

BE SELF-CRITICAL CONG. CMs TOLD

NDA Govt. a failure, says Sonia

By Anita Joshua

MT. ABU (RAJASTHAN), NOV. 8. Focussed clearly on the Gujarat elections and the nine States going to the polls thereafter, the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, today urged the Congress Chief Ministers — 14 of them — to give a “collective momentum” to the implementation of welfare programmes to consolidate the party’s hold in the Congress-ruled States, and oust the BJP and its regional allies elsewhere during the run-up to the national elections.

Inaugurating the fourth Congress Chief Ministers’ conclave here this morning, she said the party had to fulfil the expectations of a nation that was “looking at us to take the country from stagnation to growth, from strife to harmony, and from darkness to light”.

Given the “comprehensive failure” of the BJP-led coalition at the Centre, she said the people expected the Congress to provide a “Government that will govern, and lead an administration that will administer”.

‘Reject politics of hate’

Though Ms. Gandhi mainly dwelt on administrative issues — a review of the performance of Congress-ruled States being the “primary agenda” of such conclaves — she said economic success could be sustained only if “bigotry is defeated”, a clear reference to Gujarat.

Confident that the people of Gujarat would “reject the politics of hate, violence and communal polarisation”, she said her party would fight the “forces which will stoop to any level in word and deed to spread poison and inflame society” with the message of “religious tolerance and understanding, social reconcil-

iation and amity”. Setting the tone and tenor for the two-day meeting, Ms. Gandhi asked the Chief Ministers to be more “self-critical and introspective than we usually are at such meetings” while reviewing the implementation of the Guwahati resolve.

“We are not here to exaggerate our achievements nor have we come to find fault with ourselves,” she said arguing that identification of shortcomings was part of effective action.

She spoke about gender sensitisation, local self-government, fiscal discipline, power reforms and revenue collection.

On the gender issue, she said she attached a great deal of importance to the action plan drawn up at the recent Mahila Sashaktikaran Adhiveshan in Delhi.

Also, more needed to be done to bring about a visible and tangible improvement in the lives of the Dalits, Adivasis, religious minorities, and backward classes.

She made known her sense of disquiet at the “progressive weakening of the Centre” while reiterating her party’s commitment to the decentralisation of governance. “India needs a strong Centre, strong States, and



The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, arriving for the party Chief Ministers’ meeting in Mount Abu on Friday. — Photo: Gopal Sungar

strong panchayats and nagarpalikas; all supporting and deriving strength from each other.”

Acknowledging the fiscal problem facing most States, her advise to the Congress-ruled States — all of which have embarked upon the “very ambitious” programme of introducing “far-reaching reforms” in the power sector — was to provide reliable power at affordable rates to all.

And the “benefits from these reforms must be demonstratively visible to the people within a reasonable period of time”.

On the “politically contentious” issue of restructuring public expenditure, while asking the Chief Ministers to persist with this exercise, Ms. Gandhi stressed the need to give it a strong and visible pro-poor orientation.

Quoting experts, she said revenue collection could be increased at existing tax rates by making the tax collection machinery more efficient.

Complete with power-point presentations, her speech called for a purposeful discussion. Later, the Chief Ministers presented their report cards that could well decide the future of the Congress at the hustings in the not-so-distant future.

Stock-taking : Page 11

SET YOUR HOUSE IN ORDER: BJP

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, NOV. 8. The Bharatiya Janata Party today responded to the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi’s attack on the National Democratic Alliance with the advice that she should focus on getting her Chief Ministers to deliver good governance in their States rather than indulge in rhetoric about the Vajpayee Government.

“Ms. Gandhi should have utilised the Congress Chief Ministers’ conclave to take stock of their performance,” the BJP spokesperson, Arun Jaitley, said.

He also listed what was wrong in several Congress-ruled States. He said that in Rajas-

than, the Congress should focus on starvation deaths, in Madhya Pradesh, Ms. Gandhi should find out why development was at a standstill and starvation deaths were being reported, in Karnataka, the Chief Minister had cut a sorry figure before the Supreme Court and his own people (on the Cauvery waters issue), in Maharashtra, its Government was “barely surviving” and was full of inner contradictions, and in Jammu and Kashmir, the Congress-PDP alliance had started its term with contradictions, Mr. Jaitley said.

His said Ms. Gandhi should “pull up her Chief Ministers rather than indulge in empty rhetoric against the NDA Government.”

THE HINDU

9 NOV 2003

Samata fans embers of divestment debate

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Nov. 6: Before Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee holds his planned meeting on divestment next week, the controversy was rekindled with coalition partner Samata Party attacking the policy and the BJP rising in defence.

The Samata today demanded a mid-term evaluation of economic policies and privatisation. Defence minister George Fernandes, who had earlier stalled divestment in two petroleum companies, fielded party spokesman Shambu Shrivastwa to voice some uncomfortable questions for the government.

BJP spokesman Arun Jaitley, who has been a minister for disinvestment earlier, defended the policy, saying that it was dictated by market forces and neither the Samata nor his own could control them.

"There is no better transparency than allowing market forces to bid," he said in reference to the auction of government stake in public sector units.

Samata's charge: The government violated its own guidelines on divestment by allowing corporate houses, involved in litigation linked to national security, to bid. Shrivastwa cited the strategic sale of IPCL to Reliance, whose top officials have been charged with violating the Official Secrets Act. Cabinet documents, with implications for national security, were recovered from the Reliance officials, he said.

BJP's answer: The government has already taken a view after obtaining legal advice and the party has nothing more to add. A senior BJP leader said no business house would be able to bid if such objections were raised. The Tatas have been accused of paying the Ulfa, the Hinduja's are in the dock over the Bofors payoff.

"By disqualifying all top Indian business houses, you cannot divest," he said.

Samata: Where is the profit from divestment going? It should have gone to the social sector. But the government has not given any account of how much money was allocated for

the social sector. Profits from selloff "should not be used for covering the fiscal deficit caused by vulgar spending", said Shrivastwa.

BJP: The profit is used in the social sector, like health, education and rural development. The entire collection from divestment goes to the Consolidated Fund of India.

Samata: In February, Mumbai's Centaur hotel was sold for Rs 83 crore to Batra Hospitality which resold it within six months to the Sahara group for Rs 115 crore, earning a profit of Rs 32 crore.

BJP: The government has no control over market forces and subsequent increase or decrease of the value of a company's stock. Sometimes a buyer has a particular interest in a particular property to bring his business activities into harmony. There was no wrongdoing in the sale of Centaur.

Vajpayee had convened a meeting on divestment on November 3, a day before he left for Cambodia, but it was cancelled without assigning any reason.

Minister for early decision on oil PSUs

9 P.P.
NDA
7-1
6/10

Atal outburst mellows George

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Oct. 5: Atal Bihari Vajpayee's straight-from-the-shoulder address on economic reform and divestment appears to have chastened defence minister George Fernandes.

Three days after he went into a huddle with Union ministers Murli Manohar Joshi and Ram Naik — both opposed to the sale of state-owned oil companies to a strategic investor — Fernandes today demanded a speedy resolution of the HPCL and BPCL divestment issue.

"There is no justification for putting it off for three months. We should take a decision as early as possible in the next few weeks," he said, briefing the press for the first time after the differences burst into the open. The Cabinet Committee on Disinvestment had put off a decision on the issue in September.

Fernandes was at pains to dispel the impression that he was "anti-disinvestment". "What I have raised over the past two to two-and-a-half years is that whatever work (on disinvestment) has taken place should be analysed to see if any course correction is required and it should be undertaken," he said. He stressed that he had only voiced his concern.

Sources close to Fernandes said he was open to two "compromise" formulae: one, strategic

sale of one of the two PSUs and public disbursal of shares in the other; and two, allowing ONGC and the Gas Authority of India Limited to participate in bidding, "preferably" as equal partners to private players, Indian or foreign.

The second formula was worked out by BJP general secretary Arun Jaitley and disinvestment minister Arun Shourie.

Jaitley called on Fernandes a day after the much-publicised meeting with Naik and Joshi. While Fernandes was non-committal and said that "I keep talking to Jaitley and this issue also we talked about", BJP sources said there was reason to believe that the defence minister was taking a "reasonable" position.

Sources close to Fernandes said: "Allowing ONGC and GAIL to bid, preferably as equal partners along with private firms, would be the most feasible solution. It will allay the fears expressed about national security and about public monopolies being replaced by private monopolies."

Fernandes also downplayed his meeting with Joshi and Naik, terming it "routine". "This meeting was nothing special. We (Joshi and I) have breakfast together at least once a month and discuss a whole lot of issues, including political and economic. It was one of those meetings."

BJP sources said the compro-

mise formulae were acceptable to those in the party who had expressed similar concerns of security and private cartelisation.

Joshi, too, was at pains to dispel the feeling that he would reveal his swadeshi face again after backing FDI at a recent Cabinet meeting, sources said. He reportedly advised Naik not to take his "battle" to the Opposition camp but involve the Congress and the CPM. Naik had said last Wednesday that he had spoken to Congress leaders Priya Ranjan Das Munshi and Shivraj Patil on the sale of oil PSUs.

Even Union ministers, who attended the October 2 RSS function at which *sarsanghchalak* K.S. Sudarshan lashed out at the "votaries of foreign economy", have suddenly distanced themselves from his views and were keen to emphasise that they were pro-reform.

A minister of state from the east said: "When was the BJP or, for that matter, the RSS ever anti-reform? In the heyday of Congress socialism, the RSS and the Jan Sangh alone spoke up for a licence and permit-free economic system. That stand holds today. Sudarshan's only plea was against the unchecked flow of FDI."

With Fernandes coming around, BJP sources are confident that tackling Joshi and Naik and the swadeshi wing of the parivar will be "much easier". "This is all within the family," they said.

Top corporate houses named for the first time in missive to Prime Minister

Letter war on selloff in Atal team

JAYANTA ROY CHOWDHURY

New Delhi, Oct. 4: The war over disinvestment within the Atal Bihari Vajpayee Cabinet has taken an explosive turn with a new theatre of conflict—letters between ministers—opening up.

Documents with **The Telegraph** reveal that defence minister George Fernandes in a letter to the Prime Minister had warned that the policy of selling state-owned companies to a strategic investor could spell political disaster, arguing that “the message going out to the people is that our government is selling away the nation’s wealth... This will hurt us politically”.

The letter was passed on to disinvestment minister Arun Shourie, who was asked to explain his stand succinctly to the Prime Minister. Shourie, a professional journalist, turned politician, wrote back a crisp reply in the form of a note which is now with the Prime Minister.

Fernandes had said “most people do not realise the government is only a proxy shareholder in PSUs and it is the money of the people that has created these businesses. Our disinvestment policy should, therefore, be to offer these companies

to the public.”

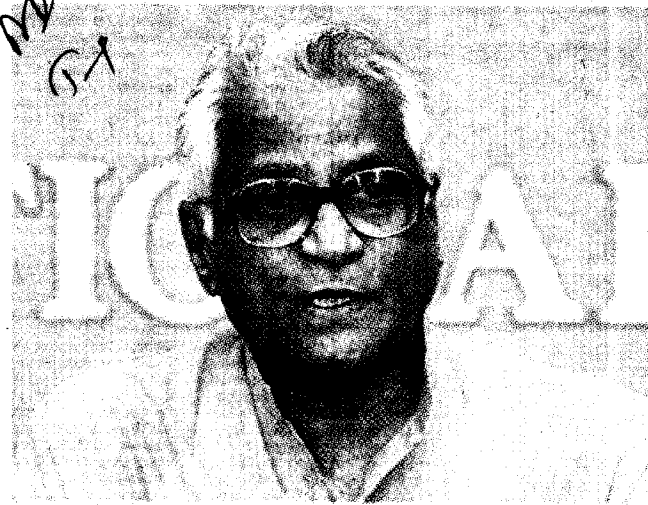
Significantly, he added that the current system of strategic sales tantamounts to “handing over entities created with the wealth of the people to further enrich the already rich”.

The socialist-turned-BJP supporter said, with the selloff of VSNL and Indian Petrochemicals Ltd, “we have created monopolies with Tatas and Reliance. Cases of richer becoming richest with people’s money”.

This is the first time that the names of the country’s two largest corporate houses have been spelt out, though there has been a lot of speculation that some elements within the BJP-led government have been openly hostile to the idea of allowing the large private companies to acquire the state-owned enterprises.

The letter has obviously been written keeping in view the political dynamics of the coming Assembly elections and the general elections slated for 2004-2005 and the National Democratic Alliance’s need to respond to public sentiment against the fast pace of reforms that were being ushered in by the Vajpayee Cabinet.

Fernandes had joined forces with petroleum minister Ram Naik and human resources development minister Murli



FERNANDES

- We in the government should decide whether the route adopted by us is benefiting citizens. The current system of strategic sales tantamounts to handing over people’s entities to enrich the already rich
- I understand the entire privatisation in UK was to the public at large through stock offering (not strategic sales)
- In the transfer of VSNL and IPCL we have created monopolies with Tatas and Reliance. Is this good for Indian consumers?
- The issue of concern is that even in strategic sales, PSUs will not be allowed to bid
- The standing committee on petroleum has taken a stand against this kind of divestment
- The message going to people is that the government is selling the nation’s wealth... this will hurt us politically in more ways than one

Manohar Joshi at a Cabinet meeting some time ago to torpedo moves to sell off two oil marketing companies. He has been holding meetings with Cabinet colleagues since then to underline his stand against indiscriminate disinvestment.

Shourie, in a cleverly drafted reply, has argued that if shares were sold in the market, the corporates with the largest war che-

MINISTER VERSUS MINISTER

SHOURIE

- If shares are sold in the market, there would be creeping acquisition. Business houses will gain and taxpayers lose
- The depth of the Indian share market is limited unlike the UK and US
- VSNL under Tatas is not a monopoly. It has three competitors. Sale of BPCL, HPCL would enhance competition
- If PSUs are allowed to bid, it would not bring in any change in management
- Punjab, Madhya Pradesh, Andhra Pradesh, Bengal have adopted the Central divestment model. It shows different political parties have accepted strategic sale
- Strategic sale has increased wealth by making companies more productive



sts would start cornering the stock on the market as had been done in the case of BSES and L&T. “The business houses will gain and tax payers lose,” he said.

Shourie also argued that Indian bourses did not have the depth to buy up the huge quantities of PSU shares that would be offloaded in the market if this advice was followed. “We experienced the inability of the stock

market to lift Gas Authority of India Ltd stocks (when) the Cabinet decided to sell 200 million shares of the company.”

Fernandes, on the other hand, said the entire privatisation programme in the UK was “to the public at large”. The airlines, steel industry, telecom, automobile and gas and petroleum sectors were privatised by making offerings through the stock

markets. “Likewise, I believe, the privatisation of the same sectors in France, including the banking and oil sectors, were to the French public and not through strategic sales. Malaysia, China, South Africa, Spain and Germany have followed suit.”

This is a charge that Shourie, considered a great proponent of free market economics, must have had problems in answering.

Sangh joins George to halt sell-off

Statesman News Service & PTI

NEW DELHI, Oct. 2. — NDA and Sangh Parivar leaders today sounded each other out on the fate of the disinvestment programme.

There seemed to be no reconciliation — Mr Arun Shourie remained at odds with the ministers opposing privatisation of oil PSUs. The RSS added its influence to the anti-reform lobby, calling liberalisers "Macaulay putras".

The Prime Minister, apparently to present a unified line, told a TV channel that divestment had not been buried, though it should be reviewed.

The anti-disinvestment cabal — Dr Murlu Manohar Joshi, Mr George Fernandes and Mr Ram Naik — today indicated privatisation of oil PSUs was off the agenda, because of the units' "strategic importance". Mr Joshi has

met Congress leaders Mr Shivraj Patil and Mr PR Das Munshi and CPI-M leader Mr Somnath Chatterjee. The three ministers want the oil sector to be on the strategic list that includes railways and atomic energy. It's wrong to presume that "we are against dis-

The RSS brands pro-reform lobby 'Macaulay putras'

vestment", Mr Naik said. "We are discussing the route to be followed."

Mr Shourie, say agencies, doesn't agree that there's another route to privatisation except strategic sales. The government has lost thousands of crores of rupees because of the delay in the divestment process. Even if HPCL and

BPCL shares are sold to the public now, there would hardly be any takers. "It's now up to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani to take a decision."

The market value of the two firms' shares has fallen substantially. Their total value now is Rs 11,000 crore against Rs 16,700 crore on 6 September, a day before the Cabinet Committee on Disinvestment deferred the process by 90 days.

The RSS chief reportedly supported the Joshi group. Mr K Sudershan hit out at the Planning Commission's "liberalisers", who he said were advocating foreign direct investment policies that "were contrary to national interests".

Mr NK Singh, formerly of the PMO, now in the Planning Commission, and never a favourite of the RSS, was the author of the report that recommended hiking FDI ceilings in civil aviation, telecom and insurance sectors.

Divestment on, but wash linen in private: PM

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Disinvestment is on. Maybe, with a little course correction. Differences on the issue are fine as long as there is no public posturing by ministers and these are sorted out behind closed doors.

That was the message Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee gave on Wednesday evening, hours after cracks in the government on the issue came out in the open.

If Mr Vajpayee's message echoed his deputy L.K. Advani's advice to his colleagues at the cabinet committee on disinvestment meeting last month that decided to defer the sell-offs in oil PSUs, HPCL and BPCL, it was not without reason. Both leaders had a one-on-one meeting before Mr Vajpayee aired his views at a function at his home on Wednesday evening.

"Disinvestment is our chosen path. Differences and debate on any issue are natural. There is nothing wrong in holding conclaves also. But there should be no public posturing," Mr Vajpayee said.

The PM's ire is understandable as he has been caught in the sell-off cross-fire. Disinvestment minister Arun Shourie had deflected the heat by saying it was for the PM and the deputy PM to decide on the issue. His statement came after cabinet heavyweights—oil minister Ram Naik, HRD minister Murl Manohar Joshi and defence minister George Fernandes—met in the morning over tea to stir up opposition to strategic sales.

Mr Vajpayee also took a potshot at the RSS for opposing strategic sale. "An anti-reforms atmosphere is being created in the country. People are spreading disinformation on disinvestment without knowing the facts. Disinvestment is not selling out the country," he said.

The PM said labour inter-

ests needed to be taken care of but there was no other way but to divest. "What do you do if some PSUs are piling up losses?" he said, adding that the government could not afford to keep paying the salaries.

This was a point perhaps Mr Naik had tried to make earlier in the day. "The issue is whether to first sell those PSUs that are a burden on the government or those that are professionally-run and make profit," he said.

"We are not against disinvestment, but want the modalities to be re-examined," he said, declining to give any more details of his discussion with Mr Fernandes and Mr Joshi.

On the loss of market cap by oil PSUs, Mr Naik said disinvestment should not be linked to market speculation. "If the share prices have declined, why did they shoot up? Obviously there were a lot of speculation."

Dump new economic policy, says RSS

New Delhi: Continuing with its offensive against the government's economic policies, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh has demanded immediate removal of people at the helm of affairs who support the Western model of development for the country, including free inflow of foreign direct investment (FDI).

Without directly naming the BJP-led government, RSS chief K.S. Sudarshan said that the economic policies being pursued "at the behest of WTO and IMF" were "urban-based, high energy consumptive, capital insensitive, labour displacing and ecologically destructive." PTI

Trinamul's ER stir fuels quit-NDA fire

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Oct. 1. — The Trinamul organised demonstrations at Esplanade and in front of the ER headquarters this morning protesting against the ER division which took effect from today. Miss Mamata Banerjee stayed away but prominent party leaders and MLAs were there at the demonstrations.

The agitation has added fillip to the speculation that Miss Banerjee wants to distance herself from the NDA top brass. But Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay Mr Bikram Sarkar and Mr Dinesh Trivedi are clearly against any move to quit the NDA.

Mr Bandopadhyay, in fact, has been quite critical of Miss Banerjee's move to organise an agitation with the JMM on the ER division and her decision to go in for an electoral alliance with JMM in

Jharkhand. The Trinamul trio's rigid stand may lead to a stormy working committee after the Pujas.

Miss Banerjee reportedly is worried at Mr Bandopadhyay's stand, particularly the manner in which he had spoken out against the Trinamul chief's moves.

Despite having differences with Miss Banerjee on the issue of severing ties with the NDA, Mr Pankaj Banerjee and Mr Saugata Roy toed her line at today's demonstration. They were extremely critical of the Centre on the ER division.

No deal with the BJP: Anil KOLKATA, Oct. 1. — The CPI-M has no tacit understanding with the BJP, nor did it soft-pedal the Eastern Railway division issue to get Rs 900 crore from the Centre, Mr Anil Biswas, state secretary, said today, SNS adds.

Miss Mamata Banerjee yesterday said the CPI-M had a pact with the BJP that it would make much noise about the ER division. This, in exchange for generous central funds. Mr Biswas said: "People know which party has overt and covert understanding with the BJP. We do what we say and that's why we have been running the state government for the past 25 years."

The LF held demonstrations at seven places in protest against the bifurcation. Mr Biswas said his party had repeatedly made it clear that as long as the NDA government remains in power, the bifurcation can't be stalled. But, once a new government is in place, the LF will get an expert committee set up and scarp the bifurcation.

Protests at ER HQ

There were protests at the Eastern

Railway headquarters at Fairlie Place, SNS adds. The Eastern Railwaymen's Union held a protest meeting within the headquarters' premises during the recess. About 200 employees shouted slogans and protested against the move which, they said, would lead to "redundancy and surplus of employees".

ER AGM Mr BM Lal said: "For the moment, we are only transferring officers who have opted for it." Another official said: "The division is happening, we've all resigned ourselves to it. Some have started shifting, many are still trying to get the transfer orders cancelled."

At Koilaghat Street, a railway staff said: "The ER division means less scope for promotion in Kolkata." Mr Manoj Dhar Choudhury, ERU Kolkata branch secretary, said: "Out of a total combined strength of 14,000 personnel at the

Eastern and North Eastern Railway headquarters, 6,000 posts have been identified as ones to be shifted to the East Central Railway. The requirement there's no more than 1,500 posts. As a result, about 500 employees have become redundant. They are now serving super-numerary posts which will be abolished after their service period."

