed. Even in the US there were very few questions on J&K.

Most were on terrorism.

What do you think will happen in the UP and Punjab elections? Are you already looking for coalition partners? How would the Central Government be affected if your party loses?

I do not think the present situation indicates that our adversaries are going to win in either Punjab or UP. I think the Akali-BJP alliance in Punjab and the BJP-led alliance in UP will win. The situation was particularly bad in UP about eight months ago after Kalyan Singh left us and for a brief while, we had a government that was unable to impress. But after the arrival of Rajnath Singh as chief minister things have kept on looking up and today we go to the elections with a sense of confidence, confident of a renewed mandate.

There were some drastic changes. The BJP UP list has omitted 40 sitting MLAs and three ministers. Could it be taken as admission that your party was running a government with help of legislators and ministers of doubtful integrity?

No, they were not our men, mainly they whose support we had to take. That necessitated the changes. In other cases, it is generally the anti-incumbency factor which has been taken into account and a very bold decision has been taken which I am sure will pay results.

What is your party's stand on elections to the posts of President and Vice-President?

This is not something on which any individual member of a party would make a pronouncement. It has frankly, not been considered, apart from an occasional, informal chat here and there. We have to sit down and consider the matter from all aspects.

Plan to kidnap Advani, Jaswant & Omar revealed

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, January 20

INTERCEPTS OF conversations between various militant groups have revealed plans for kidnapping of at least three Cabinet Ministers. LK Advani, Jaswant Singh and Minister of State for External Affairs Omar Abdullah feature high on the threat list.

"All of them are hardliners and have been vocal about their stand against Pakistan sponsored terrorism... We got inputs that three groups of fidayeen have recently arrived in Kashmir from PoK and are planning to target these ministers," an official said.

The security cover for Advani and Jaswant has been upgraded while Omar's security has been totally revamped. Earlier, Delhi Police commandos would provide mobile cover to ministers. They have now been replaced by Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) commandos who will escort the motorcade.

The SPG was recently deployed to guard the Home Minister, taking his security level to that of the Prime Minister. Jaswant, who has Z category security cover, has also been given additional guards. The proposal to include him in the Z plus category is under consideration.

Sources said Delhi Police is finding it difficult to meet the sudden increase in demand for additional security cover for the VIPs in the Capital.

In the last month, the number of Protected Persons (PPs) has risen from 270 to 325 following the militant attack on Parliament. At present, around 28,000 policemen have been appointed to provide security to the 325 PPs, though the sanctioned strength of the security unit is only around 2,357.

Opposition marches to govt tune

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 13: Opposition parties in India echoed the government by reacting with cautious optimism to President Pervez Musharraf's speech.

The Opposition says Musharraf's offer for a dialogue should not be rejected outright but has urged the Vajpayee regime to resume talks on the basis of "credible action on the ground". Opposition parties also resented Musharraf's refusal to hand over the 20 terrorists wanted by India, saying if Musharraf takes a lead in handing over these militants it would amount to a confidence-building measure.

At a luncheon meeting with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Opposition leaders, who were given a thorough briefing on the government's assessment of Musharraf's speech, endorsed the Centre's wait-and-watch policy.

Leader of Opposition Sonia Gandhi acknowledged that the Pakistan President's speech had some "positive elements". Sonia, however, asserted that there was no scope for third-party intervention in the Indo-Pak conflict. Manmohan Singh added that both the countries should engage themselves in dialogue.

Sonia lauded Musharraf for promising firm action against terrorists and putting an end to cross-border terrorism but added that much will depend on how the Pakistani leader translates his intention into action. "The real taste of the pudding lies in the eating," Singh explained.

The Congress chief urged the government to be cautious as there has been no change in Pakistan's position vis-a-vis Kashmir so far. She said the Congress was not in favour of any third-party intervention as the Simla agreement provided enough



Manmohan Singh (left to right), Harkishen Singh Surjeet, CPI leader D. Raja and Sonia Gandhi after the all-party meeting. (AFP)

framework for resolving all outstanding disputes between the two countries.