"Only 272 employees have opted for transfer. Authorities have cleared only 85 transfer orders."

SC defers plea on ER

The hearing of a PIL against the ER division in the Supreme Court has been deferred to 11 October, Mr Debi Pal, former Congress MP and finance minister, said. The hearing was scheduled for 4 October. The public interest litigation PIL was filed by Mr Pal, SNS adds.

NDA woos Mamata back

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, Sept. 7. — Mr Pramod Mahajan said today that one cannot dislodge the ruling Left front in the state without help from Miss Mamata Banerjee. The Union parliamentary affairs minister also said the NDA is not a "rigid membership" platform and Trinamul should come back to its fold as soon as possible.

"We cannot dream of throwing out the Left Front without Mamataji's support. That would be unwise. We want Trinamul back into the NDA, lock, stock and barrel", Mr Mahajan said.

Miss Banerjee had warned Trinamul leaders against maintaining truck with the NDA in Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay's presence. Upset over Mr Mahajan's visit to Mr Bandopadhyay's place, she is learnt to have convened a parliamentary party

meeting on 10 September. Her comment on the visit was: "It's a personal matter. Trinamul has nothing to do with it."

Mr Mahajan said: "The NDA has a revolving door. She came back to the NDA but decided to leave. She might have had problems. But we cannot lose sight of West Bengal, Trinamul and Mamataji's individual status. She is the principal force in Bengal."

Asked about his visit to Mr Bandopadhyay's residence, the Union communications minister said that Mr Bandopadhyay had invited him for dinner. "Sudip is a great friend of mine. We have been in Parliament for several years. Along with Mamataji, Sudip is also a force to reckon with. We cannot ignore him", Mr Mahajan said. Incidentally, Mr Arjun Jaitley is expected to visit Mr Bandopadhyay's place tomorrow.

Asked whether he has plans to

Rethink on ER division

KOLKATA, Sept. 7. — In a reiteration of her earlier views on the matter, Miss Mamata Banerjee said she would not support the NDA until the ER (East River) issue is resolved, Mrs Sushma Swaraj, L&B minister, said the NDA is still considering Miss Banerjee's demands and trying to reach an amicable solution.

"The Centre has a universal policy for all states. There is no reason why Bengal would be isolated. Miss Banerjee must have a point that is ailing her, but we too have our own set of obligations," she said. — SNS

Miss Banerjee's residence, he said: "If invited, I will."

Mr Mahajan made it clear that

his visit to Mr Bandopadhyay's place was not aimed at disintegrating the Trinamul. "I haven't come to Sudip's place...to shift his loyalty from Miss Banerjee to the BJP. I want the entire Trinamul Congress software technology park to come back to Delhi," the minister said.

Citing "personal relations" with Trinamul leaders, the minister said that Mr Dinesh Trivedi has invited him for dinner while Mr Nitish Sengupta has sought an audience.

BJP president Mr Venkaiah Naidu today echoed Mr Mahajan's words which were opposed by Mr Tapan Sikdar. "We want unity with Trinamul, as we want to fight the Marxists' misrule in West Bengal, but they must not remain confined to the railway division," he said in the morning at a meeting of district level leaders from West Bengal,

Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa. Mr Naidu added: "We have the strength to go it alone."

But at a workers' convention, Mr Sikdar said the BJP central leadership should not show any "unnecessary" weakness towards Miss Banerjee. She had tried to destroy the state BJP before the last Assembly polls, he claimed. He said the fight against the Left Front would suffer only a "temporary setback" in absence of an alliance between the BJP and Trinamul.

Mr Naidu, Mr Mahajan, Mrs Sushma Swaraj, Mr Shah Nawaz Hussain and Mr Satyabrata Mukherjee were among the BJP leaders present at the convention. Rebel Trinamul MP Mr Ajit Panja was also there.

Mr Sikdar today clarified the BJP was not against the Trinamul but was opposed to Miss Banerjee's leadership of the party.

Time to review policies, Fernandes tells Centre

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 1. The newly-elected leader of the Samata Party, George Fernandes, fired a salvo at the National Democratic Alliance Government today, when he stated his objection to its disinvestment policy and reiterated that it was time the Government "reviewed" its policies and programmes and, if necessary, resorted to a "mid-course correction."

The Defence Minister, who was re-elected the Samata Party president after two years at the party's day-long national executive here, said that he had demanded a thorough discussion on the disinvestment policy — and not on any 'particular phase' of disinvestment — amid reports that in a letter to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, he had raised questions on diluting the Government equity in public sector undertakings, especially the petroleum sector.

However, it seemed that Mr. Fernandes had not been able to convince all the members of his party on the issue. Murmurs of discontent were heard (outside the meeting) on the Samata Party's approach to the NDA Government.

Earlier, Mr. Fernandes charged that those who had made public the contents of his letter to Mr. Vajpayee had used "a lie." Denying that he had sought his inclusion in the Cabinet Committee on Disinvestment or that he had threatened to resign from the Cabinet owing to "differences" over the policy, he said he had not opposed the disinvestment of the PSUs on the grounds of strategic or defence interests.

"Whosoever floated (the above) used a lie for

whatever purpose he or she might have had... these are motivated..." Mr. Fernandes told a press conference after his election.

He had asked the Prime Minister to convene a meeting of a small group of Ministers in which he could place his party's view on disinvestment, which was against allowing the private sector to acquire a monopoly status. Mr. Fernandes said that the report of the Disinvestment Commission, headed by G.V. Ramakrishna, should be the "road-map" for the Vajpayee Government.

He also suggested that India draw lessons from Britain where almost a decade after privatising railways, the nation had re-nationalised it as private enterprise had become bankrupt. Privatisation of the British power sector was also following a similar course, he said.

On the domestic front, Mr. Fernandes said the Indian Tourism Development Corporation, which has a chain of hotels, should not allow its prime locations to be sold for a song. Property acquired through taxpayers' money should not be sold to enable someone in the private sector to make a "huge profit."

He had raised the issue with Mr. Vajpayee, the Minister said, adding that "it is never too late" to focus on the disinvestment policy again. The Samata had suggested a review of the policies and programmes of the Vajpayee Government at the Vijayawada national council in June this year. "The time has obviously come for a serious evaluation of the implementation of the NDA's policies and programmes and to go for a mid-course correction if necessary," the party resolution had said.

Who's in charge?

Thackeray has exposed the fragility of the
NDA coalition very effectively

IF you had any doubts over just how open to blackmail the NDA coalition is, Shiv Sena supremo Bal Thackeray has proved it beyond doubt. Not only has he got one of the more pro-reforms ministers in the Vajpayee's cabinet to resign, he has even decided who his successor is to be. The Shiv Sena nominee, Anant Geethe, a minister of state in the finance ministry, is to be upgraded to Cabinet rank, and replace Suresh Prabhu. And since there is obviously a quota of ministries reserved for each ally, another Shiv Sena candidate is to be nominated by Thackeray for Geethe's finance ministry job. That the top contender for this job, at least from all indications so far, is the younger brother of the Videocon group chief makes it even more unacceptable as there is a serious conflict of interest here. Videocon borrows money from banks and financial institutions, so surely a close family member cannot be allowed to lord it over these very banks and financial institutions?

The one signal that emerges from these developments is that Prime Minister Vajpayee clearly has no say in the selection of his cabinet colleagues — a signal that has extremely disturbing implications for the citizens of this country. What makes the situation even more untenable are the reasons for Thackeray's displeasure over Prabhu's minis-

terial performance. While the world is still largely clueless about why he chose to react to Prabhu in the way he did, there are suggestions that Prabhu was not exactly helpful when it came to asking industrialists for favours. In the case of the other Shiv Sena minister, Manohar Joshi, it is well known by now that Thackeray had him removed from the ministry of heavy industries and public enterprises because he was unable to ensure auto giant Maruti Udyog got sold off to a particular industrial house. Poor Joshi was so terrified of Thackeray, he even took the Maruti-sale file to Mumbai and left it there, in the hope that this would delay the Suzuki deal. Indeed, in interviews with the media, Thackeray had dropped enough hints as to the real reasons for his displeasure with his party's ministers in the Vajpayee government.

This newspaper has already highlighted the rampant corruption in the government's allotment of both petrol pumps and prime land in Delhi to a favoured few. News that cabinet ministers are now to be removed for their inability to get the corporate world to render favours, only contributes in creating an unsavoury image of the NDA government and its principal political party, the BJP. Certainly, the party with a difference isn't looking that great right just now.

THURSDAY, AUGUST 15, 2002

119-10
A CRISIS OF HER OWN MAKING 15/8
S.P.P.-NDA

TRINAMOOL CONGRESS and its chief, Mamata Banerjee, seem to have landed in a blind alley and in a state of splendid isolation. This was reflected so clearly in the laboured attempt by Ms. Banerjee to explain the party's relationship with the ruling NDA. Ms. Banerjee's choice of words, that the Trinamool Congress would not be a "part and parcel" of the NDA as long as "the issue of the Railway bifurcation is not sorted out to its satisfaction", was qualitatively different from her usually forthright manner of putting things. The Trinamool Congress chief is certainly not known for speaking in such a convoluted fashion and the fact that she chose to do so this time reflects her own dilemma. Ms. Banerjee is no longer in a position to ensure that everyone in the Trinamool Congress follows her line. The party is no longer what it was when Ajit Panja registered his dissent (and was marginalised within) a few months ago. That Ms. Banerjee is now unable to carry conviction even within her own party is clear from the reports about an influential section in the Working Committee having opposed her idea to walk out of the NDA once and for all. Ms. Banerjee herself is responsible for this state.

While the very formation of the Trinamool Congress was guided by Ms. Banerjee's own agenda to place herself as a rallying point for all those opposed to the ruling Left Front in West Bengal (she could not achieve this end by remaining in the Congress after the United Front experiment in 1996), her alliance with the BJP too did not lead her anywhere close to realising the objective. Apart from the fact that the BJP was hardly a force in West Bengal, the alliance with a party committed to Hindutva did alienate Ms. Banerjee from a substantial section of the minority community (as well as the large sections of the majority community wedded to the traditional liberal values). Even while she managed to supplant the Congress

in the 1998 general elections, Ms. Banerjee could not make any further progress since then. It was in this context that she decided to pull out of the NDA (and quit the Cabinet) a couple of months before the May 2001 elections to the West Bengal Assembly. Ms. Banerjee's stated position at that time was that she would not remain in the Cabinet as long as George Fernandes was there (in the wake of the Tehelka story). However, it was clear even then that she was scripting an alliance with the Congress for the Assembly elections. The script was enacted but it turned out to be a farce. While the Congress managed to retain its numbers in the Assembly (thanks to Ms. Banerjee), the Trinamool Congress leader's dream — of becoming the Chief Minister of West Bengal — remained unrealised and she decided to get back to the NDA (and to the Union Cabinet) soon after.

While Ms. Banerjee did not hesitate, at any stage, to reduce such ethical questions as secularism and a commitment to democratic values into a slogan, the Congress too displayed haste by aligning with her in the 2001 Assembly elections. The same is true of the BJP too; the party was willing to bend over backwards to accommodate Ms. Banerjee in the NDA even until a couple of weeks ago and even kept a Cabinet berth (the Coal Ministry) for her. The Trinamool Congress was seen by the BJP as a platform through which the Hindutva agenda could be taken into West Bengal. But then, Ms. Banerjee had a different plan — to whip up passions in West Bengal — and placed the demand to annul the decision to bifurcate the Eastern Railway as a condition to join the Cabinet. Little did she realise that the NDA, by this time, had managed to enlist some more MPs on its side within Parliament. This was where the Trinamool Congress chief miscalculated and landed herself in a state of isolation and a crisis of her own making.

15 AUG 2002

REVIEW RAIL DECISION TO KEEP US IN ALLIANCE'

Mamata stops

short of quitting NDA

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, Aug. 13. — Miss Mamata Banerjee kept the suspense over her ties with the NDA alive, saying: "Until... the issue of (Eastern) Railway's bifurcation is sorted out to its satisfaction, Trinamul will not be part and parcel of the NDA."

The resolution is a "compromise" between Miss Banerjee's wish to quit the National Democratic Alliance and her party chief whip Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay and some other leaders' opposition to the move. It would give her a bargaining chip while holding talks with NDA crisis managers. Miss Banerjee said she would meet the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Vice-President-elect, Mr Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, after on 16 or 17 August.

Railways officials said there was no scope for a review of the decision to divide ER. After the Cabinet's fresh approval, administrative and technical work was on in full swing. The new zonal headquarters at Hajipur would start operations by 15 September, though the scheduled date was 1 October.

BJP leaders ruled out the possibility of the Centre meeting the Trinamul demand. But the party has appealed to Miss Banerjee

to reconsider her decision.

"The Trinamul is an important NDA partner. We appeal to... Miss Banerjee to reconsider her decision. Beyond this, I do not want to comment. NDA partners will take a decision on the issue," BJP spokesperson Mr Arun Jaitley

Buddha calls all-party meet

KOLKATA, Aug. 13. — Within moments of Miss Mamata Banerjee's decision to stay out of the NDA, the state government convened an all-party meeting at the Writers' on 19 August to discuss the ER bifurcation issue. The chief minister will preside over the meeting.

Two leaders from each party represented in the Assembly have been invited. Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said he wanted to ascertain views of all before his meeting with the Prime Minister in New Delhi. — SNS

said. He said the bifurcation was discussed by the Cabinet again before being finally endorsed.

At today's meeting, Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay reportedly argued that Trinamul continue as an NDA partner.

Miss Banerjee was supported by Kolkata mayor Subrata Mukherjee and Lok Sabha MP Mr

Nitish Sengupta. They said the party should now maintain "equidistance" from Congress and BJP.

Miss Banerjee, leaders said, tried to find a "middle path" acceptable to all, thereby keeping the doors open for further discussions. Among others who attended the meeting were MPs, Mr Ranjit Panja, Mrs Krishna Bose and Mr Akbar Ali Khandokar, and MLAs and leaders such as Mr Pankaj Banerjee and Mr Sovandeb Chattopadhyay.

BJP chief Mr Venkaiah Naidu and Mr George Fernandes reportedly are in favour of having Miss Banerjee in the Cabinet. But senior NDA leaders have asked them to devise a face-saver acceptable both to Miss Banerjee and Mr Nitish Kumar. But some BJP leaders said the possibility of compromise ended the very day Miss Banerjee had used derogatory language against Mr Advani.

Mr Anil Biswas said in Kolkata Miss Banerjee could not muster the courage to quit NDA.

Move to disqualify Panja

Accusing Mr Ajit Panja of having defied party dictates, Miss Mamata Banerjee wrote to the deputy Speaker urging him to disqualify Mr Panja from the Lok Sabha. The suspended Trinamul Congress MP had voted in the vice-presidential polls yesterday though the Trinamul abstained.

Atal cancels petrol pump licences

g.f.p. - NDA
 HC-1 6/8

Shekhar Iyer
 New Delhi, August 5

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee today ordered cancellation of the allotments of 1,144 petrol pump dealerships, 1,788 LPG outlets and 236 kerosene agencies made by public sector oil companies since January 2000.

Fresh allotments will now be auctioned on the basis of competitive bidding. But allotments made to the families of Kargil martyrs will not be affected.

The decision to cancel the allotments is being viewed as the culmination of a phase of intense heartburn among squabbling BJP functionaries in many States, with those denied allotments complaining against those who had clinched them.

Vajpayee, who went into a huddle with senior ministers

and BJP leaders after the Opposition stalled proceedings in Parliament over the controversy, concluded that the Government and the party had to come clean on the issue.

Until yesterday, the BJP was willing to allow a CBI probe into specific cases of irregularities. But today's media reports say one of the beneficiaries had given the PM's residential address in Lucknow forced Vajpayee's hand.

Some BJP ministers and leaders said the beneficiaries might go to court for a stay on the PM's order. But others said the order would rob the Opposition of a potent weapon. Vajpayee accepted the latter argument.

Petroleum Minister Ram Naik told the PM that he would be willing to step down if he was judged responsible for the mess.



HC TIVARI/HT
Ram Naik at a news conference in New Delhi on Monday.

made on the recommendation of the Dealership Selection Boards, all headed by judges, public sentiments were not in favour of the Government and the party. Newspaper reports had spoken of BJP functionaries cornering most of the allotments, though among the 3,000-odd allotments the number of such cases was not more than 400.

V K Malhotra, who heads the BJP's Parliamentary Committee on Public Undertakings, reminded his seniors that he had recommended way back in December 2000 that the entire process be reviewed to give it a semblance of transparency.

Interestingly, Malhotra had written to Naik about the panel's recommendations after several BJP MPs raised the allotment issue in Parliamentary Party meetings.

Naik said the row had been raked up by some BJP leaders, who were upset because they had failed to swing the allotments in their favour. But both Vajpayee and Advani felt the Government would find it difficult to defend itself when the media projected BJP leaders as beneficiaries.

Incidentally, Arun Shourie had referred to this controversy while addressing the BJP's National Council on Saturday, saying the BJP could not always get away by saying things were worse under Congress rule.

As soon as the Houses were adjourned, Vajpayee met Advani and Naik to review the situation. Later, Jaswant Singh, Pramod Mahajan, Sushma Swaraj, Arun Shourie, Venkaiah Naidu and Arun Jaitley joined the talks.

Related report on Page 7

Rift in Trinamul over continuation in NDA

TR 5 TIMES NEWS NETWORK 11/8

New Delhi: There is trouble brewing for Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee as she is faced with dissensions within her ranks over her party's continuation in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA).

A section of her party, led by her one-time confidant, Lok Sabha member Sudeep Bandhopadhaya, wants the Trinamul to remain in the NDA on the plea that it will be difficult to build the party organisation if it quits the ruling combine at this juncture.

Ms Banerjee's relations with the NDA have soured following the Union cabinet's summary rejection of her demand for a review of the bifurcation of the Eastern Railway zone. Ms Banerjee had given the NDA time till August 12 to revise its decision, failing which she would announce her decision about her continuation in the NDA.

The issue was discussed by the work-



Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee at a rally in Kolkata on Friday

ing committee of the Trinamul on July 31, and is to come up for discussion again at its next meeting on August 13.

When contacted, Mr Bandhopadhaya admitted that he had strong differences with Ms Banerjee on this issue, adding that this was the first time in five years that he and Ms Banerjee had taken divergent views on any issue. "But I have not

quit the Trinamul as some people are saying...I will continue this battle," he said.

According to him, leaving the NDA for the second time would have an adverse impact on the party's credibility. He said the party could not afford any setback at this stage as it had to contest the panchayat elections in West Bengal next year.

Even as his party was opposing the bifurcation of Eastern Railway, Mr Bandhopadhaya had quietly built bridges with the BJP with the latter even offering him a ministerial berth. Since then, Mr Bandhopadhaya has been out of favour with Ms Banerjee, who is now relying more on Rajya Sabha member Dineshbhai Trivedi as her trouble-shooter.

This is not the first time that the Trinamul chief is facing problems from her party ranks. Earlier, Ajit Panja had walked out of the party in a huff following serious differences with Ms Banerjee.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

11/8/2002

BJP allies' silence on petrol pump issue raises doubts

By ANITA KATYAL
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Except for some stray comments from individual members, the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) allies have maintained a studied silence on the petrol pump scam.

The National Democratic Alliance's (NDA) non-BJP partners, who are otherwise quick to pin down the Centre as they did on the Gujarat riots issue, have not made any statement on this issue and have been strangely incommunicado ever since the controversy hit the headlines and disrupted Parliament. This is being attributed to the fact that the NDA partners also benefited from the Centre's largesse.

As in the case of the BJP, the controversy has evoked mixed feelings. Those who have been beneficiaries are predictably furious at the PM's decision while those whose applications were rejected are gleeful at the cancellation. One senior MP of the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), it is learnt, congratulated the PM on taking such a bold step when a party delegation met him on Tuesday to seek

central assistance to help cope with the drought in Andhra Pradesh.

On the other hand, the Samata Party, which is considered the most-trusted NDA partner, was embarrassed on Wednesday when one of its more outspoken MPs, Prabhunath Singh, created a flutter when he demanded the PM's resignation in connection with the scam while participating in a television talk show.

Similarly, Lok Sabha MP Devendra Prasad Yadav of the Janata Dal (U) demanded a CBI inquiry into the process of allotment of petrol pumps as it has tarnished the image of the ruling combine. According to Mr Yadav, what is even more unfortunate and a matter of great concern is that the name of a PM's relative had also figured in the list of the BJP's kith and kin who were allotted petrol pumps. The party, however, has not commented on this controversy.

The TDP, which is known to play a proactive role in such instances, has also been quiet with its leader and Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu seeking to insulate himself from this controversy. The TDP's Parliamentary Party dis-

cussed the issue at a special meeting on Tuesday. According to TDP sources, the party decided that the official line to be adopted by it would be to welcome the PM's decision to cancel all the allotments and at the same time demand a high-level inquiry.

Though it was decided that TDP leader K. Yerran Naidu would publicise the party position to the press, he did not do so. He could not be contacted till late Wednesday night.

The Samata Party, meanwhile, swung into action to do some damage-control. Party spokesperson Shambhu Srivastava parried questions on Prabhunath Singh's remarks but indicated that the party would take a firm view about members who make statements against the party line. Reiterating the Samata Party's position, he said they had welcomed the PM's decision on the cancellation as it would uphold morality in public life. Going a step further, he also asked the Congress, which had been demanding petroleum minister Ram Naik's resignation, that Satish Sharma be expelled first as he had been indicted by the apex court for allotments through the discretionary quota.

— mamata banerjee

CR 16 11/8 Allied Woes P. P. NDA

Figure out the following: Mamata Banerjee is livid with the NDA for ignoring “the interests of West Bengal” on the bifurcation of Eastern Railway. The Samata Party, which has had its way on bifurcation at the expense of Mamata, is unhappy because the Centre has condoned the Marandi government’s domicile policy on jobs in Jharkhand even when it threatens “the interests of Biharis” who have been living there for long. Meanwhile, everyone in the NDA parivar is collectively peeved at the way Chandrababu Naidu has acquired the status of first among equals when it comes to cornering Central largesse on grain procurement, drought relief, bureaucratic transfers, you name it. Mr Naidu, in turn, is sulking at the manner in which the BJP-led coalition at the Centre has thumbed its nose at his strong opposition to Narendra Modi’s continuance in office, not to mention the decision to hold early polls. The BJP on the other hand feels that it has compromised far too much on its core Hindutva agenda and the time has now come for it to flex its muscles. If the allies feel short-changed at this sudden course correction, then so much the worse for them.

No wonder the NDA parivar is no longer the picture of a big, happy family. But what went wrong? Especially given that unlike earlier coalitions in the 1990s, which were essentially post-poll patch-ups, the NDA was a pre-poll alliance committed to “genuine” federalism. It even fought the elections as a single entity and on a common agenda for governance. In terms of signposts, the BJP’s crucial national executive meet in Goa stands out as the turning point. It was here that the BJP finally decided to brazen it out over Mr Modi’s fate and tell the allies that it would no longer be hamstrung by their “secular” quibbling. Since then, big brother BJP has vigorously pursued its own partisan interests: whether it is a question of selecting a hardcore Hindutva sympathiser as vice-president, or of packing gubernatorial office with men affiliated to the sangh parivar, or, indeed, the elevation of L K Advani as the formal number two in the cabinet. Consequently, the NDA seems to have forfeited what little unity of purpose it had. The increasingly acerbic and publicly articulated clash of interests between the different constituents is symptomatic of that larger crisis. Coalition politics might still be a necessity for India’s diverse and divided polity, but the federal spirit that might sustain it is rapidly and regrettably ebbing.

1 AUG 2002

9-8-02
9/2/02

NDA's bifurcation

The Mamata-Samata duel has rendered Vajpayee's govt a hopelessly divided one

ONE of the great strengths of coalition governments is that they reflect the interests of a wide band of regional forces and interests. But that, alas, is precisely one of their great weaknesses. The NDA government is at present adrift in an gigantic sea of local demands, a state of being that does not exactly make for great governance. Thus is Vajpayee constantly having to give in to the likes of Chandrababu Naidu. The latest Naidu demand is that the Centre pick up an extra 20 lakh tonnes of rice from AP. To be forced to do this at great expense even when the Centre's godowns are overflowing is criminal. But survivability has ensured the government's servility.

Similarly, it would be difficult to believe that Mamata Banerjee's party is a constituent in the NDA government going by the high-voltage rhetoric that emerged at her mammoth Kolkata rally on Sunday. Not only did she demand the head of Railway Minister Nitish Kumar, she has threatened to severely embarrass the Vajpayee government by announcing a 72-hour Bangla bandh if the prime minister does not announce within three days an end to the bifurcation move. She has, please note, hinted darkly that she was prepared to fight "till the last drop of our blood" to ensure this. With partners like this, this government certainly does not need the opposition. As for Nitish Kumar, it would be difficult to perceive his alacrity in pushing through the notifi-

cation of five new zones just before Mamata was to arrive in Delhi to discuss her reentry into the Cabinet as the moves of an inspired administrator. He knows as well as any other that this is all about politics, that the whole bifurcation business — while justified on the important issue of ensuring greater efficiency of railway administration — is spiked with politics from the days when it was first mooted in 1997. The selection of Hajipur — the then railway minister's constituency — as one of the proposed zonal headquarters testified to that.

The moral of the story is overt politics in administration, besides making for conflict, destroys good governance, which is essentially a product of consensus over what constitutes the greater common good. The open warfare within the NDA parivar over the railway bifurcation issue puts a serious question mark, therefore, over the Central government's ability to handle the contradictions created by the conflicting political agendas of its constituents and, ultimately, its capacity to govern this country. It follows then that Vajpayee had better exercise his prerogative as the leader of the NDA government and put an end to this unedifying Mamata vs Samata battle. Of course, this is easier said than done. Already the prime minister's statement that the Union cabinet will reconsider the bifurcation issue has raised the blood pressure readings of Samata party activists.

NDI N E P R I C E S

23 JUL 2002

Mamata stops rail minister in his tracks

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Trinamul Congress on Thursday simultaneously took on the opposition RJD and its NDA ally, the Samata Party, in the Lok Sabha on the issue of creation of new railway zones. But it found solace in support from a BJP MP from Uttar Pradesh since the North-Eastern Railway headquartered in Gorakhpur would be affected by the changes as well.

The ruling coalition-opposition divide blurred as Trinamul and RJD MPs clashed in the house after an MP from Bihar threatened not to allow trains bound for or emanating from West Bengal to pass through the state if hurdles were put in the creation of a new railway zone with headquarters in Hajipur.

Simultaneously, Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee accused railway minister Nitish Kumar of "misleading" the house and saying that the zonal headquarters in Hajipur would become functional on October 1 while the Prime Minister and deputy PM—whom she "trusted"—had said the matter of bifurcation of Eastern Railways would be reviewed in the cabinet.

During an impromptu debate on the subject during zero hour, RJD leader Raghuvansh Prasad Singh said that Bihar would not tolerate any injustice against the state. "The agitation in Hajipur has already started. No trains either emanating from West Bengal or going there will be allowed to pass through Bihar if the new zone is



Nitish Kumar



M. Banerjee

not allowed to be set up."

The Trinamul MPs immediately took offence and Ms Banerjee demanded that the "unparliamentary language" used by Mr Singh should be expunged. In this, she received support from the Left which, too, is opposing the establishment of the East Central Railway headquarters in Hajipur. The Left MPs said the bifurcation of Eastern Railways "could divide the entire country".

Ms Banerjee also attacked Mr Kumar for saying during question hour on Thursday that the new zone would become operational from October 1 and said he had no right to comment when the issue had been referred back to the cabinet.

Amidst continuing protests, Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi (Congress) demanded a full-fledged discussion on the issue.

To a demand that the Western Railway headquarters be shifted, from Mumbai to Ahmedabad as 80 per cent of its network was in Gujarat, he said, "There is no such proposal before the ministry."

19 JUL 2002

Shekhawat named NDA V-P nominee

Congress wants Sushil Shinde

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, July 17

THE NDA today named Bhairon Singh Shekhawat as its vice-presidential candidate, inviting a certain contest for the post, polling for which is scheduled for August 12. The former Rajasthan Chief Minister will file his nomination papers tomorrow.

Prime Minister AB Vajpayee, who was authorised by the alliance to name its candidate, was told by Congress president Sonia Gandhi yesterday that her party could not back a BJP nominee and therefore a contest was inevitable. Vajpayee's discussions with CPI(M) general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet drew a similar response.

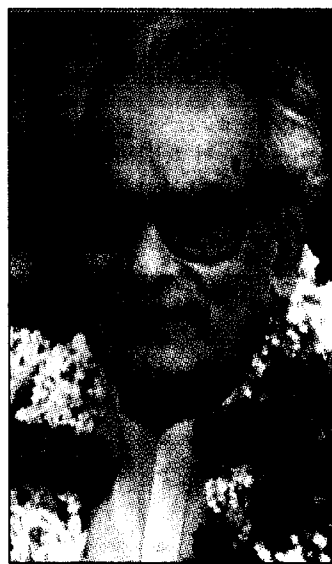
Today, Shekhawat's nomination set off a prompt Opposition hunt for a joint candidate, with Sonia spearheading the efforts and seeking the Samajwadi Party's support in her enterprise.

AICC sources said the Congress president called Amar Singh to sound him out on fielding Sushil Kumar Shinde, a Dalit leader from Maharashtra, for the Vice-President's office.

Singh refused to say what the two leaders had discussed, but confirmed that he would get back to Sonia after speaking to Mulayam and other senior Samajwadi Party leaders.

Significantly, Amar Singh and Mulayam's brother Ram Gopal Yadav were among those present at a dinner hosted yesterday by Congress leader Manmohan Singh to discuss floor co-ordination among non-NDA formations in the Rajya Sabha.

The SP leaders reportedly told Singh that the mess in UP result-



Bhairon Singh Shekhawat
Contest ahead

ing from the Congress' refusal to support Mulayam's efforts to form a Government in the State would have to be to be sorted out first for "a consistent, greater secular unity" at the Centre. The Opposition is planning now to name a Dalit candidate and drive a wedge between SC and ST members of Parliament.

To the NDA's relief, when Vajpayee spoke to TDP chief N Chandrababu Naidu and BSP leader Mayawati, both promptly pledged their support to the ruling combine's nominee. The AIADMK, too, announced its support for Shekhawat after Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani spoke to Jayalalithaa.

NDA convener George Fernandes said most political parties had assured the PM that they would support Shekhawat.

9 5 JUL 2002

THE HINDU INDIAN TIMES

Rail row sent back to Cabinet

FROM KAY BENEDICT

New Delhi, July 13: The Centre tonight sought to buy time on carving up railway zones by referring the issue back to the Cabinet after talks led by the Prime Minister failed to break the deadlock.

The decision came after extensive talks among Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, NDA convener and defence minister George Fernandes and railway minister Nitish Kumar.

The move to bring the Cabinet back into the picture may have a salutary effect on the monsoon session of Parliament, which begins on Monday, at least for a couple of days. Both the Trinamul Congress and the Left may hold their fire, pending a

fresh look by the Cabinet.

It may also help dilute further the *rail-roko* stir launched by Trinamul today in several parts of Bengal. (See Page 9)

Trinamul chief Mamata Banerjee was also invited to the talks in Delhi, but did not attend. Sources said she might arrive in the capital tomorrow.

Unless the Prime Minister's camp comes out in support of Mamata, the Cabinet, which has several ministers from Bihar, is unlikely to completely overturn the decision to divide the railway zones.

A proposal, mooted by some interlocutors early this week as a compromise formula, suggested the handover of the cash-rich Dhanbad division to Eastern Railway and creation of a new division at Bhagalpur with

Malda and Katiahar.

Fernandes, who had yesterday ruled out a rethink on the issue, tonight said the proposed Cabinet discussion could not be termed a "review". Fernandes said Kumar made a detailed presentation on the move to create new zones and divisions since 1996 and his presentation will be placed before the Cabinet next week.

Asked if it meant the government was inclined to review the Cabinet decision, Fernandes said: "Review is too big a word." He said "the entire issue of the subject of controversy" will be discussed.

Sources close to Kumar, however, said the process of creating new zones at Hajipur and Jaipur (for which notifications have already been issued) will continue.

Fernandes, who was expected to reach here on Sunday morning, was asked by Vajpayee to cut short his visit and reach here today itself, fuelling speculation that the Prime Minister is keen to work out a deal on the eve of the monsoon session of Parliament.

Sources close to Vajpayee said he was not pleased with Fernandes foreclosing the issue yesterday.

Even Advani did not say so. After meeting an all-party Bihar team on Thursday, Advani had said the matter involved relations between two states and that the government did not want to hurt the sentiments of any particular state. He said it was up to the Cabinet and the Prime Minister whether or not to review the bifurcation decision.

14 JUL 2002

Fernandes and Advani at odds over rail row

9-PM NDA 11-1 1377

HT Correspondent/Agencies
Mathura/Patna/New Delhi,
July 12

DEPUTY PRIME Minister LK Advani and NDA convener George Fernandes today appeared to be chugging on different tracks on the issue of bifurcation of Eastern Railway.

Advani said a decision on bifurcation would be taken when he meets the Prime Minister on Sunday.

"Vajpayee proposes to have discussions on the bifurcation issue and the resolutions passed by Assemblies of West Bengal and Bihar after the return of Fernandes from Patna either tomorrow or on Sunday," Advani told reporters in Mathura.

But in Patna, Fernandes railed against Mamata Banerjee and ruled out setting up an experts committee to look into the issue of bifurcation. "How can an experts panel rescind Cabinet decisions?" he said.

Advani, however, said, "We will consider the issue from all aspects and then decide."

But support was building up for Railway Minister Nitish Kumar. Today, BJD chief Naveen Patnaik spoke to Advani and Vajpayee, favouring bifurcation. Orissa stands to gain with plans to make Bhubaneswar the headquarters of the East Coast Railway that is to be carved out of South Eastern Railway.

Mamata was keeping her cards close to her chest, refusing to talk to reporters.

Fernandes said the whole controversy "raised by Mamata" was "unjustified and unfair". "What the Railway Minister has implemented is a decision of the Union Cabinet and not his own," he said.

WHAT ADVANI SAID

A decision on the issue of Eastern Railway's bifurcation will be taken on Sunday when he meets Atal Bihari Vajpayee

WHAT GEORGE SAID

There is no question of setting up an experts group to look into bifurcation

HIS REASON

An experts panel cannot rescind a Cabinet decision

Defending his Samata Party colleague in the Union Cabinet, Fernandes said, "The decision to reorganise the Railways was taken way back in 1996. But since there was little continuity in the railway ministry, its implementation got delayed. Now Nitish Kumar has implemented it and there is nothing wrong about it."

Asked whether the problem had its root in the inclusion of the cash-rich Dhanbad division in the newly created East Central Zone, he said, "The decision to create new zones was taken by the Union Cabinet and the Railway Board decided to amalgamate the Dhanbad division with the new zone after due consideration. I see nothing wrong in it."

Advani said, "It is not a question of individuals (Nitish or Mamata). It is a question of the Government as a whole. We would not like any decision to affect relations between two States," Advani said after an all-party delegation from Bihar met him.

"How we deal with it is a matter for the Prime Minister or the Cabinet to decide," he said.

Marandi domicile policy tests NDA unity

MANOJ PRASAD
RANCHI, JULY 12

DIFFERENCES in the ruling NDA over Chief Minister Babulal Marandi's domicile policy has spilled into the open. Samata Party MLA Baccha Singh, also state Urban Development Minister, has opposed the move and called a bandh here on July 18.

According to the law enacted, a resident whose ancestors' name figures in the land records of 1932 will get "preference" in appointment to state government's class III and IV jobs. So all those whose ancestors did not own land in the state in 1932 will

stand disqualified for these jobs. Singh told reporters the domicile policy won't help the state. "It is discriminatory to the core. And if it is not amended, it will disqualify many Jharkhand residents, who have been living in this state for long, from getting any government job," he said.

The law was brought into force after widespread demand from tribal-dominated outfits and parties such as JMM, the main Opposition party, and Adivasi Chatra Sangh (ACS), a popular body of Adivasi youths backed by several Catholic Church members.

The policy was notified last year and welcomed by JMM and ACS.

With Babulal Marandi not willing to alter the policy and all eyes on cops' recruitment, lines are drawn for agitations to come



Manch, called a bandh in Dhanbad. The same day, Manch workers ransacked the Circle Office and smashed windcreens of a dozen vehicles in Dhanbad.

In Bokaro, Manch workers reportedly held the Circle Officer (CO) captive. The COs, the authorities who issue domicile certificates, had refused certificates to some youths denying them the chance to fill applications for constable's vacancies.

The Manch members were not confined to the Samata alone. The BJP and the JD(U), other constituents of the NDA, too were present. About 50 of them were arrested after they blocked National Highway 32. The next day, hundreds of

Jamshedpur youths, under the banner of Chotanagpur Chatra Yuva Parishad, burnt Marandi's effigy.

The Dhanbad protesters have announced a Raj Bhavan gherao on July 21. Former Chief Justice of Punjab and Haryana High Court M. Rama Jois, also the VHP's legal advisor, is scheduled to take oath as the new Governor on July 15.

The day after the Manch's agitation, ACS workers retaliated and stoned Singh's house and said: "Anybody with anti-Adivasi mindset will be driven out of Jharkhand."

Later, Singh's press advisor Raj Kumar Singh filed an FIR at Lalpur police station against the attack, accusing ACS secretary Mahesh Bha-

gat and its vice-president Chamra Linda.

Samata state general-secretary Rajiv Ranjan Mishra threatened to agitate if the attackers were not arrested within 24 hours. "The issue (policy) should have been discussed if an amendment was needed," he said.

With Marandi reiterating yesterday not to alter the domicile policy, all eyes are now fixed on the constables' recruitment. And the lines have been drawn for agitations to come. Though a PIL against the policy was filed in the High Court last year, Manch supporter Sanjay Singh warned they would "file another PIL".

VAJPAYEE MEETING ON RAILWAY DIVISION NOT HELD

Advani gets tough with Mamata

9-P.P.
NDA
5-1
12/7
Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, July 11. — The Prime Minister's leniency towards Miss Mamata Banerjee may permit her continuation in the NDA though her recent outbursts on Eastern Railway division have been characteristic of an "Opposition" leader, sources said. The Deputy Prime Minister, Mr LK Advani, and the RSS are against the NDA tolerating "such nonsense", the sources said.

The proposed meeting that Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee was to have with Mr Advani, Mr George Fernandes and Mr Nitish Kumar to resolve the Eastern Railway issue was not held today.

Miss Banerjee's induction into the Union Cabinet is not likely till after the monsoon session of Parliament. But some BJP leaders are hoping for a face-saver that would enable her to join the government.

The sources said Mr Vajpayee had thought of meeting Miss Banerjee's demand that she be rehabilitated in the railway ministry. But Mr Advani strongly opposed this and was reportedly keen that she get the coal and mines portfolio. "Take it or leave it", is how he views the matter.

Some BJP leaders said Mr Ram Vilas Paswan left the NDA before opposing the government publicly. Miss Banerjee has the same option as the NDA would not like to expel anyone from a voluntary coalition, they said. BJP and NDA leaders feel a token resistance from Miss Banerjee might be tolerated. But they will attack her if she crosses the "Lakshman rekha," a BJP leader said.

Mr Advani said today's proposed meeting could not take place as Mr Fernandes had to visit his constituency to attend a pre-arranged programme. The next date for the meeting can be decided only after his return.

The government is concerned about regional interests coming to the fore. "The decision (on ER

Atal Behari Vajpayee had thought of meeting Mamata Banerjee's demand that she be rehabilitated in the railway ministry. But LK Advani strongly opposed the idea and was reportedly keen that she get the coal and mines portfolio. "Take it or leave it", is how he views the matter

division) was cleared by the Cabinet. This is not a regional issue and we do not want confrontation between different states. We want to address that but what the modalities will be cannot be stated now and how the issue is dealt with can only be decided by the Prime Minister and the Cabinet," Mr Advani said after meeting an all-party delegation from Bihar which suppor-

ted the railway minister's move to create a new East-central zone at Hajipur after dividing Eastern Railway headquartered at Kolkata.

Mr Advani virtually echoed Mr Nitish Kumar's arguments on the issue. The railway minister had rejected setting up an expert committee to review the decision as demanded by Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee and Miss Banerjee, saying the restructuring of zones was done in accordance with the provisions of the Railway Act and Cabinet resolution. Only the Prime Minister or the Cabinet had the prerogative to review such decisions.

The 20-member Bihar delegation — led by water resources minister Mr Jagdanand Singh and including members of the RJD, CPI, CPI(M), CPI(ML), BJP, Samata, JU(U) and the Congress — met Mr Advani at North Block and then Mr Nitish Kumar.

Mr Jagdanand Singh said they were "very satisfied" after meeting Mr Advani who told them that this was not an issue of Bihar vs Bengal. Mr Advani told them he would apprise the Prime Minister of their sentiments.

The delegation proposed that Malda and Katihar divisions be merged to create a new Bhagalpur division which should form part of the proposed East-central zone. This could lead to protests from West Bengal leaders. Malda division was carved out of Katihar division when Mr ABA Ghani Khan Chowdhury was railway minister.

Mr Pranab Mukherjee today urged Mr Vajpayee to defer the decision to divide ER and called for setting up of an expert committee on the issue. SNS adds from Kolkata.

12 JUL 2002

THE STATESMAN

TRINAMUL CHIEF TO BEGIN STIR IF CENTRE REFUSES TO BUDGE ON ER

NDA top guns may dash Mamata hopes

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI/KOLKATA, July 10. — Miss Mamata Banerjee and the NDA are on a collision course on Eastern Railway's division and Bihar is preparing to mount pressure on the Centre not to review Mr Nitish Kumar's decision.

The Trinamul chief today said in Kolkata that she would wait for tomorrow's meeting on the issue between the Prime Minister, his deputy and NDA convener before deciding on her course of action. But according to sources in Delhi, the meeting may be cancelled.

A BJP leader said the government was prepared for any eventuality and that Miss Banerjee had spoiled her chances of being re-inducted into the Cabinet by taking such a public stand against the NDA leadership.

Mrs Rabri Devi will lead an all-party delegation to Mr LK Advani tomorrow to impress on him not to review the decision to divide ER. The issue was raised by Mr Umashankar Singh (Samata) and was supported by all parties, including the CPI-M, CPI and CPI-ML.

At a rally at Esplanade, Miss Banerjee demanded immediate withdrawal of the notification on ER's division and constitution of a review committee. She described Mr Nitish Kumar as Mohammed-bin-Tughlak who was

"out to destabilise India on regional lines".

"Mr Kumar is trying to pit one state against another by dividing the railways. We won't tolerate this. The Trinamul won't allow Mr Kumar to snatch away Bengal's property. Let's see what happens at tomorrow's meeting. After that we will announce our decision. I'm not a power-hungry politi-

night later. What she possibly meant was that Mr Kumar might have thought that he would lose the railway ministry to her and hence, pulled off a fast one.

She feared that the ER division would be followed by the shifting of the Coal India and DVC headquarters too.

Mr Akbar Ali Khondakar, party MP, appealed to Miss Banerjee to allow Trinamul workers to launch rail-roko stir across the state. Mr Subrata Mukherjee accused Mr Kumar of trying to destroy ER, which "belongs to Bengal".

Some Union ministers, however, feel Miss Banerjee has taken the issue to a point of no return, like what she did after the Tehelka expose.

But they are confident that the government wouldn't be affected if she walks out of the NDA again because her party has only eight MPs in the Lok Sabha.

BJP leaders think Miss Banerjee, being an ally, should have talked to Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr Advani. That she has chosen to go to town with a warning shows that she wants a confrontation.