Other Opposition leaders who attended the meeting, which lasted for more than an hour and a half, are CPM secretary general Harkishen Singh Surjeet, CPI leader D. Raja, Trinamul Member of Parliament Sudip Bandhopadhyay, Bahujan

Samaj Party chief Mayawati and RJD leader Raghuvansh Prasad Singh.

Surjeet described Musharraf's speech as "positive", pointing out that the Pakistani President had accepted many of the demands that India had made. "Many things that we have been demanding, he has accepted," Surjeet said. The Marxist leader

asserted that his party did not agree with Musharraf's call for any third-party intervention in resolving bilateral issues.

The CPM leader favoured the resumption of Indo-Pak dialogue "I hope the talks would resume. The government of India had never said no to such talks," Surjeet said. CPI leader D. Raja praised Musharraf for taking on

religious fundamentalists. "As far as religious extremism and terrorism are concerned, Musharraf's statements are quite positive," he said. On Kashmir, Raja said his party was of the firm view that India and Pakistan should engage themselves in a meaningful dialogue. Like Sonia and Surjeet, he too ruled out any third party mediation.

TEL TELEVISION

Cong. to join MPs' team: Govt.

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, JAN. 11. A forty-five minute meeting this evening between the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, sorted out the misunderstanding which had led to a stand-off between the Congress and the Government on the issue of MPs' delegation going abroad. The Government confirmed that the Congress leaders would now participate in this exercise.

Today's meeting between Mr. Vajpayee and Ms. Gandhi was held at the Prime Minister's invitation. Keen on limiting the damage to the effort to sustain a political consensus on the issue of cross-border terrorism, Mr. Vajpayee invited Ms. Gandhi for consultations. The Congress was reportedly upset that the Govern-

ment had not consulted it in advance while deciding the names of party leaders who were expected to travel abroad.

According to Government sources, Ms. Gandhi suggested during the meeting the names of some of her party leaders in response to the Government's request. The Congress maintains that it will make its position on the names cleared after internal consultations on Saturday. While the list is being given final shape, it is reliably learnt that senior Congress leader, Manmohan Singh, who was to have led one of the delegations, is unlikely to travel abroad, as he is required to campaign for the party during the coming Assembly elections. The Congress also confirmed that a meeting between the two leaders had taken place.

The change of heart on the part of the Congress came after the intervention of the Prime Minister. The party had stuck to its guns earlier in the day, and even though the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary, Brajesh Mishra, spoke to Dr. Manmohan Singh, it was apparently not enough to make the Congress change its mind. "Nothing has happened since yesterday to make us change our stand," said the party spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy.

The party had dismissed Mr. Brajesh Mishra's attempts to clear the misunderstanding as "purely an inquiry". What the party was miffed at is that apparently when Mr. Mishra spoke Dr. Manmohan Singh he did not "make any new proposals or offer any explanations about why the issue was handled the way it was".

THE HINDU

11 JAN 1999

Centre gets down to business brasstacks

Excise on oil products will be hiked; no war tax

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The Union cabinet which met on Tuesday took a slew of important decisions, including raising excise duty, tightening emission norms and extending the powers of the Lok Adalats.

In a move to check the government's burgeoning fiscal deficit during the current year, the government plans to issue an ordinance enabling it to raise excise duties on any commodity without any restrictions.

Announcing the cabinet decision, parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan on Tuesday said the ordinance was necessitated as presently there was a cap on raising excise duty beyond twice the rate on various items. Under current rules, the government can only increase duty on items with zero per cent duty by 50 per cent ad valorem and double the rate for other items.

Explaining the rationale behind the move, a senior official said the finance ministry would more than double the excise rates on petrol, diesel, kerosene and cooking gas without passing on the burden to the consumer through any hike in the retail prices of these products.