The leaders said Bihar was more important to them than West Bengal because the party had a stronger base in the former. Besides, Mr Nitish Kumar carries more weight than Miss Banerjee in the NDA. He has a good equation with Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani.



Miss Mamata Banerjee at Wednesday's party rally. — AFP

cian. I can stay away from the ministry, but not from the people of Bengal."

She alleged that the railway minister had raked up the issue to extract political mileage. Mr Kumar, she said, had issued the notification in the middle of June, sensing there could be a Cabinet reshuffle a fort-

THE STATESMAN

11 JUL 2002

Nitish rules out expert panel for review of ry bifurcation

New Delhi
9 JULY

RAILWAY minister Nitish Kumar on Tuesday told a multi-party delegation from West Bengal that he could not set up an expert committee "at this stage" to reconsider the bifurcation of Eastern Zone and creation of the seven new zones, but said he would convey their feelings to the "higher political authorities".

Mr P.R. Dasmunshi, chief whip of the Congress in the Lok Sabha, who was part of the delegation, told reporters after the 60-minute discussion that Mr Kumar had assured them that he would convey their feelings to Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

The Trinamool Congress, led by Mamata Banerjee, which has been most vocal in opposing the bifurcation, was not in the delegation. Mr Ajit Panja, dissident TMC Lok Sabha member, who was in the delegation, said they had explained in detail the social and economic consequences of the bifurcation on West Bengal, where already 60 lakh people are unemployed.

An RSP member of the dele-



TRIPPING AT THE TABLE: Railway minister Nitish Kumar holds an all-party meeting to discuss the railway bifurcation imbroglio in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

gation, however, said categorically that Mr Kumar had given "no assurance" that he would review the bifurcation of the Eastern Zone and creation of seven new zones.

Mr Kumar told reporters that the discussions were "free and cordial." He said while the delegation wanted a review of the decision, he explained the "background and rationale" behind the creation of new zones, something the Union Cabinet had decided many years ago.

Mr Kumar told the delegation, "I have only implemented the Cabinet decision" and assured

that the decision would not adversely affect the interests of Eastern Railway and West Bengal.

Mr Dasmunshi said the delegation told the minister that "we do not believe in provincial controversies, but we are opposed to the bifurcation of the Railway zones".

Mr Kumar said the creation of the seven new zones "is the natural culmination" of a Cabinet decision, is as per the law and under the Railway Act. Justifying his decision, the minister said he had explained to the delegation that he was even prepared for a debate in Parliament. — PTI

Advani, PM to discuss break-up

New Delhi
9 JULY

DEPUTY prime minister L.K. Advani will take up with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee on Thursday the demand for a review of the decision to bifurcate the Eastern Railway Division. This assurance was given by Advani to a delegation of West Bengal MPs and MLAs from Left parties and Congress which called on him here on Tuesday. Trinamool Congress, which opposes the move, was, however, not present. Advani told reporters that the issue will be taken up by him day after with the Prime Minister. Defence minister George Fernandes, who has been talking to the Trinamool Congress, and railway minister Nitish Kumar, will also be present at the meeting. — PTI

The ...

1 5 101 2002

Jaswant is well-equipped to handle challenges

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Finance minister Jaswant Singh faces the same number of challenges as his predecessor Yashwant Sinha but officials and businessmen believe that he is better equipped to handle them than Mr Sinha. The trend the world over is to choose experts as ministers in charge of managing national economies and while Mr Singh, described as a free market reformist may not be termed as an expert, his biggest advantage is his



Jaswant Singh

perceived "closeness" to the PM. He can count on political backing from the top to steer difficult economic reforms without having to roll back unpopular measures under political pressure.

Officials also expect Mr Singh to build a team in the finance ministry to implement economic reforms — something which Mr Sinha could not do and which was his undoing in that job. Mr Sinha did not have the freedom to choose a team and he was not comfortable working with persons given to him. Mr Sinha had four different teams of officials assisting him to formulate his last four budgets.

"There will be hardly any change in policy. That is because governments make policies. Nowadays, even governments of different political parties follow the same policies," said a top official associated with economic reforms for the past several years. "But we are definitely about to see a faster implementation of reforms for Mr Singh is better placed to carry them through politically," he added.

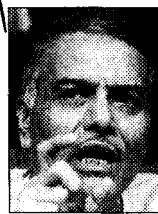
The swapping of job portfolios and the actual shifting of offices did not take place on Tuesday. The offices of finance minister and external affairs minister in North Block and South Block, respectively, are separated only by the Raisina Road. But Mr Singh and Mr Sinha continued in their erstwhile office chambers, preferring to move only on Wednesday.

Mr Singh had a busy day in office reflective, perhaps, of the enormous challenge before him.

Yashwant Sinha could do with some help from PMO

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Yashwant Sinha is in an unenviable position as the successor to a man whose tenure, according to mandarins, will be "a hard act to follow". Almost all observers believe that Jaswant Singh's stewardship of the ministry of external affairs (MEA) was one of the few unalloyed successes of the A.B. Vajpayee government, if only for the strong support he enjoyed from the Prime Minister.



Yashwant Sinha

The ministry that has appeared personality-driven for the past four years is sure to feel Mr Singh's absence in the hands of a new minister whose background is that of a bureaucrat, though an efficient one at that.

While there are no harsh words for Mr Sinha, officials are reserving their judgment for the present. "He is an affable man, nice to talk to," says a senior official who has met Mr Sinha, but proffers no opinion on what might be Mr Sinha's comparative strengths in foreign policy.

"He is a competent bureaucrat," says a foreign policy observer, adding that Mr Sinha is completely unknown to him. Opinions may be scarce, but there is no dearth of apprehensions as South Block mandarins mull over the changes. While Mr Sinha's biggest disadvantage is Mr Singh, his second will be that he enters the MEA at a volatile time. The last four years (since the May 1998 Pokhran tests) have proved that mere competence is no longer enough in this ministry.

Despite his seemingly ponderous manner, Mr Singh's tenure was fairly free of serious missteps. He is credited with transforming India's uneasy relations with the world's sole superpower and winning over the international community to the Indian viewpoint on Pakistan. In the process, he exposed himself to some criticism of being too US-centric.

There is some apprehension in South Block that Mr Sinha's bureaucratic background may not lend itself to the quick footwork India's foreign policy needs to meet the challenges it confronts.

NDA govt gets major face-lift

Roll-back Sinha swaps role with Jaswant, 2 actors come into picture

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Jaswant Singh and Yashwant Sinha swapped places on Monday as the new finance and external affairs ministers respectively in a major mid-term cabinet reshuffle affected by Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, giving his government its seventh face-lift.

The government got a double dose from Bollywood for the first time with Shatrughan Sinha joining with cabinet rank as health and family welfare minister and Vinod Khanna inducted as minister of state in charge of tourism and culture.

Also inducted was Jana Krishnamurthy, who quit as the BJP chief over the weekend. He gets law and justice.

While Mamata Banerjee and her Trinamul Congress kept out because she was denied her preferred railways portfolio, there was still hope of her being persuaded, the PM told newsmen after the swearing-in ceremony at Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Jammu and Kashmir chief minister Farooq Abdullah did not figure in the changes, indicating that the government

was still evolving its Kashmir policy ahead of the crucial assembly elections. However, his son Omar, despite his angry outbursts last week, retains the external affairs portfolio as one of the two ministers of state. Digvijay Singh is the other minister in the foreign office, shifted from railways.

Delhi got a boost in Sahib Singh Verma, a former chief minister, who got cabinet rank and the labour portfolio. Balasaheb Vikhe Patil of the Shiv Sena from Maharashtra was promoted to cabinet rank in charge of heavy industry and public enterprises. He succeeds fellow Sena member Manohar Joshi, elevated as the Lok Sabha Speaker last month.

Earlier in the day, the President accepted the resignations of Venkaiah Naidu, who is the new BJP chief, Arun Jaitley, C.P. Thakur, V. Dhananjay Kumar, Maneka Gandhi and Muni Lall. Mr Jaitley is tipped for a senior party post.

Mr Naidu's rural development portfolio goes to Shanta Kumar. Sharad Yadav is the new minister in charge of consumer affairs, food and public distribution, the

post earlier held by Shanta Kumar.

Among the new inductees, N.T. Shanmugham, who held cabinet rank earlier, gets independent charge of food processing industries. Of the new ministers of state, Nikhil Kumar Chodhury from Bihar gets agro and rural industries, Shripad Yesso Naik from Karnataka gets civil aviation, Anant Gite of the Shiv Sena gets finance, Basangouda R. Patil gets textiles, Sanjay Paswan from Bihar gets communications and information technology, along with Sumitra Mahajan, an earlier inductee shifted from HRD. A.K. Murthy gets railways, Su. Thirunavukkarasar from Tamil Nadu has got shipping.

Of the portfolio changes, Ravi Shankar Prasad gets law in addition to his earlier charge of coal and mines. Tapan Sikdar from West Bengal gets chemicals and fertilisers and O. Rajagopal urban development in addition to parliamentary affairs.

While Sahib Singh Verma represents Outer Delhi in the Lok Sabha, Shatrughan Sinha and Jana Krishnamurthy are from the Rajya Sabha. Mr Vikhe Patil is a veteran LS member from Maharashtra.

Thakur quits, Ananth's fate still uncertain

By Mahendra Ved
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: With the broad contours of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's proposed cabinet reshuffle remaining unchanged, senior ministers, BJP functionaries and NDA allies made a beeline for 7 Race Course Road on Sunday in the hope of influencing matters at the last moment.

Although most consultations happened behind the scenes, the dramatic development of the day was Union health minister C.P. Thakur's decision to resign. In the face of his imminent ouster, which his supporters in Patna reacted to violently, Mr Thakur chose the honourable way out.

With his decision to appoint Union home minister L.K. Advani as deputy Prime Minister out of the way, Mr Vajpayee spent the day closeted with his new deputy as well as with Jaswant Singh and Pramod Mahajan, and George Fernandes, who is also the NDA convenor.

Mr Vajpayee held two rounds of discussions with some of his senior colleagues. He met Jana Krishnamurthy, who may get the law or the rural development portfolio. He also met Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee. Understood to be keen on getting back the railway portfolio, she told journalists that she did not discuss portfolios but only had "political discussions" during her meeting with the PM.

It is understood that the Pattali Makkal Katchi's N.T. Shanmugham and A.C. Murthy may be inducted into the council of ministers. MDMK chief Vaiko is seeking a cabinet berth, but he is understood to have been told that he would have to agree to two of his colleagues, ministers of state at present, being dropped.

- PM meets Jana, Mamata
- Vaiko seeks cabinet berth
- NDA allies welcome Advani's elevation

Apart from Mr Thakur, at least four other ministers are likely to be dropped, according to BJP sources. This includes Maneka Gandhi, who recently clashed with Mr Thakur over the use of animals for conducting experiments. The fate of urban development minister Ananth Kumar, according to some reports, appears uncertain with plans to move him to the party being reconsidered.

Unlike on two earlier occasions, when the Prime Minister had to call off cabinet changes after even announcing the dates, the current reshuffle has seen Mr Vajpayee operating from a position of apparent strength.

Meanwhile, key NDA allies Samata Party and Janata Dal (United) welcomed the elevation of Mr Advani as the deputy prime minister, saying the country would get more stability.

While alliance partner in Tamil Nadu, DMK, is yet to react, rival AIADMK took the lead with chief minister J. Jayalalithaa sending a message of congratulation from Chennai.

The Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) refrained from offering any comment. Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala was among those who called on Mr Advani to congratulate him.

Samata Party spokesman Shambhu Srivastava, while congratulating the deputy prime minister, said the decision to elevate Mr Advani was unanimous within the NDA.

● See Edit: Atalji's Deputy, Page 14

Venkaiah Naidu to take over BJP reins

Advani gets Deputy PM's post

NDA
9-P-P¹

Sri
20/6

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 29. — Mr LK Advani was today appointed the Deputy Prime Minister, though he'll continue to look after the home ministry as well.

The Union rural development minister, Mr M Venkaiah Naidu, is scheduled to take over as the new BJP president in place of Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, who has sent his resignation to the Prime Minister and would leave office on Monday.

The Union home minister's appointment as Deputy Prime Minister follows a request from Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee to the President today that the arrangement be formalised. NDA convener Mr George Fernandes had earlier informed Mr Vajpayee that the allies had no objections to the arrangement.

Mr Advani joins a select club comprising Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, Morarji Desai, Jagjivan Ram, Charan Singh and Devi Lal.

Finance minister Mr Yashwant Sinha was likely to swap place with foreign minister Mr Jaswant Singh. The minister of state for coal, Mr Ravi Shanker Prasad, is likely to be given independent charge of law. Mr Krishnamurthy may join the law ministry or rural development ministry in place of Mr Naidu.

From the allies, those likely to be inducted are Miss Mamata Banerjee, Mr Anant Geete and Mr PC Thomas.

Miss Banerjee has, however, made it clear that she would return to the government only as a railway minister. Failing to get an assurance from the Prime Minister on this, she skipped today's NDA meeting. An NDA leader said: "The Prime Minister is keen to have her into the Cabinet, but it has been made clear to her that she wouldn't get railway ministry where Mr Nitish Kumar is doing well."

While more than a dozen ministers are likely to join the government, an equal number may be dropped, sources said. Dalit leader and BJP general secretary, Mr Sangh Priya Gautam, may join as a Cabinet minister in place of Mr Satya Narayan Jatiya.

Among others likely to join the government are Mr Shatrughan Sinha, Mr Keshubhai Patel, Mr Sahib Singh Verma or Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, Mr Laxmi Narayan Pandey, Mr Shivraj Singh Chauhan, Mr Balbir Punj and Mr Kailash Meghwal.

A surprise entry could be Mr Nirmal Chaudhury from Bihar to compensate for Mr CP Thakur (a Bhumihar caste leader) who is likely to be dropped.

Ministers likely to be dropped are Mrs Maneka Gandhi, Mr Munni Lal and Mrs Rita Verma.

Mr Vajpayee today asked Mr Naidu and Mr Arun Jaitley, who will be the new president's general secretary-spokesperson, to resign as Union ministers. Mr Ananth Kumar, too, is likely to follow suit.

Former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mr Rajnath Singh is likely to be appointed as general secretary. Miss Uma Bharti is being persuaded to get into the party either as general secretary in-charge of Madhya Pradesh or as president of the state unit.

Earlier in the day in Chennai, Mr Krishnamurthy said he would "abide" by the Prime Minister's wish on whether he would head the party or join the Cabinet.

Cong reaction: The Congress declined to comment on Mr Advani's appointment as Deputy Prime Minister, saying it would wait for the reshuffle, PTI adds.

Mamata Banerjee was offered several ministries, but she made her choice clear to the NDA — railways. The BJP is not ready to accept the demand

Law minister Arun Jaitley has been asked to resign and take over as BJP general secretary and spokesman of Venkaiah Naidu

On page 10

■ Mamata still on tracks
■ Ministers work overtime, but only at the last minute

THE STATESMAN

30 JUN 12

Govt allows 26% FDI in print medium

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: In a major policy decision, the Central government on Tuesday opened up the print media to foreign participation by allowing foreign direct investment (FDI) of up to 26 per cent in the sector. With this decision, it reversed the 1955 resolution of the Jawaharlal Nehru cabinet not to allow foreign participation in Indian publications.

Briefing mediapersons later, information & broadcasting minister Sushma Swaraj said the government had decided to allow 74 per cent FDI in specialised journals—in the non-news, non-current affairs category.

The cabinet decision was taken in the face of opposition from al-

most the entire political spectrum, with many parties raising security concerns. Ms Swaraj, however, rejected such apprehensions by insisting that adequate safeguards had been taken to protect the national interest. "We tried to address the concerns expressed about the impact of this step and took a few precautions," she said.

Among the restrictions is a ban on passing managerial control to foreign hands. The single-largest Indian shareholder must hold stakes higher than 26 per cent. For changing share-holding patterns, prior permission from the I&B ministry is necessary. Ms Swaraj said. Both managerial and editorial control should be in Indian hands. Three-fourths of the editorial staff

and the board of directors would have to be Indians. The credentials of the foreign investors would also be probed by the home ministry before allowing them entry.

"After we opened up the broadcasting sector, there is no reason why another sector should be deprived," Ms Swaraj said, terming the step as "very, very logical".

However, the cabinet decision was not a smooth affair nor was it unanimous. In fact, an intense battle raged with finance minister Yashwant Sinha and sports minister Uma Bharti strongly opposing the proposal.

Quoting newspaper reports, Mr Sinha pointed to reservations expressed by different shades of political opinion about the move and

suggested that publications starved of funds be helped by the financial institutions.

Ms Bharti claimed that it would be unwise to bring in foreign players to end the monopoly of a few big media houses.

However, Ms Swaraj reportedly argued that there was a need to help small publications. Human resource development minister Murlidhar Joshi also supported her contention.

The cabinet decision implies that a foreign investor can launch a scientific or speciality journal with 74 per cent of shares by teaming up with an Indian partner holding the remaining stake.

● Media, parties decry move, Page 7

NDA, Oppn oppose FDI in print media

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Parties across the political spectrum have strongly opposed any move to open up the print media to foreign players. The idea of allowing FDI in Indian publications, they say, is fraught with serious implications for national security and sovereignty.

Unanimity prevailed among the BJP's allies and the opposition on the issue. "In principle we are against unrestrained FDI in any economic activity. We are totally against FDI in the field of education as well as information," RSS spokesman M.G. Vaidya said. However, he said, if NRIs wanted to enter this segment, "we can have a different point of view".

The RSS at its national executive meeting on June 29-30 is likely to discuss the issue. During the long debate on the desirability of FDI in

25/6
this segment in recent months, political parties have held that exposing the print media to outside forces would have a devastating impact on different aspects of Indian life.

"We are not in favour of FDI in the print media, that will lead to the death of local papers," former BJP president Kushabhau Thakre said. "Our main objection to opening up the print media is from security considerations," Samata Party spokesman Shambhu Srivastava said. Congress spokesperson Anand Sharma also reiterated his party's staunch opposition to FDI in the print media.

The Trinamul Congress too opposed the proposal, insisting that forces inimical to India would seize the opportunity for hostile propaganda from within the country. "It is a dangerous proposition. Keeping in view what is happening in our neighbourhood, one is full of apprehension that Talibanic fundamental-

ists or Maoist extremists can exploit such a situation by unleashing propaganda warfare against India through a publication from within the country," Trinamul MP N.K. Sengupta said. TDP MP K. Rama Mohan Rao said the intention of any prospective foreign investor would not be profit. "They will come with their political agenda," he said.

CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan said the presence of foreign players would "distort our political and economic orientation, besides trying to influence our foreign policy."

I&B minister Sushma Swaraj had told a meeting of her ministry's parliamentary consultative committee some time ago that the government still stood by the 1955 cabinet resolution rejecting foreign participation in the print media.

- See Edit: Meddling with Media, Page 14
- Majority of newspapers say no, Page 7

25 JUN 2002

THE TIMES OF INDIA

VAJPAYEE TAKES OPP LEADERS INTO CONFIDENCE

Kalam NDA's choice for President

SR 11/6
Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 10. — After a weekend of frenetic political parleys which spilled over to this evening, the NDA chose Dr APJ Abdul Kalam as its presidential candidate.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee announced Dr Kalam's name at a meeting of the NDA tonight and appealed to all parties to support him, the Alliance convener, Mr George Fernandes, said after the meeting.

The chances of the country getting its first non-politician, non-bureaucrat head of the state appeared bright. The TDP, BSP and the SP have already given their consent, while the Congress and the Left parties have indicated they may not oppose Dr Kalam's candidature. A formal decision from both are expected tomorrow.

"We expect support from all political parties", Mr Fernandes said. The TDP leader, Mr N Chandrababu Naidu, and the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Miss Mayawati, were present at the NDA meeting that decided Dr Kalam's candidature and also when Mr Fernandes announced Dr Kalam's name.

Mr Vajpayee deserves credit for evolving a consensus and preventing a contest, which some party hardliners wanted by fielding the Maharashtra Governor, Mr PC Alexander, for the top post, BJP sources said.

Another move had sought to elevate the Vice-President, Mr Krishna Kant, to the top post. But there was stiff opposition from within the BJP. The Prime Minister snubbed both the Maharashtra lobby that was pushing the candidature of Mr Alexander and those in the party who were saying that the NDA was being forced to accept Mr Kant as he was the TDP's candidate.

He rejected both and hinted at the possibility of a third candidate at a high level meeting with his ministerial colleague yesterday. He spoke to Mr Naidu about the new thinking and took him into confidence on Dr

Dhanushkodi to Pokhran



- Born at Dhanushkodi in Tamil Nadu's Rameswaram district in '31
- Joined Madras Institute of Technology, '54
- Joined DRDO in 1958, ISRO in '62
- Awarded Padma Bhushan in '81
- Returned to DRDO as director, '82
- Scientific Adviser to defence minister, '92
- Awarded Bharat Ratna in '97
- On 11 May '98, he achieved his dream of seeing India become a nuclear power with the tests at Pokhran

Kalam's name. At the second meeting the same day, he dropped the name of Dr Kalam to his ministerial colleagues and said consensus should be evolved on him as both Mr Kant and Mr Alexander had become controversial. He spoke to Dr Kalam over

phone at 11-30 p.m. to take his consent, sources said.

The task today, therefore, was limited to placating Mr Naidu in Hyderabad which was done by making the parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Pramod Mahajan, have a one to one talk with him on the issue. Mr Mahajan spoke to him about the new choice and reservations some NDA leaders had on Mr Kant's name. He also prevailed upon Mr Naidu to be present in the capital at the time of announcement of Dr Kalam's candidature.

The Prime Minister's job thereafter was to take NDA allies and supporting parties into confidence. Even the AIADMK was consulted and its chief, Miss J Jayalalitha, gave her consent. Miss Mayawati too was informed and she decided to come to Delhi.

While Mr Vajpayee met the Congress chief, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, and the SP leader, Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav, he spoke to Opposition leaders such as Mr Harkishen Singh Surjeet (CPI-M), Mr AB Bardhan (CPI) and Mr PA Sangma (NCP).

By choosing Dr Kalam, the Prime Minister had sent a manifold message nationally and internationally. The pioneer of India's missile programme could be the country's head of the state as well. To the international community, the message was that the Central government was not opposed to minorities.

Dr Kalam tonight expressed happiness over being chosen for the top post, adds PTI from Chennai. He is now a professor at the Ramanujan Computing Centre, Anna University. Dr Kalam sent word through Dr Radhakrishnan, his coordinating officer, that he was "very happy". He said he would meet the press tomorrow.

■ BJP man may be Vice-President and other reports on page 6

11 JUN 2002

THE STATESMAN

NDA undecided, Opp eyes Narayanan again

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 9. — The failure of the Andhra Pradesh chief minister to reach the capital today forced the postponement of the NDA meeting after which the coalition was to declare its presidential nominee.

(Mr N Chandrababu Naidu, however, spoke to the Prime Minister on phone and sought to evolve a consensus on the issue, sources close to the chief minister said in Hyderabad, adds PTI. Mr Naidu is believed to have told Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee that a consensus is the need of the hour, but did not refer to any name.)

The choice between Mr Krishan Kant and Maharashtra Governor Mr PC Alexander became tougher after some BJP leaders calculated that Mr Naidu, who holds the key to the race, can be persuaded to support Mr Alexander.

The Opposition, which had almost reconciled itself to supporting Mr Kant, became active again today and decided to persuade Mr KR Narayanan to con-

test for another term and also look for an alternative if he rejected the proposal.

A team, including Congress, CPI-M, CPI and Samajwadi Party leaders, met Mr Narayanan to persuade him to run for a second term in case the NDA fielded Mr Alexander. Team members included Mr Manmohan Singh and Mr Natwar Singh (Congress), Mr HS Surjeet and Mr Sitaram Yechuri (CPI-M), Mr AB Bardhan (CPI) and Mr Amar Singh (Samajwadi Party).

Congress president Mrs Sonia Gandhi had earlier discussed with Mr Surjeet and Mr Bardhan the possibility of supporting Mr Kant as the candidate or backing Mr Karan Singh, sources said.

Mr Naidu was to come here today after the Prime Minister spoke to him yesterday, but he failed to make it due to a prior engagement, officials said. He is expected to come tomorrow.

Political circles, however, said he didn't turn up as he wanted to show his displeasure at the changed scenario.

Turn to page 6

10 JUN 2002

THE STATESMAN

NDA talks on presidential candidate today

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, June 8. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today invited Mr N Chandrababau Naidu for a final round of consultation on the NDA's Presidential candidate prior to the alliance' meeting tomorrow. The NDA is slated to announce its candidate after the meeting.

Strategists calculate Mr Naidu should be present when the NDA makes a formal announcement. It is, however, not clear if Mr Naidu has agreed to come tomorrow. After all, he had said he would have another round of consultation, if needed, a government source said.

The NDA meeting was originally slated for today, but had to be postponed as many of the allies' leaders were not available in Delhi. The strategists then proposed that the Prime Minister should first have another round of consultations with the TDP chief before announcing the name of the Presidential candidate.

The cautious NDA approach is seen in the context of the BJP sounding the NDA partners earlier that the Maharashtra Governor, Mr PC Alexander, was the NDA's choice for the top post. The

Congress's opposition and the reported reservations of Mr Naidu forced a rethink.

Before making any other announcement within the NDA, the leadership apparently wants to test Mr Naidu again and also request him to be present at the time of announcement. The statements of some TDP leaders that Mr Naidu was not keen on Mr Krishan Kant and that Mr Alexander could also be acceptable have forced another round of consultations.

The People's Front today tried to put pressure on the NDA saying that in absence of consensus, it was ready for a contest. The NDA's fear is that in case of Mr Alexander, the Opposition might adopt Mr Kant as their candidate.

"The NDA is indulging in the politics of confrontation. By not consulting us, they are forcing a contest and we are prepared for it," Mr Amar Singh and Mr Sitaram Yechury, Front leaders said.

Stating that the government should have taken initiative for a consensus for the highest post, Mr Singh said: "In case of elections, the entire Opposition would fight it jointly. We have already finalised a candidate, but we are giving the government the last chance."

6 9 1999

THE STATESMAN

2. 1. 11

PM shares step-by-step plan with Sonia

9 P.P.
NDA

245

G-1

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, May 19: Hinting at a "step-by-step campaign" against Pakistan, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today told the leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, that his government would do everything in its powers to end cross-border terrorism and would not bow to any external pressure.

Vajpayee today briefed Sonia about the diplomatic, administrative and military options being considered by the government. He said "national interest" alone would serve as the basis of his response.

Sources said Sonia gave Vajpayee a carte blanche to undertake whatever steps he deemed fit. Congress sources said home minister L.K. Advani and external affairs minister Jaswant Singh did most of talking from the government side.

Late in the evening, Sonia invited the Congress think tank at 10 Janpath to tell them about her meeting with the Prime Minister. The Congress leadership feels the government has kept all options, including limited military engagement, open to meet

the "extraordinary" situation.

In the 50-minute meeting with Vajpayee, Sonia was assisted by party colleague and the leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Manmohan Singh.

After the meeting, Jaswant said: "We shared our views on the current position... We briefed them (Congress leaders) about the situation, both on the diplomatic front as also on the border." He said Vajpayee would hold similar meetings with leaders of other political parties.

Asked if the government was considering a military option, Jaswant was tightlipped. The Congress leaders, too, were silent on the options listed by Vajpayee.

The Vajpayee-Sonia meeting takes place two days after the Lok Sabha, through a unanimous resolution, authorised the government to take whatever steps it considered suitable to counter cross-border terrorism.

The main Opposition party is fully backing the government on this issue. Yesterday, the Congress had welcomed the decision to ask Pakistan to withdraw its high commissioner, Ashraf Jehangir Qazi.

Ostensibly, Vajpayee had invited Sonia to discuss the possibility of the government and the Opposition arriving at a consensus on P.C. Alexander as the presidential candidate. Vajpayee said he wanted to talk about the presidential polls but national security events had taken priority.

"I would invite you again for presidential polls," he said without mentioning Alexander's name.

Sonia declined to either support or reject Alexander's name. She said there was a view in the Congress that K.R. Narayanan should continue, but the Congress Working Committee would take a decision.

The Congress is keen to continue with Narayanan and, in exchange, it is willing to accept former Rajasthan chief minister Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, a somewhat liberal face of the BJP, as Vice-President. The vice-presidential polls are scheduled for August, a month after the new President is elected.

Narayanan's candidature got a shot in the arm today when former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar backed him.

THE TELEGRAPH

20 MAY 2002

15/5
NDP

Poll bills were accounted for, Yashwant tells party

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 14 MAY

FINANCE MINISTER Yashwant Sinha, under fire for obtaining poll material from Flex Industries, on Tuesday asserted that he hadn't done anything wrong and that all his poll expenses had been duly accounted for. Flex Industries is currently facing investigation for organising bribes for senior government officials.

Addressing the BJP parliamentary party meeting here, a day before his scheduled statement in Parliament on the allegations levelled against him, Mr Sinha admitted that he had bought banners, posters and other poll material from Flex Industries in August, 1999. "But I made payments for all these material. I have receipts to prove my point. The payments were later incorporated in the details of poll expenses submitted to the Election Commission," the finance min-



SINHA: FLEXIBLE

ister told his party colleagues.

He went on to add that like all other candidates, he too, had sought help from many quarters to contest the election. "This help was in the form of vehicles and poll material, for which proper payments were made," he maintained. Mr Sinha claimed that it is well nigh impossible to check the credentials of people and agencies from which such help is sought during elections. "No one can predict whether they'll be arrested tomorrow on charges of malfeasance," he said. Most of the MPs present at the meeting seemed to concur with his views.

The finance minister's contention was supported by the minister of state in the Prime Minister's office, Mr Vijay Goel. "Political parties should come together and evolve a consensus on the issue. The Election Commission could take the initiative by preparing a list of individuals and organisations from whom funds could be obtained," he pointed out.

The Economic Times

16 MAY 2002

TDP rejects Speakership offer

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, MAY 4. The TDP has finally turned down the Bharatiya Janata Party's offer of Lok Sabha speakership, thus ending several days' suspense over the issue.

"We are not contesting for the post of Speaker", the TDP president and Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu announced at a press conference after a meeting of the party's politburo here tonight.

Mr. Naidu, however, made it clear that the TDP's support to the NDA Government would continue and that this would be issue-based.

Fielding questions the Chief Minister conceded that the Politburo decision not to contest for speakership was a mark of protest against the BJP leadership's refusal to sack the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi.

Asked whether the decision was a gain or loss to the TDP, he quipped, "we have taken a principled stand. It is not an issue of gain or loss.

He said the TDP's support to NDA would continue though it was not a member of the steering committee. Whenever the BJP violated the NDA agenda, the TDP registered its protest, he said citing the saffronisation and Ayodhya issues.

THE HINDU

5 MAY 2009

Allies look for rewards after vote

S.F. 9. P.P. - N.D.A

Some LS rules to chew over

NEW DELHI, May 2. — Rule 349 does not specify if chewing gum, paan or tobacco or eating anything inside the Lok Sabha is permitted during the proceedings. But the convention has it that no member is to eat or chew anything in the House. Drinking water is allowed. A seemingly innocuous remark from Mr. George Fernandes about Mrs Sonia Gandhi chewing gum during the Gujarat debate on 30 April plunged the Lok Sabha into chaos. The Congress members were on their feet protesting against Mr Fernandes's remarks. Mrs Gandhi was not the only member who was chewing something. Several others were seen chewing something or the other during the marathon debate.

There are, however, many other rules to guide the conduct of the members of the House which are treated with contempt. For instance, clause (i) of Rule 349 says: "While the House is sitting, a member shall not read any book, newspaper or letter except in connection with the business of the House."

A woman member from Andhra Pradesh is frequently seen reading novels in the House. Another of the 'don'ts' advises members not to interrupt the person given the floor by disorderly expression. There are occasions when members not only interrupt, but gesticulate in an indecent manner.

The Rule prohibits members from making "running commentaries", a common practice these days. MPs are not supposed to shout slogans in the House. A junior woman member of the Vajpayee government is often seen solving cross-words puzzles during the sittings. The Rule says a member "shall not leave the House immediately after delivering his speech". Even some former PMs and leaders of Opposition parliamentary parties are habitual offenders. — SNS

CL Manoj in New Delhi

May 2. — After the verbal demonstration of their "moral outrage" in the Lok Sabha over Gujarat, most of the NDA allies, while publicly nursing their "secular wounds", are deftly manoeuvring for grabbing their "pound of flesh" for voting along with the government.

The minister of state for external affairs, Mr Omar Abdullah, after going to the media with his "verbal resignation offer" to the Prime Minister and his "hard-hitting" speech in the Lok Sabha, quietly attended office today. Many in the Opposition chided his posturing that it was for the Prime Minister to take a decision on his resignation 'offer'. They said had Mr Abdullah really wanted to resign nobody could have prevented him from doing so as was done by Mr Ram Vilas Paswan. For many it was a gimmick played with an eye on the Muslim vote-bank in Jammu and Kashmir where Assembly elections are due and knowing full well the BJP's compulsions for retaining numbers.

Meanwhile, rumours are agog about the BJP trying to split Mr Paswan's Lok Janshakti, by trying to rope in two of his MPs. Already many allies are reportedly eyeing the portfolio of coal and mines, which has fallen vacant after Mr Paswan's resignation. With talk of a cabinet expansion after the Parliament session and reports of many "behind the scene

assurances", allies are dreaming of rewards. Equally upbeat is the AIADMK for the services fendered.

After briefing the media almost daily about her indignation over the Gujarat issue and insistence on having Mr Narendra Modi removed, Ms Mamata Banerjee today preferred not to talk to reporters. And all that the Mamata camp asserted is their determination to ensure the stability of the Vajpayee government, "because frequent elections are a very expensive affair which this country can ill afford".

Today Miss Banerjee was seen in the Lok Sabha vigorously gesticulating with her bandaged left arm at her Communist rivals.

A day after JD(U) rebel, Mr Devendra Prasad Yadav defied the whip and abstained from voting, his party clarified that he was the "only defining" member from their lot.

But any action is unlikely to follow and some jokingly said since the whip was issued for 30 April and his 'defiance' took place in the early hours of 1 May, the whip "is non-applicable".

The TDP, worried about the minority votes and rattled by the Congress campaign in Andhra Pradesh, is expected to continue sulking and may make contesting for the Speaker's post dependent on the government's removing Mr Modi. But there are also reports about serious rifts within the TDP over "strategy".

Women MPs demand George apology

NEW DELHI, May 2. — The strongest reverberations from the Lok Sabha's Gujarat debate are probably being felt by Mr George Fernandes. The defence minister has been asked to apologise by some Opposition women MPs for his speech during the debate.

Mr Fernandes himself has extracted an apology from the Congress MP, Mr Mani Shankar Aiyar, over the latter's remarks during the debate. And a CPI-M MP too refused to take an answer from the defence minister in the Lok Sabha, even though by parliamentary rules that meant the question was withdrawn.

Opposition women MPs in the Lok Sabha have taken exception to Mr Fernandes' speech which said inter alia, "this is not the first time that riots started in the country and it's not the first time that women were ill-treated and subjected to crimes like rape etc. and burnt alive."

The women MPs said that the defence minister was "making fun of rape and other atrocities committed against women". They said they have started a signature campaign against Mr Fernandes and are planning to submit a petition to the Deputy Speaker. Three MPs — Mrs Shiyama Singh and Prabha Rao of the Congress and AK Padmajam of the CPI-M - today held a press conference. They are seeking a discussion on the issue and an apology from the defence minister. They have threatened to boycott Mr Fernandes. — SNS

A win that exudes defeat

Dismiss Modi: that's the overwhelming logic of this debate

IN terms of numbers, the NDA coalition held. But it was an empty victory, one that did little for its moral stature, or its inherent integrity. If the cracks were wide and very visible, so was the desperation to fob off the Opposition's attack by any means available, even the most cynical one of deploying offence as the best means of defence. Since those in the government could not possibly justify the despicable developments in Gujarat they screamed themselves hoarse about the Opposition's perfidy, the Congress restlessness to gain power, or even the gum the leader of the Opposition allegedly chewed. Some found it expedient to raise memories of the 1984 riots. As if one horror can justify another. As if this country is incapable of learning from its past legacies of hatred and is forever ordained to lapse into primordial headhunting.

These, let us not forget, are men and women vested with the responsibility to guard the Constitution and the citizen and yet here they were glossing over the serious issues that Gujarat raises. If one were, for instance, to go by the burden of the Union Defence Minister George Fernandes' argument, citizens should count themselves fortunate if they and their children have not been disembowelled and thrown into bonfires, because, or so he argued, this has been a common phenomenon for the last 55 years. But there were many, even in the treasury benches, who winced at his words and this is where the fragility of the NDA coalition was most visible. Already, on the eve of the debate, two ministers — representing two parties in the coalition — had either resigned or offered to resign. The Trinamool Congress, while it had decided to vote with the gov-

ernment against the Opposition's motion, was arguably the most persistent among the BJP's allies in demanding Narendra Modi's resignation. Two members of the Janata Dal had defied the party whip and voted with the Opposition. Then there was the TDP which walked out on the issue of Modi's continuance in office. Even those who chose to quietly toe the BJP line summoned up the courage to mildly criticise the Modi government, with Rashid Alvi of the Bahujan Samaj Party highlighting the lack of law and order in the state and the DMK dwelling upon how the majority is duty-bound to protect the minorities in the country.

Therefore, while the NDA government may have won its latest test in Parliament by a comfortable margin, the articulation in the House spoke a different story. The debate conclusively affirmed that Gujarat is neither a state subject nor one that is an internal matter of the BJP; that it has major implications for the nation. It also set down for the record that the sentiment within the House was for the dismissal of the Modi government. Indeed, if the prime minister meant what he said, then his words too hold significance. He dwelt on the cruelties perpetrated on women and wondered how society had sunk to such depths. He felt that the country's existence and honour were at stake and that "if this disease is not checked, it will affect our society and culture". It is for precisely this reason that the man who presided over the madness that overtook Gujarat must be removed and the forces of law and justice be allowed to function without political interference. By allowing Modi to remain in office, the prime minister is rendering his own words meaningless yet again.

INDIAN EXPRESS

2 MAY 2007

HND-1 ✓
SONIA LEADS CHARGE AGAINST GOVT.

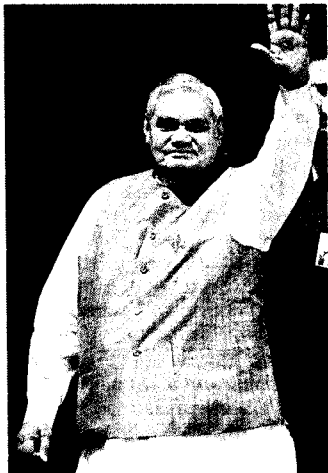
NDA cracks widen as Gujarat debate hots up in Lok Sabha

By Neena Vyas 115

NEW DELHI, APRIL 30. Chaotic scenes marked the debate on the Gujarat situation in the Lok Sabha today with the treasury benches showing more aggression than logic in their arguments and some cracks in their alliance and the Opposition making a blistering attack on the Government for its failure to contain and stop the continuing carnage in Gujarat.

After the exit of Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti from the National Democratic Alliance on Monday, it was the turn of the National Conference today to convey to the Prime Minister that it would not vote with the Government on the substantive motion in the Lok Sabha, but would abstain. The Minister of State for External Affairs, Omar Abdullah, also offered to resign from the Council of Ministers. And the Janata Dal (United) was finding it difficult to hold its members together on this issue.

What became obvious during the course of the speeches, the sparring, and the shouting was that the allies and the parties "friendly" to the NDA were one with the Opposition in their strong condemnation of the



continuing murder and arson in Gujarat and their demand for the removal of the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi. The Telugu Desam Party leader, K. Yerran Naidu, did not mince his words when he demanded Mr. Modi's immediate dismissal, but he also harped on the need for "stability" at the Centre.

The allies were not yet ready to stand up and be counted when it came to voting because of "political compulsions." The most that they were willing to do, as announced by the NC, was to abstain from voting.

The acrimonious scenes virtually prevented the Defence Minister and Samata Party leader, George Fernandes, from making his presentation — repeated interruptions stalled the House for almost an hour, and similar scenes were witnessed when Vaiko of the MDMK made his speech.

The Samajwadi Party leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, was the first to speak as the motion stood in the name of his party member. "How many more bodies have to be counted in Gujarat, and how many more incidents of arson you want before you act," he asked the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee.

"Those supporting the Government when their hidden agenda against the minorities was out in the open for everyone to see should remember that the issue at hand is not the survival of one Government or another, but the survival of the nation," he said.

The attack from the Opposition was unsparing, and their ranks were given a boost by an unexpected intervention from the former Prime Minister, Chandra Shekhar, who charged that the Sports Minister, Uma Bharti, speaking on behalf of

the Government and the Bharatiya Janata Party, had spoken more like a "Nazi volunteer" than a "sanyasin". The signal was that her speech was a disgrace to her saffron robes. The CPI(M) leader, Somnath Chatterjee, made a direct attack on the BJP, saying that Gujarat was witnessing a "State-sponsored genocide" which had been "masterminded by the State Chief Minister, Narendra Modi."

The Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, led the Congress party in a direct attack on the ruling coalition, spelling out in some detail incidents of rape and murder perpetrated in Gujarat. Appealing to the "nobler instincts" of the Prime Minister, she demanded that Gujarat be "put on notice under Article 355 of the Constitution." She said Mr. Vajpayee must "remove the Chief Minister for failing to fulfil his constitutional obligations... Appoint a sitting Supreme Court judge to ascertain the whole truth... Implement all the recommendations of the National Human Rights Commission." Let us act in a manner that once again the country becomes a "beacon for respecting and celebrating diversity," she said.

The arguments from the treasury benches tended to veer away from Gujarat to focus on all the sins of omission and commission by previous Congress regimes — the riots witnessed in Gujarat during Congress rule and the unspeakable horrors witnessed in Delhi when Sikhs were targeted in 1984.

Several times, the House was nearly disrupted — when Vaiko made sharp points about the 1984 Sikh massacres and the Congress responded by charging him with being close to the assassins of Rajiv Gandhi, and when Mr. Fernandes emphasised that for 40 years during its uninterrupted rule, the Congress had presided over "thousands" of riots across the country. He quoted from a 1980 study to establish that Muslims had not had a fair deal and they had been discriminated against.

Contrary to the general tenor of Ms. Bharti's speech, Mr. Fernandes did make the point that "we are not going to doubt the nationalism of those who are born here and live here." Perhaps the reference was to voices from the Sangh Parivar who have repeatedly dubbed almost the entire Muslim community as would-be ISI agents.

THE HINDU

ALLIANCE MPs MAY VISIT GUJARAT ON PEACE MISSION

NDA authorises PM to decide on Presidential nominee

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 11. The ruling National Democratic Alliance today adopted a formal resolution authorising the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to begin consultations and decide on a Presidential nominee for the elections due in mid-July when the five-year term of K.R. Narayanan ends.

No names were discussed at the NDA meeting today but the members were told that they were free to give their suggestions to the Prime Minister. It was felt that first the effort must be made to arrive at an agreed name within the NDA, then the consultation process must be expanded to include supporting parties such as the Telugu Desam and the Bahujan Samaj Party and finally, the Opposition parties could be involved.

The Presidential poll was the main subject on the agenda of the meeting which lasted over an hour. Apparently, the continuing violence in Gujarat was referred to in passing — the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, “explained” that his Ministry had credible information that efforts were being made by agents of Pakistan’s Inter-Services

Intelligence to sustain the violence in the State by offering material and other help. His explanation was in tune with what he had told the consultative committee members attached to his Ministry on Friday. There was also a suggestion that NDA MPs should help establish peace in Gujarat, for which some concrete steps were needed, the NDA convener, George Fernandes, later told reporters. (According to UNI, the NDA offered to send its MPs to help restore peace in different parts of the State.)