In an ingenious piece of financial engineering, the exercise will result in siphoning off the money from the oil pool account to the general exchequer without hurting consumers.

At present, there is an eight per cent excise on kerosene and cooking gas, 32 per cent (16 per cent Cenvat plus 16 per cent special excise duty) on petrol and 16 per cent duty on diesel. The exact new duty rates for these products are still to be determined, but the aim is to more than double the existing rates, the official said.

To effect this stiff hike in duty on petro-goods, the government has decided to arm itself with powers to raise excise duty through an ordinance amending the Central Excise Act that gives it emergency powers.

Amidst much speculation and rumour,

finance ministry officials denied that a war tax was being imposed through this substantial hike in excise rates.

In another major decision aimed at achieving the desired air quality in major cities of the country, the Union cabinet approved a new auto fuel policy based on the recommendations of an expert committee, headed by R.A. Mashelkar, director general of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research.

The measures include tightening vehicle emission laws by the implementation of Bharat Stage II, which is equivalent to Euro II norms. These norms for vehicles, current-

ly in force in the four metros, will be introduced in Bangalore, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad by the end of 2003 and in the entire country from April 1, 2005.

The equivalent of Euro-III emission norms for all categories of vehicles (excluding two- and three-wheelers) will be introduced in Delhi, Mumbai, Chennai, Kolkata, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Ahmedabad from April 1, 2004, and be extended to

other parts of the country from 2010, Mr Mahajan said. "The choice of fuel and vehicular technology will be left to the owners and operators of vehicles, with the government prescribing only the vehicular standards," he added.

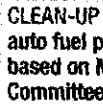
The Mashelkar Committee report has also recommended that the government should provide fiscal benefits to the domestic oil and auto industry as investments of up to Rs 35,000 crore and Rs 25,000 crore respectively would be required to be made by these sectors to upgrade facilities and technology to meet Euro-III emission norms.

The cabinet also decided to amend the Legal Services Authorities Act, 1987, and give more teeth to Lok Adalats—the alternate to courts—which have so far settled 1.34 crore cases.

PUMP-PRIMING



ADDING TO SINHA'S KITTY: Govt can hike excise duty on any item without curbs



CLEAN-UP ACT: New auto fuel policy will be based on Mashelkar Committee report



AND JUSTICE FOR ALL: Scope of Lok Adalats will extend to public utilities

TIME-OUT FOR REFORMS

IN A WAY, the Cabinet Committee on Reforms, under the chairmanship of the Prime Minister, A. B. Vajpayee, has its task cut out on more than one front. In addition to setting the tone for the reforms to come, its tasks include sending out important political and economic signals both within and outside the country. To begin with, the Committee reflects the Government's intention to continue with reforms and, in this context, the first meeting was also one of symbolism as it took place at the end of a year which saw a slackening in the pace of reforms. With the odds stacked against it on the legislative front, the going is bound to be tough for the Government to push across the more sensitive phase of reforms, especially those involving changes to the labour sector. In addition, with the nation rapidly overtaken by events and the collective attention now focussed on neighbourly relations, the lag in the economic agenda has not been taken serious note of. The transition towards the much-promised second-generation reforms has been marked by a hesitancy that the country can ill-afford.

One important task that the Committee should seriously address itself to is to resolve differences within the ruling coalition on the process of reforms in the years ahead. It will be in order if the Cabinet Committee recognises the factors that have been impeding reforms, as a starting point. One of the important hurdles to the reforms is also an inherent one: the federal nature of the Constitution, as a result of which, in crucial areas such as electricity, the Union Government can say a lot but do little directly. It is imperative that in the long-term interests of the nation, there is as little conflict between the Union and the States as possible in the move towards taking the reforms process ahead. At

the level of national politics, while there has been an overall understanding and recognition of the need for reforms, there have also been discordant voices. The Government, for its part, has also promised much. One instance is in the reforms related to the labour sector, where there is bound to be stiff opposition. Indeed, there is the need to proceed in this sensitive area with caution. Yet the reluctance to seize the bull by its horns should not send out the wrong signals.

Another important task that should engage the attention of policy-makers is to make a comprehensive evaluation of the reforms that have been brought in during the last decade, and their consequences. Such a task is imperative as it would serve the important purpose of carrying out a mid-course appraisal of the ability of the country's political leadership to meet the ideal of implementing reforms with a human face. This exercise, in addition to the industry-wise review of reforms, which is expected to engage the attention of the Committee, will only go to provide a firm basis on which the future of reforms can be planned in a meaningful manner. As a political body, the Cabinet Committee should also seek to arrive at an overarching consensus on reforms and aim at winning the confidence of the nation. Equally important will be its own ability to convince the various shades of political opinion that the larger interests of the country's economy will be well served by its decisions. Howsoever meaningful the Cabinet Committee on Reforms may sound, it is also vital that it guard itself against the temptation to transform itself into a body where difficult decisions are further delayed and trapped in procedural pitfalls. The crux of the Committee's agenda should be to take the reforms forward, not to delay it.

We may use any weapon against Pak: PM

HT Correspondent
Lucknow, December 2

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee sounded a stern warning to Pakistan here today, when he said India wouldn't hesitate to exercise all options against Islamabad if it didn't stop exporting terror across the border.

He shot down General Pervez Musharraf's demand that New Delhi should furnish evidence if action against terror outfits in his country.

Vajpayee said India wouldn't give up its right of self-defence and reserved the option to use any weapon, irrespective of the destruction it might bring to the enemy.

If the country has to fight a battle against terrorism, it would be a decisive one, the Prime Minister said. Several restrictions were imposed on India when it developed nuclear capability. "These failed to have any adverse impact on us. We have only emerged stronger."

"Uphone hamara hukka pani band kar aya. Hum apna atm raksha ka adhikar nahin chhodenge aur kisi bhi hathiyar ka istemal karenge. Yadi ismain koi mara jaye to hamari jimmadari nahin. (They imposed curbs on us. We won't give up our right to self-defence. We will use any weapon. Then, we shouldn't be held responsible if it results in

the country had fought three wars against Pakistan and had held every inch of its territory. In Kargil, Pakistan betrayed India by hatching a conspiracy when he was undertaking a bus journey to Lahore.

Atal to call meet on mayors: Vajpayee will soon call a meeting of all Chief Ministers to discuss ways to confer more financial and administrative powers to Mayors so that they discharge their duties more effectively.

Vajpayee, who was inaugurating the 37th All India Conference of Mayors, said the Chief Ministers of all States would ponder over how to confer more financial and administrative powers to Mayors and help them discharge their duties. He said the real purpose of the 74th amendment to the Constitution was decentralisation of powers to urban and rural bodies.

The Prime Minister reached Lucknow at 2.30 pm, three hours behind schedule, as heavy fog in Delhi had delayed the departure of his plane. Vajpayee admitted that he had been ignorant about the problems faced by Mayors till Indore Mayor and Chairman of the All India Council of Mayors, Kailash Vijavargiya, brought them to his notice.

Vajpayee suggested that a uniform pattern would have to be evolved for the election of Mayors in all States.

massive loss of lives," he said. He indicated that India was keeping the option of using the nuclear option open.