And, finally, a self-congratulatory resolution in relation to Pokhran-II four years ago was also passed at the meeting.

Although not stated in so many words, the mood at the NDA meeting was that the Government should choose its own candidate for the highest office. If the ruling coalition and the Opposition could arrive at a consensus that would be fine, otherwise the NDA should go ahead by proposing its own candidate even if that meant a contest.

The calculation is that although the Bharatiya Janata Party has lost several States — and, together with that the majority in the electoral colleges for the Presidential election from those States — the NDA is still in a position to get its own candidate elected

with the help of the TDP and the BSP. The BJP has been suggesting that it had been promised support by the TDP, but the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Chandrababu Naidu, who met Mr. Advani here today, indicated that he would disclose what his party will do at “an appropriate time”.

The resolution adopted at the NDA meeting today said: “National Democratic Alliance authorises the honourable Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to take the decision about the ensuing Presidential elections.

The NDA requests the Prime Minister to discuss the issue within the NDA partners and then with parties like the TDP and the BSP, who are supporting (the Government) from the outside, followed by consultations with Opposition parties before coming to a final decision.”

The Pokhran resolution stated that the Vajpayee Government had not given in to any pressure, that in spite of international opposition to India going nuclear, it had gone ahead with Pokhran-II in the national interest. Over the last four years the Government had faced many challenges on the security front and had met them successfully.

THE HINDU

12 MAY 2002

Paswan grabs Gujarat & Goa to exit

Heartland link in resignation

FROM KAY BENEDEICT

New Delhi, April 29: In a jolt to the NDA government, coal minister Ram Vilas Paswan today resigned from the Union Cabinet protesting against the government's inability to contain the violence in Gujarat.

The Lok Janshakti Party leader said he felt the Centre could have acted right at the beginning to stem the communal carnage. "The country's image is getting tarnished," he added, after sending his papers.

The Dalit leader was also agitated over Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's remarks in Goa against minorities.

The resignation came a day before the crucial motion under Rule 184 is taken up for voting in the Lok Sabha and hours after his bete noire, Bahuujan Samaj Party leader Mayavati, formally staked claim to form the next government in Uttar Pradesh.

Though Paswan's resignation will not destabilise the BJP-led government, the news has unnerved NDA managers.

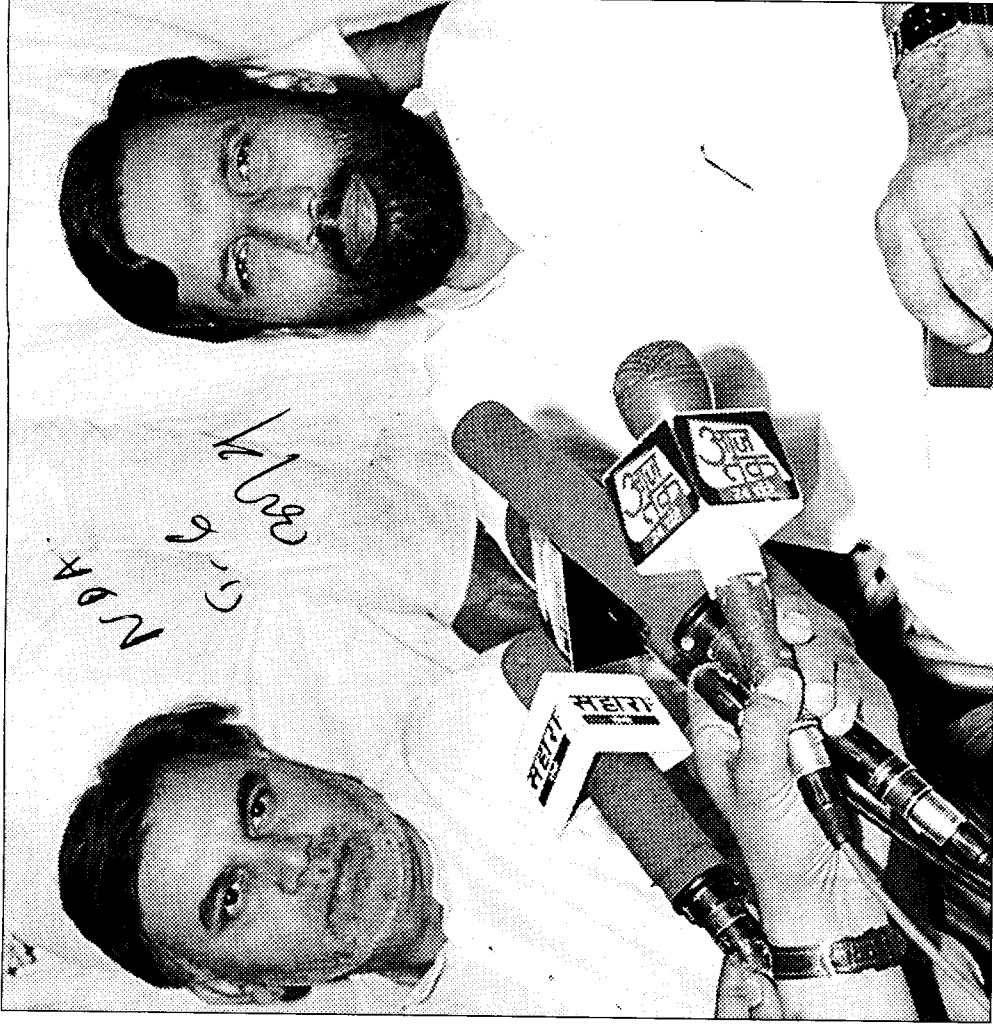
The four-member Lok Janshakti has decided to vote against the government tomorrow. Paswan did not attend the NDA meeting convened today to discuss the voting. There is no question of supporting the NDA from outside, he said.

Paswan's brother and Lok Sabha MP Ramchandra and party vice-president Ramvir Singh Biduri submitted the resignation in the Prime Minister's Office this morning.

Vajpayee tried to contact him soon after, but Paswan was not available.

Ending speculation that the NDA managers may try to convince him to take back the resignation, the Prime Minister forwarded his letter to President K.R. Narayanan after Paswan demanded President's rule in Gujarat.

Denying that his resignation



Ram Vilas Paswan at a news conference in Delhi after announcing his resignation. (PTI)

had anything to do with the BJP courting Mayavati for a second time, he said. "I took the step because as a minister it would have been difficult for me to remain neutral. I have received tremendous love and affection from the minorities and I cannot betray them at this crucial juncture."

Earlier, speculation was rife that Paswan might forge an alliance with the Congress in Bihar if the latter snapped its ties with Laloo Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janshakti Dal. A Con-

gress-Paswan alliance could attract upper caste votes and emerge as a formidable force in the state.

The Dalit leader had been uncomfortable for some time in the NDA. In the run-up to the Uttar Pradesh elections, the BJP had dumped the Lok Janshakti and opened covert dialogue with Mayavati. The BSP leader was allegedly responsible for Paswan's demotion from communications to coal.

Both Paswan and Mayavati

are Dalit leaders in their own right. The BJP preferred the latter as the saffron party plans to forge electoral alliances with the BSP in the Hindi belt to bolster its dwindling fortunes.

Paswan spoke to Telugu Desam Party chief Chandrababu Naidu, Trinamul Congress leader Mamata Banerjee and National Conference chief Farooq Abdullah — all partners in the NDA — and requested them to decide their party's stands on tomorrow's motion.

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Patna, April 29: Gujarat may have been his immediate provocation, but Ram Vilas Paswan's resignation from the Union Cabinet today has more reasons than that. To woo minority voters in Bihar is one of them, said his party workers here.

Humiliated since he was stripped of the telecom ministry last year, Paswan received a further raw deal after he launched his own outfit, the Lok Janshakti, and wanted to be a significant NDA partner in the Uttar Pradesh polls. Instead, his party was confined to eight seats in the state to help, as Paswan claimed, Mayavati.

Disillusioned, the coal minister declared that he would strike out on his own in future polls. In private, he fumed against the "arm-twisting of the BJP and its tacit understanding with the BSP". Looking for an opportunity to retaliate, Gujarat came in handy for Paswan.

He had realised that having snapped ties with the BJP in Bihar, the Lok Janshakti had become a one-caste outfit. If the minister were to win the next poll in his constituency, he would require a section of the Muslim and Yadav votes to keep him and his party in the reckoning.

Paswan had found favour with the minorities in his constituency, Hajipur. But following the 1999 general elections, when he joined the NDA, the minority voters drifted to the Laloo Prasad Yadav camp. The trend

LOSS AND GAIN	
EFFECTIVE LS STRENGTH	540
MAJORITY MARK	271
NDA	310
After Paswan's resignation	306
Likely abstentions	
TDP, NC, ADMK	44
If they abstain, the effective strength of the House will be down to 496	
New majority mark	249
NDA + BSP	286
*NDA after likely abstention of allies	

continued in the Bihar polls the following year in which the winning margin of Paswan's candidates dropped sharply.

Ramchandra Paswan, the minister's brother and one of the three party MPs, said: "The Bihar dynamics of Paswan politics will not create any confusion though Paswan, like Laloo Prasad Yadav, has been demanding Modi's resignation. We are bound to touch a soft chord of the minority members."

Lok Janshakti state president Narendra Singh said the minority community in Bihar had expressed satisfaction with Paswan's decision to resign. "What Yadav speaks about, Paswan has demonstrated his courage of actually doing it," he said.

In recent meetings with state party leaders, Paswan had disclosed that he would quit the NDA if Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi did not resign by April 30.

RESIGNATION LINKED TO GUJARAT

Paswan quits, govt unruffled

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, April 29. — Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's resignation from the Union Cabinet and the decision to ask four members of his Lok Janshakti Party to vote against the government on the censor motion on Gujarat in the Lok Sabha tomorrow created a momentary stir in the NDA ranks.

The coalition, however, survived the "shock", pulling itself together swiftly. The promptness with which Mr Paswan's resignation was accepted indicated that the NDA brass was not keen to persuade the coal and mines minister to reconsider his move. The resignation letter was delivered at the Prime Minister's office in the Lok Sabha at 4.15 p.m. by party MP Mr Ram Chandra Paswan and LJP vice-president Mr Ram Vir Singh Bidhuri. NDA leaders were informed of the development at the alliance meeting at 5 p.m. and his resignation letter was forwarded to the President at 5.30 p.m.

Mr Paswan's taking the high moral ground — linking his resignation to the Gujarat situation — did not find many takers in the NDA even as he had talks with Miss Mamata Banerjee, Dr Farooq Abdullah and Mr Chandrababu Naidu after resigning. His potential allies on the issue vouched for the stability of the Vajpayee government and pledged their support to it on the crucial vote.

Trinamul Congress chief Miss Mamata Banerjee said: "We do not want to destabilise the government on a state issue. We will vote for the government, but demand Mr Modi's removal."

JD (U) leader and labour minister Mr Sharad Yadav said his party was in the process of issuing a whip to its members, while the BSP, with its 14 members, today declared its support to the government.

All coalition partners, excluding the National Conference and the TDP, have issued three-line whips for the voting. NDA convener Mr George

Fernandes said: "The NDA is a very strong coalition and Mr Paswan's resignation is no shock to it... the alliance remains firmly united. The government has a comfortable majority... and would prove it tomorrow."

The Prime Minister tried to contact Mr Paswan after the resignation was received at his office but he was unavailable. Mr Fernandes said till noon they expected the minister to participate in the NDA meeting as he was in regular touch with his office.

BJP leaders said the LJP leader was distressed over Miss Mayawati's refusal to include his two

party members in the new UP government. Mr Paswan had also been sulking since he was moved from the high-profile communication ministry last year. Resigning on the eve of discussion in the Lok Sabha provided him the "right political issue" where he could claim to have quit for a cause.

Mr Paswan, however, sought to deny this. "I have been under tension for the past month over the Centre's failure in dealing with Gujarat situation... the Centre cannot escape its responsibility. The resignator should not be linked with developments in UP."

Meanwhile, the Congress summoned Bihar Congress president Dr Shakeel Ahmed to Delhi soon after Mr Paswan

announced his resignation.

Paswan closer to Cong: LJP leaders are viewing Mr Paswan's resignation as the "first step" to join hands with the Congress and step up the "war" or the BJP-led alliance. Bihar unit president Mr Narendra Singh said in Patna there was a strong possibility of the party aligning with the Congress.

Allies on motion: DMK president Mr M Karunanidhi today said in Chennai his party would not support the censure motion in the Lok Sabha. INLD leader Mr Om Prakash Chautala said in Bangalore that the party would extend support to the NDA and ruled out voting for the motion. He, however, regretted the continuing violence in Gujarat.

President's vote-eve peace appeal

NEW DELHI, April 29 — In a significantly timed attempt, aimed at putting added pressure on the government on the eve of the vote in Parliament under Rule 184, the President, Mr KR Narayanan, expressed his "anguish" today at the "killings" in Gujarat.

In a message issued late tonight and clearly intended as a rebuke to the government, he spoke of being "deeply anguished and pained at the violence that has disturbed the peace and harmony in Gujarat and elsewhere." He appealed "to all my fellow citizens to restore communal harmony..." — SNS

NDA to decide strategy today

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 28. The constituents of the National Democratic Alliance, who spoke against the continuation of the Narendra Modi Government in Gujarat, are yet to finalise the party stand on the discussion in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

The discussion under Rule 184, which entails voting, is being seen by the Opposition as an opportunity for the "secular-minded" allies of the NDA to re-

cord a definitive opinion in the House.

The NDA would meet here tomorrow to draw up its strategy ahead of the April 30 discussion.

The Opposition-sponsored motion was admitted by the Deputy Speaker, P.M. Sayeed last week. The NDA convenor, George Fernandes, has called a meeting of the allies on Monday evening.

The meeting would be chaired by the Prime Minister,

Atal Behari Vajpayee.

For the past few weeks, the Opposition leaders have been challenging the BJP allies, such as the Telugu Desam Party, the Janata Dal (United), the Lok Janshakti and the Trinamool Congress to keep off the BJP.

The Janata Dal (United) MPs who were vociferous in their protest against the continuing violence in Gujarat and demanded the immediate removal of Mr. Modi, would have an opportunity to take a stand at the

parliamentary party meeting.

Although no official meeting has been scheduled, party sources said a discussion would be held after the MPs return here to attend the session tomorrow.

The JD-U has six MPs including the Union Minister, Sharad Yadav.

Just as the Telugu Desam, some allies who had joined the chorus appear to adopt a cautious line and watch the course the debate on the issue takes.

While the Trinamool Congress had earlier suggested that it would follow the TDP, the party chief, Mamata Banerjee, said that it would not like to side with any move that was against the Vajpayee Government.

Meanwhile, the BJP has found a new ally in the Bahujan Samaj Party. With 13 MPs, if the party decides to vote against the Opposition-sponsored motion, it would mean a major shift in its stance.

Alternatively, it could abstain from voting. The BSP Parliamentary Party is expected to meet on the day of the debate to firm up the stand.

NC decision on Tuesday

PTI reports from London:

The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister and National Conference president, Farooq Abdullah, tonight said that his party, which has five MPs in the Lok Sabha, would decide on Tuesday whether or not to support the Government on the censure motion.

In Delhi, the NC MP, Abdul Rashid Shaheen, said a "strong section" of the party favoured abstaining from voting on the motion in the Lok Sabha.

29 APR 2002

THE HINDU

21/4
'OPPOSITION STAND ON GUJARAT RIDICULOUS'

NDA is united, says PM

HD-1

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 20. Reverting to his pre-Panaji stance when he had taken a strong position against the Gujarat violence, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today sought to silence speculation over differences in the ruling National Democratic Alliance and, in turn, asked the

Opposition to join the Government in fighting the scourge of communalism.

Delivering the inaugural address at an all-India conference on the 'Role of the Voluntary Sector in National Development' here, Mr. Vajpayee blamed the Opposition for the current impasse in Parliament and said its insistence on dis-

cussing Gujarat under a particular rule had reached a "ridiculous level".

Explaining the Government's position, he said: "We have nothing against a discussion, but differ with the Opposition on the rule under which it should be taken up."

Of the view that the Opposition was pressing for the discussion under a particular rule only to show the NDA to be weak, he asserted: "NDA is one and there is no difference of opinion within the ruling alliance."

Though his written text made no mention of Gujarat, the issue was forced upon the Prime Minister by the preceding speaker, Nafisa Barot from Uthan in Gujarat, who made an impassioned plea for a direction from the powers that be at a time when her "beloved Gujarat and civic society in the State is at a crossroads".

Stating that the Gujarat violence had been criticised with "kathor shabd" (harsh words), Mr. Vajpayee — in an oblique reference to the CPI(M) leader, Somnath Chatterjee's observation that "if the incidents in Gujarat could make the Prime

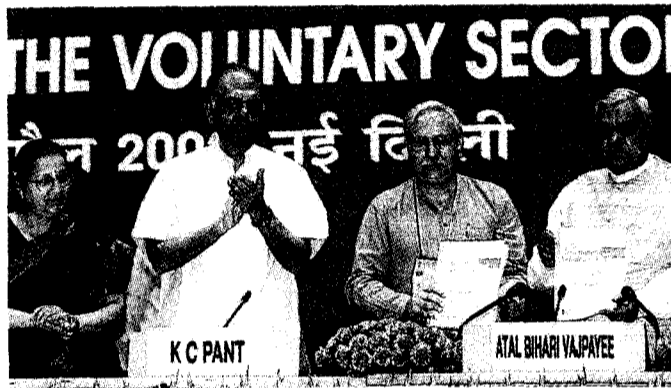
Minister feel ashamed, it obviously is not a simple matter that can be discussed in a cursory manner" — said the Opposition was trying to nail him with his own "harsh words".

He also mulled over India's choice of secularism instead of opting for a theocratic state despite the environment in the neighbourhood.

"There is unanimity that there should be no discrimination on the basis of caste or creed. Any aberration ought to be condemned and fought," he said adding that the Gujarat violence had put a question mark on all the efforts of the country since Independence.

Addressing Ms. Barot in person, the Prime Minister said the country had seen and survived worse situations in the past. "We have to fight this evil and cannot lose courage."

Then, the poet in him surfaced: "The night may be dark, but the small lamps of hope — epitomised by those who braved the odds to help people in need, irrespective of which community they belonged to — will show us the way."



The Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, releasing the compendium of partnership between the Government and the voluntary sector in New Delhi on Saturday. The Minister of State for Human Resource Development, Sumitra Mahajan, the Planning Commission Deputy Chairman, K.C. Pant, and the representative of the voluntary sector, Rajesh Tandon, are also seen. — Photo: V. Sudershan

THE HINDU

A Way Out

Whether Ram Vilas Paswan's dramatic, if belated, walkout from the NDA has an impact on Tuesday's vote in the Lok Sabha remains to be seen. However, it is certain to cause some discomfort to a government doing and redoing its arithmetic. Sadly for Gujarat, and the thousands of victims of the past two months of violence, the entire exercise has become hostage to political calculations. The vote was an opportunity for the political parties — whether those forming the ruling coalition or the opposition — to rise above partisan considerations and unanimously endorse effective steps to douse the burning fires of Gujarat and start the process of relief and rehabilitation. The opposition-sponsored motion under rule 184 censures the government in general terms without seeking effective action. This has enabled the government to reject the motion outright on the grounds that it cannot be expected to vote for its own censure. Indeed, the two irreconcilable positions have ensured that the House would be split down the line on an issue of such gravity as Gujarat. It is a matter of regret that the government and the opposition did not explore a via media which would convey the strong sense of the House on Gujarat, in particular spell out its national security and national interest implications, and urge strong Central intervention as mandated in the Constitution. A resolution on these lines, moved by the Congress, is to come up before the Rajya Sabha. To quote: "That this House expresses its deep sense of anguish at the persistence of violence in Gujarat... and urges the Central government to intervene effectively under Article 355 of the Constitution to protect the lives and properties of the citizens..."

The motion reflects the maturity of the Congress in more ways than one. First, it shows the principal opposition as thinking ahead in terms of restoring peace and normality in Gujarat. Second, the motion presents the government with a fait accompli in that it specifically asks for action under the Constitution. By rejecting the motion, the government can only cause acute embarrassment to itself. Should the Congress even now press for a similar motion in the Lok Sabha, it will have done the nation a great service. Neither the government nor the opposition appears to have understood the foresight of our founding fathers in providing for Article 355 to deal with the situations of the present type. Thanks to the past misuse of Article 356, there has till now not been much opportunity to give attention to the full scope and implications of Article 355. While the Centre has threatened to invoke the Article on various occasions, perhaps the only time it was acted upon was in December 1992, when Narasimha Rao deployed security forces around Ayodhya against the protests of then chief minister Kalyan Singh. However, the Article was not used appropriately to prevent the demolition of the mosque. If an offer by the opposition to pass a sense of the House resolution, unanimously requesting the Union government to act under Article 355, is rejected by the prime minister, then surely he will expose himself to the charge that he was unwilling to exercise the due responsibility of the Union government in a matter involving national interests and national security. Can we hope to see statesmanship on the part of the prime minister and the opposition?

Paswan parts ways with NDA

'We will vote against govt in Lok Sabha'

Times News Network

PATNA: Expressing dissatisfaction with the Union government's handling of the Gujarat crisis, coal and mines minister Ram Vilas Paswan resigned from the cabinet and snapped his party's ties with the NDA on Monday.

The Lok Janshakti Party chief said he had always been demanding the removal of Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi and would vote against the Vajpayee government during the censure motion in the Lok Sabha. "It would have been unethical to remain in the ministry and vote against the same government," he added.

"It is true that Ram Vilas Paswan has resigned. The Prime Minister has accepted his resignation and sent it to the President," parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan informed the Lok Sabha when opposition members were vociferous in their demands for a statement on the matter just before finance minister Yashwant Sinha was to begin his reply on the finance bill.

Mr Paswan said it had taken him

PASWAN SAYS RAM, RAM TO NDA AT GUJARAT CROSSROAD



Ram Vilas Paswan at his residence in New Delhi after resigning from the cabinet on Monday.