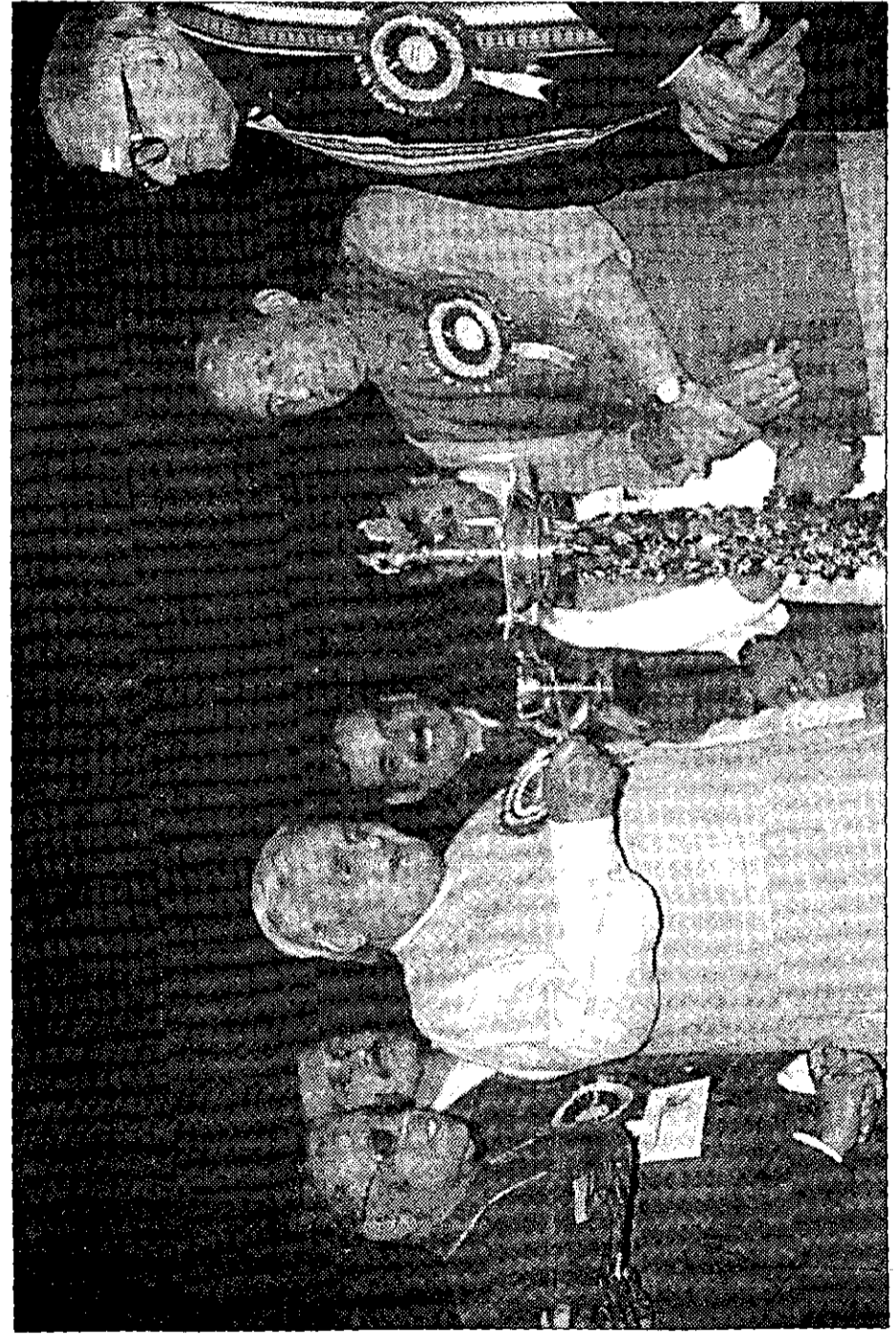
Vajpayee, who arrived here on a two-day visit, will leave for Kathmandu on Thursday to take part in the Saarc summit. Inaugurating the 17th Arya Maha Sammelan, he said: *"Hum shanti ke puari hain, par hum dhanushdhar bhi hain"* (We are peace-loving people. But we can take up weapons if needed).

Rejecting Pakistan's demand for furnishing evidence, Vajpayee said there was no justification in it. The bullet marks on the walls of Parliament House and the bodies of the terrorists killed were proof enough. The international community, he added, was exerting tremendous pressure on Pakistan and India's stand had got world support.

Referring to a phone call from the Libyan leader, Col Gaddafi, he said world leaders favoured unity between the two countries. "We don't mind uniting the two countries. But other world leaders too must be consulted on this," he said.

Pakistan, he added, was an exporter of terror and had propped up the Taliban in Afghanistan. It had created trouble in Jammu and Kashmir. Today, it has done so elsewhere.

Calling upon the people to get ready for any eventuality, he said



Chief Minister Rajnath Singh looks on as Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee lights a lamp at the inauguration of the 37th All India Conference of Mayors in Lucknow on Wednesday.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 4, 2002

 HD-10
STRIDENCY FOR THE HUSTINGS

THE BELLICOSE TENOR of the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's speech laced heavily with jingoistic flourishes at Lucknow on Wednesday is in sharp contrast to the sense of sobriety and reasonableness that seemed to reflect in his 'reflections' on New Year Day. In fact, the general message he has sought to convey goes against the grain of the declared preference of New Delhi for a diplomatic approach to the externally-sourced terrorist challenge, post-December 13 outrage on Parliament House. At the core of the stated approach had been a wholesome emphasis on the diplomatic route — bilateral as well as global, taking full advantage of the favourable international climate prevailing in the wake of the current U.S.-led anti-terror campaign — rather than on any military response. At Lucknow, on the other hand, Mr. Vajpayee, in a manner befitting more a rabble-rousing politician, has spoken in terms that are associated with a state of war. Almost in the same breath as making a reference to India going ahead with the nuclear tests in the face of stiff international opposition and sanctions, the Prime Minister declared that "no weapon" would be spared in "self-defence". And, for good measure, he also reportedly said that it was time that India gave a "reply" to Pakistan. Such hawkish rhetoric, apart from undermining as it does the basic objective of sensitising the peoples of both India and Pakistan to the menace of terrorism — one of the aims Mr. Vajpayee would appear to have set before himself while penning his 'reflections' — does not exactly square with the sort of statesmanship required at the present critical juncture, both on the Indo-Pakistan and the international fronts.

In a way, however, what Mr. Vajpayee has chosen to do is a part of the game his party, the BJP, has been an adept in playing, namely the politics of jingoism for electoral mobilisation.

Not long ago, the 'victory' in the Kargil war was successfully utilised by the BJP, and by extension the coalition it heads (the NDA), in the 1999 Lok Sabha elections. And now, with the Assembly polls just a few weeks away in four States, including the politically crucial Uttar Pradesh, the BJP — aided by its partners in the coalition — seems all set to play it again, this time making cynical use of the 'anti-terrorism' card. Witness the doggedness with which the Vajpayee regime sought to get Parliament to endorse the draconian anti-terrorism legislation (POTO) and its orchestrated attempt to equate support to POTO with patriotism. Even in the post-December 13 context, which showed up the involvement of Pakistan-based Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammad in the fidayeen attack on Parliament House, there seems to be a calculated attempt to play down or belittle Islamabad's significant moves on the ground directed at curbing these elements, by dismissing these gestures as 'farfical' or 'cosmetic', made under pressure from the U.S.

What needs to be realised is that warmongering, particularly of the type inspired by narrowly partisan and exclusivist considerations — as the one indulged in by the BJP and its cousins in the Sangh Parivar — will only be counter-productive for the reason that it will render it much more difficult for General Musharraf to act firmly against powerful Islamist groups that sponsor terrorism in India, for any such action will be seen as a capitulation to New Delhi. In the domestic context, such a blatant appeal to national chauvinism will amount to breaching the national consensus that the Vajpayee administration has been able to obtain for its anti-terrorism efforts and will inevitably have the effect of fracturing the unity forged across the political spectrum on this count.

THE HINDU