What the figures in the Lok Sabha foretell

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The censure motion against the government in the Lok Sabha under Rule 184, which entails a vote, is likely to be defeated by about 40 votes, sources in parliament say.

Following is the likely arithmetic of votes.

Total number of MPs in LS: 545

Vacant: Three seats

Potential abstentions (including TDP 28, National Conference 5, and AIADMK 11): 44

Effective voting: 498

To win, the government needs: 249 votes

Total strength of NDA: 312 (including TDP and NC)

If TDP and NC abstain, NDA strength: 279

With BSP support of 13: NDA strength goes up to 292

With exit of Lok Janashakti (4): NDA stands at 288

Opposition strength: 198

With NCP (8) votes: Opposition totals 206

Against a simple majority of 249, the government looks assured of 292 votes, winning by a margin of 39.

two months to resign because he had been discussing the issue with Telugu Desam Party chief Chandrababu Naidu and Mamata Banerjee of the Trinamul Congress. "It was a big decision to make," he added.

Mr Paswan said he would have no truck with Laloo Prasad Yadav in Bihar and would support any move to fight the "jungle raj" presided over by Mr Yadav. "I had joined the NDA to fight the jungle raj," he said.

► See Edit: A Way Out, Page 8

✓ ALLIES HAVE ^{✓✓}CROSSED THE LIMIT: RSS

PM to counter Farooq move on conclave

SRM 19/4
Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, April 18. — The Prime Minister has reportedly decided to convene a meeting of the NDA parliamentary party next week to counter Dr Farooq Abdullah's proposal for a conclave of non-BJP partners of the ruling alliance.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's meeting would also act as the NDA's show of strength for the Opposition which has been demanding a discussion on Gujarat under Rule 184 that entails a vote.

NDA managers have always been wary of any move to form sub-groups within the alliance because that would create parallel power centres. The dissident group in the coalition seems to have cooled down on the Gujarat issue.

Miss Mamata Banerjee, however, demanded dissolution of the Gujarat Assembly and imposition of President's rule as well as immediate implementation of the rehabilitation package for the riot victims, SNS adds from Kolkata. She said she hadn't discussed her demand with the TDP.

Miss Banerjee iterated she would support the Vajpayee government in the event of a no-confidence vote and expressed the hope that other allies, too, would do the same.

At the meeting of NDA parliamentary floor managers today, the Trinamul Congress and Janata Dal-U, which have so far been staying away, were present. The leaders decided that they wouldn't accept the Opposition's demand for a discussion under Rule 184 that requires a division, but would be open for a debate under Rule 193.

(The RSS said NDA allies have crossed limits of propriety in demanding Mr Modi's resignation. "It's the BJP's prerogative to decide the chief minister of a state ruled by it," RSS spokesman Mr MG Vaidya said. "If you're talking about crushing violence and demanding Mr Modi's resignation, the chief ministers of Bihar and J&K, too, should resign.")

(The VHP, too, opposed the demand for Mr Narendra Modi's removal and criticised the Vajpayee government for not being as "effective" as it should have been, PTI adds from Nagpur. With the on-going religious polarisation, it said, the country was heading towards "pre-Partition" days.)

9-P-P-NDA
Senior BJP leaders are reconciled to the fact that the party's relation with the TDP will remain "slightly restrained" till the crisis on the Gujarat issue blows over. They're confident that the party won't sever ties with the NDA, at least not in the near future, because of its own political compulsions.

NDA floor managers are also trying to ensure that they don't give out any signal about being indifferent to the demands or advice from the Andhra Pradesh chief minister, Mr N Chandrababu Naidu. The Gujarat Cabinet's decision to defer a decision on dissolution of the Assembly was a step in that direction. Senior leaders, including Mr George Fernandes and Mr Venkaiah Naidu, are in touch with the TDP chief and it's understood that he would make a calibrated retreat.

NDA leaders believe that even the TDP would agree to a discussion without a vote as this would give it an opportunity to attack the coalition without exercising the voting option. They wouldn't mind as long as the party continues supporting the coalition.

To keep Miss Mamata Banerjee in good humour, NDA bosses have once again offered her a plum ministerial berth. She would be taken into the Cabinet in the next reshuffle in May. Miss Banerjee will reach Delhi on Monday and is expected to take an active role in convincing the allies to stay together at this juncture.

Parliament impasse continues

Parliament remained paralysed for the fourth day today on the Gujarat issue, PTI adds. The Lok Sabha Deputy Speaker convened a meeting of all parliamentary groups tomorrow to try and break the deadlock.

Quite uncharacteristically, Mr PM Sayeed used some strong words against the Treasury benches for going public with statements that they were "not accepting" a censure discussion on the issue. "It's the Speaker's prerogative to decide, but keeping in mind the situation... and because it's a sensitive issue I want to go for a consensus," he told journalists. In both Houses, the Opposition demanded a discussion under Rule 184 (censure). The government, backed by allies, including the Trinamul and JD-U, opposed the demand.

More reports on page 6

Amma Joins 'Remove Modi' Camp, Naidu Sticks To His Guns

NDA reels under Gujarat pressure

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 17 APRIL

THE NDA government, on Wednesday, came under more pressure on the Gujarat issue. Tamil Nadu chief minister and AIADMK supremo J. Jayalalithaa joined the "remove Narendra Modi" chorus, while TDP supremo N. Chandrababu Naidu stuck to his guns. The deadlock in Parliament continued, with both Houses being adjourned for the third consecutive day and three allies boycotting the ruling front's meeting.

"What is needed is a change of government. It is up to the BJP and the central government to take necessary steps in Gujarat in the national interest," Ms Jayalalithaa told reporters in Chennai on Wednesday. The assertion clearly belied the impression that the AIADMK was cosying up to the BJP and would have supported the government in the eventuality of a vote on the Gujarat issue.

The move added further impetus to the Opposition drive, but the NDA stuck to its guns. It met on Wednesday to once again reject the demand for a discussion on the Gujarat, but the Trinamool Congress, JD(U) and Lok Jan Shakti absented themselves from the meeting.

"The NDA leaders were of the unanimous view that the Gujarat situation was not a subject for discussion at Parliament. If you raise state matters, then tomorrow there will be demands for discussing West Ben-

gal and Andhra Pradesh," NDA convenor and defence minister George Fernandes told reporters here. Notwithstanding the bluster, there were clear signs to suggest that the government was under considerable pressure on the issue. The Gujarat Cabinet's move to defer a decision on dissolution of the Assembly and hold elections is a clear pointer that the BJP leadership is not keen to precipitate matters and had decided to come halfway to meet the TDP's demand.

The TDP, however, made it clear that it had no intentions of providing succour to the BJP until it obliged with the twin demand of removing Mr Modi. The TDP supremo and the Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu asserted on Wednesday that there would be "no compromise on the ideological fight." The party reiterated that it wanted an immediate discussion in the Lok Sabha on the issue. TDP MPs joined the Opposition on Wednesday near the Parliament main gate to shout slogans demanding removal of Mr Modi.

With Parliament at a standstill on the Modi issue, the government is concerned about its inability to transact business in both Houses. Efforts to get Parliament running again have been initiated by the deputy speaker, Mr P.M. Sayeed. A meeting of all leaders has been convened by Mr Sayeed in the bid to break the impasse and reach an amicable solution on the Rule under which the Gujarat issue can be debated. Ms Jayalalitha told reporters in Chennai: "I do not think there is any need for advancing the Assembly elections there. What is needed is a change of government."



BACK IN BUSINESS

House impasse may relegate Budget to the backburner

Swaraj Thapa
NEW DELHI 17 APRIL

HAD PARLIAMENT functioned normally, the exercise of discussion and voting on the allocations for both the Union and the Railways budget, apart from discussion on the Finance Bill, 2002, would have begun on Wednesday.

But the continuing deadlock between government and Opposition over the Gujarat issue appears to have scotched the possibility of a full fledged debate on the budget proposals as well as the Finance Bill. While voting on the budgetary allocations cannot be avoided, the standoff may now force it to be passed peremptorily without proper deliberation.

As per the calendar agreed upon by the Opposition and government at the start of the session, the discussion on the Union budget was to begin on April 17, preceded by a discussion and voting on the demand for grants (railways). In the next five days (April 18 to 24) the demands for grants (general) was to be discussed, pertaining to the ministries of Agriculture, Defence and Home affairs. The demands for grants were then expected to be put to vote on April 24. Then, three days from April 26 to 29 had been allocated for consideration and passing the finance bill, 2002.

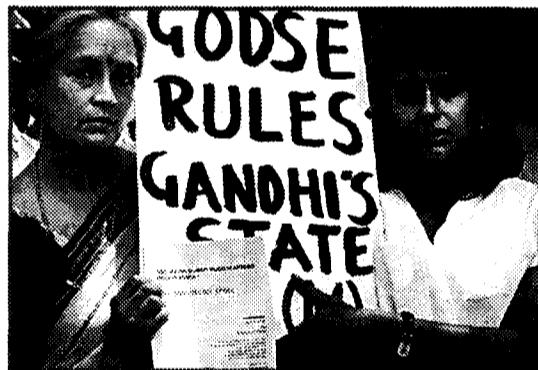
Parliamentary officials, however, are still not giving up and are hopeful that important business relating to the Budget can be proceeded ahead with, if the stalemate ends in the next few days. According to officials, there are still 20 sittings to go between April 18 and May 17, the last day of this session.

Modi govt defers decision to dissolve state Assembly

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 17 APRIL

BOWING TO wishes of the BJP's allies at the Centre, the Narendra Modi government on Wednesday decided against precipitating a crisis by deferring a decision on the dissolution of the Gujarat Assembly and calling fresh elections. The decision, widely anticipated after the BJP top brass impressed upon Mr Modi not to aggravate matters by going in for snap polls, is likely to give the much-needed elbowroom to the Vajpayee government to negotiate with allies such as the TDP, the Trinamool Congress and the Lok Jan Shakti, who've been on a warpath with their demand to sack Mr Modi for his failure to contain the communal strife in the state.

The decision not to go in for early polls had an immediate fallout. Softening her stance, Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Bannerjee, who, along with Andhra Pradesh chief minister N Chandrababu Naidu, had been in the forefront of the "oust Modi campaign", said removal of the Gujarat chief minister was "an



BY GODSE DECREE: Nafisa Ali and Nandita Das at a protest rally in New Delhi on Tuesday, against the recent Gujarat violence. — AP

internal matter of the BJP". BJP sources viewed the Gujarat Cabinet announcement as "the first step" to defusing tension with the ruling coalition.

Key allies skip NDA meet, bloc rejects Oppn demand

New Delhi
17 APRIL

THE NDA on Wednesday met without three key allies — Trinamool Congress, JD (U) and Lok Jan Shakti, and went on the offensive on the Narendra Modi issue by rejecting the Opposition demand for a discussion on the Gujarat issue in Parliament, charging it with violating Constitutional norms by raising state matters.

The three allies, which were not present at the impromptu meeting, are demanding removal of Modi and opposing immediate elections in the state, like the TDP and the Opposition. "The meeting of NDA leaders was of the unanimous view that the Gujarat situation was not a subject for discussion. If you raise state matters, then tomorrow there will be demands for discussing West Bengal and Andhra Pradesh," NDA

convenor and defence minister George Fernandes told reporters here. The meeting was held after both Houses of Parliament were adjourned for the third consecutive day on Wednesday on the issue.

Asked whether the Gujarat Government's move to defer a decision on dissolution of the Assembly and holding of polls was part of a "compromise formula" to placate the TDP which is demanding Modi's ouster, Mr Fernandes merely said: "Earlier there was talk of holding elections but not immediately."

Assailing the Opposition for stalling Parliament on the issue, Mr Fernandes said the NDA leaders will have daily meetings from Thursday to ensure that both Houses of Parliament run. "All NDA partners will attend the floor leaders' meeting to be held daily from Thursday to chalk out the strategy," BJP spokesman V. K. Malhotra said.



FERNANDES

— PTI

TUESDAY, APRIL 16, 2002

A DANGEROUS GAMEPLAN

40-10

THE ANDHRA PRADESH Chief Minister, Chandrababu Naidu's decision not to rock the boat of the Atal Behari Vajpayee Government, at least for the moment, has come as a breather for the NDA. So vehement was Mr. Naidu's disapproval of the BJP's adamant in backing the stigmatised Chief Minister of Gujarat, Narendra Modi, and of its cynical gameplan to politically capitalise on the communal polarisation post-Godhra by seeking a fresh mandate that his Telugu Desam Party's parting of ways with the ruling coalition appeared the only logical course open to him. The TDP leadership has, in fact, been beaming clear signals to that effect ever since the BJP's decision to back Mr. Modi to the hilt was known, and it looked as if the party had had enough. In the event, however, Mr. Naidu ended up deciding against withdrawal of support, after the NDA came out with a formal and apparently ritualistic appeal to its 'most valued friend' (TDP) not to part company; it was as though he was waiting for such a 'gesture' from the coalition leadership to avoid taking the plunge. His claim that the 'withdrawal of support' question was still open and the "final decision" would depend on what the Prime Minister was going to say in Parliament on 'removal of Mr. Modi' lacks credibility for the simple reason that Mr. Vajpayee and every other top BJP leader has, repeatedly and unequivocally, ruled out any going back on the party executive's Goa resolution.

In a way, the TDP or the NDA constituents such as the Janata Dal(U), Trinamool Congress and the Lok Janshakti Party who are insistent on Mr. Modi being shown the door, found themselves checkmated by the BJP when it cited a political party's fundamental and inalienable right to decide who should or who should not be the Chief Minister in a State where it enjoys an absolute legislative majority of its own and maintained that such a right cannot in any way be abridged

16/4

or encroached upon just because that party happened to be a partner in a coalition at the Centre. Like the democratic principle of going to the people for a fresh mandate — the one relied upon by the BJP to upstage the 'oust Modi' campaigners — this position is also not open to challenge. But the fact remains that no coalition member can legitimately invoke this 'immunity' provision and fend off criticism or intervention from its co-partners when the issues at stake critically impinged on national concerns and threatened to erode the core elements of the constitutional framework, as is the case with Gujarat under Mr. Modi. No less perverse is to project — as the NDA's resolution has done — the demand for the ouster of Mr. Modi as an attempt to get Delhi to "interfere" in the "democratic functioning of States" and then proceed to claim that it would "completely distort the constitutional balance of federalism".

Politically speaking, if the BJP's Goa line had an unmistakable 'aggressive Hindutva' thrust — as evidenced by its strategic initiatives in Gujarat — the way it has handled the 'rebellious' NDA partners revealed a new firmness and an air of self-assurance. And this has to do with the BJP's supreme confidence of roping into the NDA new members (such as the Bahujan Samaj Party) with enough strength to sustain the Vajpayee Government, even if the TDP and a few other outfits decide to walk out. True, there may not be any serious threat to the BJP-led regime at least in the near future, although the composition of the coalition may undergo a change. But the stark reality is that the BJP seems determined to make 'Gujarat', where Mr. Modi has operationalised its divisive ideology (going by the name 'cultural nationalism'), a test case for possible replication nationwide. At this critical juncture, all secular parties have a pressing obligation to defend the constitutional values of secularism, pluralism and social cohesion by joining forces.

Naidu angry but dithers over support

Statesman News Service

HYDERABAD/DELHI, April 15. — Mr Chandrababu Naidu today was non-committal on continuing support to NDA, but renewed his demand for Mr Modi's resignation for "presiding over" the Gujarat killings. "It's all happening because of them," he said, asked about the BJP's secular credentials, adding that the TDP would continue the Gujarat battle in Parliament.

Mr Naidu denied he was interfering with internal BJP matters: "Mr Vajpayee is a BJP candidate, but (he is) the NDA PM. When *Time* magazine writes 'Bloody India', it affects the country's image", he said in Hyderabad today.

But the BJP, however, feels it would tide over its problems with allies such as the TDP by assuring them that it would not dissolve the Gujarat Assembly and order fresh polls, at least not till September, by which time it hopes the crisis will peter out, sources in the party said.

Mr Naidu sidestepped questions on the possibility of withdrawing support at the Centre, and if the TDP politburo discussed the issue last night.

Seeking to dispel the impression that his party's "belligerence" can destabilise the NDA, Mr Naidu said: "During the last four years we never sought to destabilise the government. On Gujarat, we have taken a principled stand without prejudice against any individual."

Asserting his party was "not interested in power" and its support to NDA was based on "secularism", he said he will press the issue "till the leadership is changed" in Gujarat.

GOA GAMBIT PAYS FOR THE MOMENT

Allies blink at BJP hard talk

Sanjay Singh in New Delhi

April 15. — The BJP's Goa gambit has paid off, at least temporarily. After its clean chit to Mr Narendra Modi at the conclave, BJP leaders were in an aggressive mode today, flaunting the new-found strategy to keep NDA allies in check. And the fact that both Houses of Parliament were adjourned over Gujarat today seemed not to bother them in the least.

The party's new-found combativeness was reflected in the comments of spokesperson Mr VK Malhotra: "How many times do they (the Opposition) want to discuss Gujarat? The Opposition cannot decide the fate of a BJP chief minister by stalling Parliament. If that was the case, the fate of 14 Congress chief ministers would have been different. They are raising a hue and cry about early elections in Gujarat, which we think is the right way to seek public opinion over the accusations levelled against the state government. The Congress had fixed different standards for itself when Rajiv Gandhi forced early elections in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination."

A section of the BJP leadership, however, have still not come to terms with the brazen way in which Mr Modi had offered his resignation at the BJP conclave and the manner in which the party executive succumbed by passing a drafted resolution without a debate to reject his offer.

But the Damocles' sword of "discipline" that hangs over them has stifled murmurs. The party proposal to dissolve the Gujarat Assembly and seek a fresh mandate now works as a double-

edged weapon: it has silenced Mr Modi's critics within the party and also given the BJP a bargaining chip for negotiation with allies.

Several coalition partners today said they would persist on the demand for Mr Modi's removal, but remained evasive on whether they would support a censure motion on Gujarat in Parliament. Allies are likely to meet tomorrow to discuss floor strategy in the House. NDA leaders like Mr Devendra P Yadav (JD-U), Mr P Singh

(Samata) and Mr KY Naidu (TDP) met after Parliament today to talk strategy.

But other coalition leaders including Mr Nitish Kumar stood firmly with the Centre: "Gujarat government is stable; the BJP has every right to run its government with its majority. Allies should limit their concern to the NDA agenda."

The Shiromani Akali Dal, a BJP ally, sought the Centre's intervention to control violence in Gujarat, adds PTI from Chandigarh.

VHP happy, Sena happier
The VHP today welcomed the BJP's return to the pro-Hindutva posture at its Goa

executive, and asked the party to "retain its identity and voice Hindu concerns", PTI adds from Jaipur. "If the change witnessed in the BJP at Goa persists to resist pressure from NDA allies, it is welcome," Acharya Giriraj Kishore said. It was "strange" the BJP was "buckling down" to pressures from allies every time, he said.

The Shiv Sena, which has been critical of the BJP's "soft-peddling on Hindutva", today welcomed its ally's stance to revert to the path of staunch Hindutva, PTI reports from Mumbai.

Uproar in Parliament, page 6

96.8

Sonia is so far

15/9

NDA needs no help to self-destruct. It isn't getting any

SOME would say things haven't looked better for the Congress in a long time. Fresh from its comprehensive rout in the recent assembly elections, the BJP is mired in the mess in Gujarat. Though the party has finally resolved at Goa to back Narendra Modi in one voice, the political pay-off is yet to be seen. But one thing is certain. The statements from Goa will spark more commotion between the BJP and its allies in the NDA. They will sharpen the dilemma Gujarat poses for at least some of them and provoke more frantic positioning games on their part, or something more drastic perhaps. Factor in the continuing turmoil over the Budget in the NDA, and the picture is clearly gloomy for the ruling alliance at the Centre. In this situation, the Congress would appear to be enviably placed. Then why is it that even as the BJP-led alliance grows more inchoate, the main Opposition party continues to look inarticulate as well, uninspired and uninspiring? Why does the Congress show little signs of being willing or able to seize the political initiative, much less the government?

Though Sonia Gandhi's party acquitted itself commendably in the recent assembly elections, and though it now has governments in as many as 14 states, the fact remains the NDA has only itself to blame for its present troubles — its opposition can decidedly claim none of the credit. Despite the impressive array of states in its kitty, the Congress remains unable to mount a credible chal-

lenge at the Centre. The party is a mere bystander to the farce and the spectacle of NDA; it passively awaits the denouement. Gujarat is the latest case in point. By all accounts, there has been no evidence so far of the Congress' rousing itself to seize the moment of the BJP-led government's embarrassment. The main opposition party is yet to direct its state unit in Gujarat to undertake a concerted campaign in the ravaged state. Its workers are yet to come out in the streets to take up the task Modi's government won't perform — of healing the wounds, of rebuilding the trust. Of course, the inertia vis a vis Gujarat is only a symptom. The Congress is still to clearly define its position on crucial questions. Sonia's party is still undecided, for instance, on coalitions. Can it make peace enough with other parties at the Centre to cobble an alternative to the Vajpayee government? Is the reclusive high command willing to step out and negotiate, to conquer?

Admittedly, the two-day meet of Congress chief ministers at Guwahati last week was not the forum to grapple with the large questions. Yet, held as it was parallel to the BJP's convulsions at Goa, it assumed more significance and raised greater expectations. In this context, the reiteration of the old pieties, and the absence of a vigorous new initiative, is telling. Goa and Guwahati would appear to have reaffirmed two things. One, that the NDA needs no outside help to self-destruct. And two, that it isn't getting any.

CONTRADICTIONS IN NDA OVER 'OUST MODI' DEMAND REMAIN

9 P P - NDA

TDP not to withdraw support

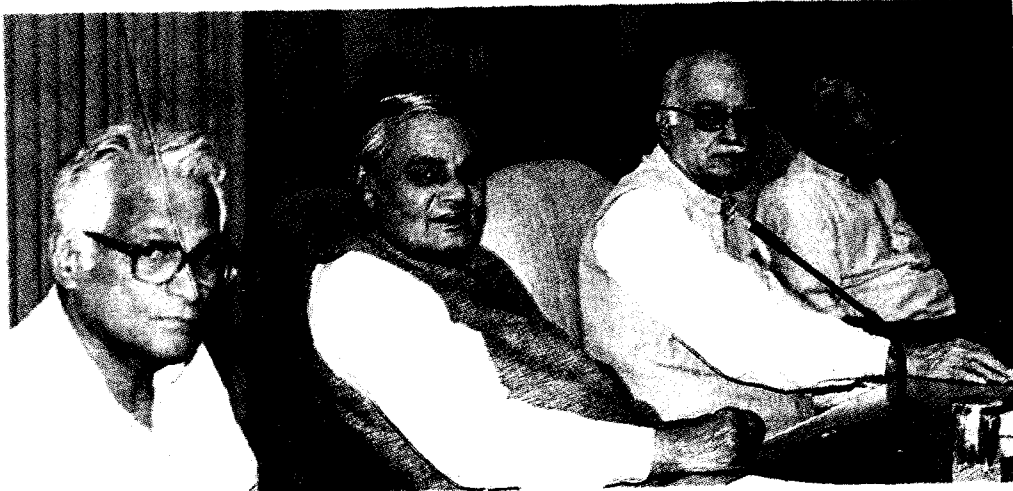
By K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, APRIL 14. The Vajpayee Government, which faced a crisis following the strong stand of its key ally, Telugu Desam Party, over the Gujarat developments, breathed easy tonight with the TDP reiterating its support to the National Democratic Alliance Government at the Centre.

The TDP's announcement came shortly after a 90-minute meeting of the NDA here this evening, in which the latter issued an appeal to its "valued friend" to continue supporting the Government as it had been doing for the last four years.

The NDA meeting, held in the backdrop of the demand by some allies that the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, be removed from office, was chaired by the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and attended by most allies, barring the Trinamool Congress and the Lok Janshakti Party. The meeting underlined that the NDA had been and remained fully committed to its agenda and "reaffirms unequivocally" its confidence in the leadership of Mr. Vajpayee.

In effect, the NDA rejected the "oust Modi" demand by the allies such as the TDP, the Trinamool Congress, the Janata Dal (United) and the LJP, and



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, with the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, and the BJP leader, Jana Krishnamurthy at the NDA meeting in New Delhi on Sunday. Photo: Shanker Chakravarty

reminded them of its commitment to federalism. With the TDP remaining firm on its demand for Mr. Modi's ouster and the Trinamool Congress agreeing to follow its footsteps, the contradictions within the NDA over the issue remained.

The NDA convener, George Fernandes, kept "live contact" with the TDP chief, N. Chandrababu Naidu, through the day. Mr. Naidu, in turn, contacted some NDA allies such as the JD (U) chief, Sharad Yadav, to ascertain their stand.

In its appeal, the NDA said that in a federal polity, "interference in the democratic functioning of States or of Delhi determining who is or is not to be the Chief Minister of any particular State will completely distort the constitutional balance of federalism."

Briefing correspondents, Mr. Fernandes said the meeting strongly criticised the recent statements of the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, and the Congress general secretary about the Prime Minister. "They

are not only irresponsible and in bad taste, but they also represent the lowest ebb of political immorality."

He said the NDA was "unanimous" in its resolve to defeat the scheming of the "Congress and its cohorts." The Alliance had decided not to permit any destabilisation of the country at "this critical juncture," that too when the Defence forces were deployed on the borders.

The meeting had also decided to send a team of NDA delegates to Gujarat on Tuesday to

review the relief and rehabilitation measures. The composition of the team would be finalised tomorrow, Mr. Fernandes said. At the meeting, none of the allies had either suggested that Mr. Modi be removed or demanded the imposition of Central rule in Gujarat.

Those who attended the meeting included the BJP Union Ministers, L. K. Advani, Yashwant Sinha, Jaswant Singh, Pramod Mahajan and Vijay Goel, the BJP president, K. Jana Krishnamurthy, the former BJP chief, Kushabhau Thakre, and the party spokesman, Vijay Kumar Malhotra. Arjun Charan Sethi (BJD), Murasoli Maran (DMK) Sharad Yadav (JD-U), Sushil Kumar Indora (INLD), Maneka Gandhi (Independent), Nitish Kumar (Samata Party), Sukhdev Singh Dhindsa (SAD), Manohar Joshi (Shiv Sena), Ali Mohammed Naik (NC), Rajeev Shukla (ABLC), Sukh Ram (HVC), and P. C. Thomas (IFDP) were also present.

TDP to await PM response in Parliament

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, APRIL 14. The Telugu Desam Party has decided to maintain its pressure on the BJP-led Government at the Centre by pressing its demand for replacement of the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, in Parliament on Monday.

It was obvious at the end of a marathon meeting of the TDP's politburo presided over by the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu, which went on till late on Sunday night, that a final decision on continuing support to the NDA Government would depend upon the Prime Minister, A. B. Vajpayee's response in Parliament to the demand for Mr. Modi's ouster.

Briefing presspersons after the meeting, the TD Parliamentary Party (TDPP) leader, K. Yerran Naidu, said there was no climbdown by the party on the Gujarat issue since "we have never said we will withdraw support".

Mr. Yerran Naidu said the TDP politburo reiterated its stand that Mr. Modi should go and that it was not proper for the BJP national executive to ask him to go in for polls without the restoration of law and order in Gujarat.

I can prove majority any time: PM

By Neena Vyas

PANAJI, APRIL 14. Two clear messages were sent out by the Bharatiya Janata Party from here today. The first was that there was no danger to the Vajpayee Government — if necessary the party was willing and able to find new friends — and that it had accepted the challenge from the main Opposition party and would "carry the battle into the Congress fold".

The concluding session of the party's three-day national executive committee meeting was clouded by the prospect of what its strongest friend of the last four years, the Telugu Desam Party, may do in Hyderabad.

"The TDP is free to take any decision," the BJP president, Jana Krishnamurthy, said. "I will comment on the situation only after the decision comes." Referring to Mr. Naidu's reported comments, he said that the timing of election in a BJP-ruled State was "beyond the scope of any NDA ally or partner". There was a strong signal that the BJP was now ready to do business with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) in Uttar Pradesh by helping crown Mayawati as Chief Minister provided the BSP returned the favour at the Centre by supporting the Vajpayee Gov-

ernment in a no-confidence motion. Mr. Krishnamurthy's response to a question on

'I am more than a match for you'

By Neena Vyas

PANAJI, APRIL 14. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today sent out a tough message to the NDA allies and supporting parties, warning that he was more than a match for them.

It is learnt that during his concluding remarks at the BJP national executive committee here this afternoon, Mr. Vajpayee said that he was old, but he could handle them all.

Addressing his party — but the message was clearly for the allies — he also said that the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and TDP chief, Chandrababu Naidu, should have gone to Gujarat and got first hand information before demanding the removal of its Chief Minister, Narendra Modi. He suggested that he had done enough, and the ball was now in the TDP's court.

whether his party would go looking for new "friends" elicited the response: "Wait for further developments."

Mr. Krishnamurthy said that the BJP parliamentary board could meet to review its earlier decision to sit in the Opposition in Uttar Pradesh. He would also keep in mind the BSP leader, Kanshi Ram's formula — that the BSP could support the Vajpayee Government if Ms. Mayawati was made the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister.

Earlier this morning, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, stated that he could prove his majority "any time" even as party leaders anxiously awaited a decision in Hyderabad. Concluding the executive committee meeting, Mr. Vajpayee assured the party that there was no danger to his Government. However, admitting that the BJP was passing through critical times, he said the need of the hour was "unity in the ranks" and that "indiscipline should not be countenanced". Victory and defeat were part of the political game. The party had faced similar situations earlier also and would come out of the present crisis. He discouraged any attempt by individuals to play the blame game, pointing out that all decisions were taken collectively and that this mechanism should be strengthened.

Allies look towards TDP

CL MANOJ
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

9 PPN
NDA ✓
5-10

NEW DELHI, April 13. — As the BJP in Goa gives final shape to its strategy of turning the Gujarat cauldron into an electoral plank, the BJP's partners in power are desperately hunting for a shield. For many of them, Mr AB Vajpayee's provocative statements have been the last straw, coming in the wake of the BJP's refusal to accept Mr Modi's resignation. Mr Vajpayee has now robbed the allies of their fig leaf: the last line of excuse of their "having full faith in the secular credentials of the Prime Minister". The recent loss of face over Ayodhya, the body blow from Goa and Mr Advani's terse statement today asking them to mend ways is proving too hard and too much for them to take.

By this evening many allies were driven into a state of suspended animation by the prevailing confusion, embarrassment and an apparent lack of a clear-cut strategy. The only thing they seemed to be doing in unison is make panic calls to Mr Chandrababu Naidu in Hyderabad, who is himself yet to recover from the public slap in the face delivered by the BJP. Allies in Delhi hope Mr Naidu will show them the way, and the TDP today offered some home with its criticism of the BJP's decision. The big question, however, remains unanswered: Is Mr Naidu capable of crossing the Lakshman rekha?

Many allies feel Mr Naidu now lies all the more within the danger of inviting the wrath of the sizeable Muslim population in Andhra Pradesh. This makes the TDP vulnerable vis-a-vis the Congress a year ahead of Assembly elections. But if the TDP takes the plunge,

19/4
allies including the JD(U), Biju Janata Dal and the Trinamul would be ready to jump into its bandwagon. The National Conference, facing an election in Jammu and Kashmir later this year, is also nearing desperation. But there are fears amongst coalition partners that the BJP, wary of the possible polarisation, is already working on the AIADMK, BSP and the NCP to neutralise the TDP in the numbers game. The allies are also aware of the embarrassment of facing Parliament from Monday without a clear-cut stand.

Some allies openly admit that on the strength of their inconsequential numbers they will not be a match for the BJP without active TDP participation. JD(U) spokesman Mr Mohan Prakash, expressing dismay over Goa developments, has spoken of the need for an emergency NDA meeting, while reiterating the demand for President's Rule in Gujarat. The Trinamul today again said Mr Modi must go. Mr Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Janshakti — trying to align with the Congress following the BJP-BSP liaison in Uttar Pradesh — has reiterated its demand for Article 356 in the riot-hit state. And many read in Mrs Sonia Gandhi's desire for a word with NDA allies a message for the likes of Mr Paswan, Miss Banerjee and Dr Farooq Abdullah.

Samata Party's spokesman-turned-rebel, Dr Shambu Shrivastava today asked his party to pull out of the NDA. There is a resounding silence from the Fernandes camp with Mr Nitish Kumar holed up in his residence, but many say Dr Srivastava's words are the reflection of the growing anger in many sections of the Samata.

THE STATESMAN

No polls, no Modi: TDP talks tough

HT Correspondents
Hyderabad/Panaji, April 13

ANGRY OVER the way the BJP leadership made a mockery of his party's demand for Narendra Modi's resignation, Telugu Desam Party chief N Chandrababu Naidu today hardened his stand saying Modi would have to go and that the Gujarat snap poll decision was an attempt to make political capital out of human tragedy.

Naidu convened a meeting of his party members at his residence at 4 pm today. The meet-

ing, lasting nearly four hours, was unanimous that the BJP leadership belittled the TDP resolution and a strong message should go out to the BJP from the TDP. A resolution was issued in the name of the party politburo — though only five of the 11 members were present — late in the evening, blasting the BJP for rejecting Modi's resignation offer and coming up with the "devious" plan to hold Assembly elections in Gujarat.

"To say that elections will be held to decide the issue is, in our view, a covert attempt to clothe

narrow and partisan ends with the legitimacy of a democratic process. The leadership in Gujarat has lost its moral authority to govern and its devious use of the electoral process cannot restore such authority. The need of the hour is not elections, but the immediate restoration of peace and normalcy," the statement said. "The TDP is against using the noble process of elections for achieving blatantly narrow and communal ends."

In a scathing language, the TDP statement said: "Strict adherence to secularism is one of

the basic conditions for our support to the NDA. Secularism is a fundamental principle of the TDP. The TDP firmly believes that India is a pluralist society. Effective and impartial interventions by law and order agencies would certainly have curbed the gross human tragedy that has unfolded in Gujarat over the last few weeks and continues to this day."

While Trinamool chief Mamata Banerjee chose to remain mum, calling the BJP's election decision its internal matter, the Janata Dal (United) said it has

sought an NDA meeting to discuss the fallout of the BJP's stand and was in touch with the other allies. JD(U) leader Mohan Prakash said: "The Government should have weighed all options, including the President's rule in Gujarat, before rejecting Modi's so-called offer to resign."

BJP leaders, meanwhile, are working on a plan to cope with any major ally exodus by accommodating the AIADMK, BSP and the NCP in the NDA. Several leaders have suggested electing PA Sangma to the Speaker's post in case the TDP pulls out support.

PM snubs Naidu

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee called up Chandrababu Naidu on Saturday night and rejected the TDP demand for Narendra Modi's removal. Immediately after the TDP reiterated that Modi should go, Vajpayee went into a huddle with senior party leaders before calling up Naidu from the Goa Raj Bhawan.

PTI, Panaji

Party sends a terse message to partners

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI/HYDERABAD, April 12. — The BJP's rejection of Mr Narendra Modi's resignation offer is being interpreted as a terse message to NDA partners that they cannot dictate terms to the principal ruling party. "The BJP as a party will pursue policies it thinks are right and the allies are free to accept them or leave the coalition," a senior NDA leader said.

The words of the conclave's resolution and what NDA leaders read between the lines have placed a section of leaders in a fix. The resolution talks of dissolution of the Assembly and snap polls under Mr Modi's leadership.

But some coalition partners are reading more into it. The manner in which the BJP drafted the resolution and the vehemence with

which it defended Mr Modi today is a throw-back on the old Hindutva agenda, they feel. By amending Budgetary provisions and promising select sops for the middle class, the party is making another attempt to lure this key constituency and consolidate Hindu votes. All this has placed the NDA partners in a fix.

They see two options for themselves: They can accept the BJP's 'big-brotherly' attitude and remain with it, allowing events to unfold. Or, they can sever ties with the NDA harping on the "attack on secularism" as the focal point for the separation and go to polls. They, however, realise that prospects do not seem bright for them in either case, an NDA leader said.

"One should be ready to take the blame for the fall of the government ... if majority of coalition partners are ready to sever ties with the NDA. Our past experience has not been

happy in this regard. Though the Congress did well in the Assembly polls, it still cannot be seen as a viable alternative under Mrs Sonia Gandhi. The biggest dilemma, however, is that if we stay on in the government, we will lose our claim to be the champions of secularism within the NDA," an MP from the coalition said.

[Samata Party leader Mr Sambhu Srivastava, who quit as party spokesman earlier this week, tonight called the developments in Goa a "notice" to allies that the BJP will continue with "its own agenda", adds PTI.]

Terminating the rejection a "clear victory for BJP hardliners", Mr Srivastava said: "The events ... go against the spirit of the NDA national agenda."

The onus is now on the TDP, which yesterday demanded immediate action. The party expressed surprise at the BJP's Goa decision. "Not removing Mr Modi and calling for polls is

the handiwork of the RSS-VHP," a senior TDP leader said later tonight. Mr Naidu was not available for comment.

Mr Laljan Basha, TDP officebearer, told a television channel tonight that his party will decide its future course of action at its politburo meeting. Mr Basha added that the TDP is still hopeful Mr Vajpayee would do "something".

Earlier in the day, Miss Mamata Banerjee hinted at the possibility of a pressure group within the NDA to press for Mr Modi's ouster, adds SNS from Kolkata. Claiming the Trinamul was the first NDA partner to press for Mr Modi's ouster, Miss Banerjee said she was happy to note that the TDP, the Lok Shakti and Samata Party had also made the demand: "We are not alone ... others are singing our tune too."

BJP stand on Modi harmful, says Cong: page 6

Remove Modi, provide healing touch: TDP

J.P.P.
TDP NDA

179
110-1

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, APRIL 11. The Telugu Desam Party has called upon the Bharatiya Janata Party, its ally and leader of the ruling National Democratic Alliance at the Centre, to effect an "immediate change of leadership" in Gujarat.

In a strongly-worded resolution adopted today, the party politburo said the administration and the leadership in Gujarat "have failed miserably" in not only quelling the violence but also in providing relief and rehabilitation to the victims of communal riots, which have rocked the State for over a month.

The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and TDP leader, N. Chandrababu Naidu, chaired the politburo session in two spells before taking the crucial decision of calling for the

replacement of the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi.

The TDP said that unless Mr. Modi quit, "we will be guilty of eroding public confidence and failing to provide just and fair governance" to the citizens. What was important was providing a healing touch and restoring the confidence of the people in the institutions of governance.

The interests of the nation were more important than those of parties, organisations and individuals and the nation could not be held hostage to the "partisan and short-sighted agendas" of a few misguided organisations or people. Immediate steps were necessary to "prevent our nation from descending into unmitigated chaos."

The resolution said that secularism was one of the fundamental tenets of the party and that communal

harmony was fundamental to India's future.

Adherence to secularism was one of the "basic conditions of our support to the NDA." Any negation of this principle would be unacceptable.

The recent developments in Gujarat had tarnished India's image as a modern, liberal and secular society and threatened to wreck its secular fabric.

The TDP agreed with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's observation that "brutality against innocent victims is a national shame."

By calling for Mr. Modi's ouster, the TDP struck an unexpected blow at the BJP leadership just on the eve of its important meeting in Goa.

It also represents a shift in the TDP stand that the return to normality, restoration of peace and rehabilitation of riot victims were more important.

Samata crisis after U-turn on Gujarat CM

Paswan joins sack-Modi clamour

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 9

THE SAMATA Party today did a U-turn from its position that CM Narendra Modi must stand down for failing to contain the riots in Gujarat, but not before party general secretary Shambhu Srivastwa resigned in protest against the party's decision to shift its stand under pressure from the BJP.

Barely a couple of days after Srivastwa sought Modi's removal, party president VV Krishna Rao said today that a leadership change would not solve Gujarat's problems.

In an obvious climbdown, Rao welcomed the "gradual return to normalcy" and peaceful panchayat polls in the State. "This is a strong indicator that the extreme emotions and violence that rocked Gujarat are under control," he said. He condemned the attack on journalists at Sabarmati Ashram and praised Modi's prompt action to set up an inquiry and efforts to bring those responsible to book.

The change of tone came about after AB Vajpayee, LK Advani and BJP chief K Jana Krishnamurthy pressured Samata boss and NDA convenor George Fernandes to undo the damage from Srivastwa's scathing indictment of the Narendra Modi Government.

It was at Fernandes' behest that VV Krishna Rao issued a statement, saying Modi's removal wouldn't solve the problems in Gujarat.

Srivastwa took only hours to resign. "Your statement trying to defend Modi makes my position absolutely untenable," he wrote to the party president from Patna.

Srivastwa was particularly upset because Rao had not told him about the party's altered stand even though the two were

NCM fires salvo

THE NATIONAL Commission for Minorities fired another salvo against the Modi Government on Tuesday, asking it to appoint a sitting Supreme Court judge to head the inquiry commission constituted by it. It suggested a 10-point formula to restore normalcy and regain confidence of the minorities. In a letter to the State chief secretary, the panel said the policy of political transfers "now being indulged in" went against the norms of good governance and should be "stopped immediately."

PTI, New Delhi

together before Srivastwa took his flight to Patna this morning.

Fernandes had spoken to him four times yesterday, never hinting at any shift in the party's stand on Gujarat, he recalled. "I won't withdraw my resignation till the party changes its latest position on Modi," he told *Hindustan Times* from Patna.

If there was relief in the BJP camp after Rao's statement, it was offset by Paswan's LJP, which compounded the BJP's discomfiture with a demand for Modi's summary dismissal.

LJP vice-president and spokesperson Ramvir Singh Bidhuri said Gujarat was faced with a "constitutional crisis" and was a fit case for President's Rule.

"There is a crisis of governance in Gujarat and the killing of people from one community continues with the patronage of the local police and administration Total anarchy is prevailing in the State," he said.

Related reports on Page 6

The NDA's common agenda has been reduced to a dead letter

A country on trial

MAHESH RANGARAJAN

The massacres in Gujarat have deprived the Bharatiya Janata Party leadership of the claim that minorities are safest when it is in power. This line had been parroted so often as to attain the status of a half-truth. In fact, the reverse appears to have been the case: the most unsafe state of the 28 that constitute the Indian Union, not only for Muslims but also for any one risking his life to stop the carnage was the one state under a cent per cent saffron regime.

In 1990, a resurgent L.K. Advani in Ayodhya had spelt out the logic of "safety" under "Hindu raj" after his release from detention. The parent body of his party, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, has now repeated it virtually verbatim. Muslims, it states, are dependent on the goodwill of the majority if they want to be part of the Indian body politic. Not that the BJP has been alone in advancing such theses. In October 1984, the editor of a leading national daily chose the aftermath of the assassination of Indira Gandhi to pose the issue to Sikhs as a whole. They had to decide, he said, whether they were with the terrorists or against them. The Congress cashed in on the massacres that followed.

The drama has been played out with tragic consequences for the defenceless: in Bhagalpur in 1989 and Mumbai in 1993. In each of these latter instances, the forces and groups that espouse *Hindutva* were never far from the scene. In the former, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's campaign for the Ram temple formed the backdrop for the violence. In the latter, the Shiv Sena carried out operations with surgical precision. But Gujarat puts all these events in the shade. Never before has an entire state of the Union been subject to such a vigorous attempt at ethnic cleansing. Those who cite the tragic precedent of the Kashmiri Pandits should keep in mind that the other two regions of the Jammu and Kashmir continue to have mixed populations.

In Gujarat, the violence was not confined to the ghetto, but engulfed the middle classes. If indeed the Inter-Services Intelligence wanted to drive a wedge between Indians on religious lines, and it had a hand in the Godhra tragedy, it could never find better allies than those who equate every Muslim with an invisible pro-Pakistani fifth column.

The burning of property and the gutting of shops and establishments, the leaflets distributed across the state calling for a boycott of minority-owned shops and businesses, all point to an attempt to sever the tiers of coexistence which form the warp and weft

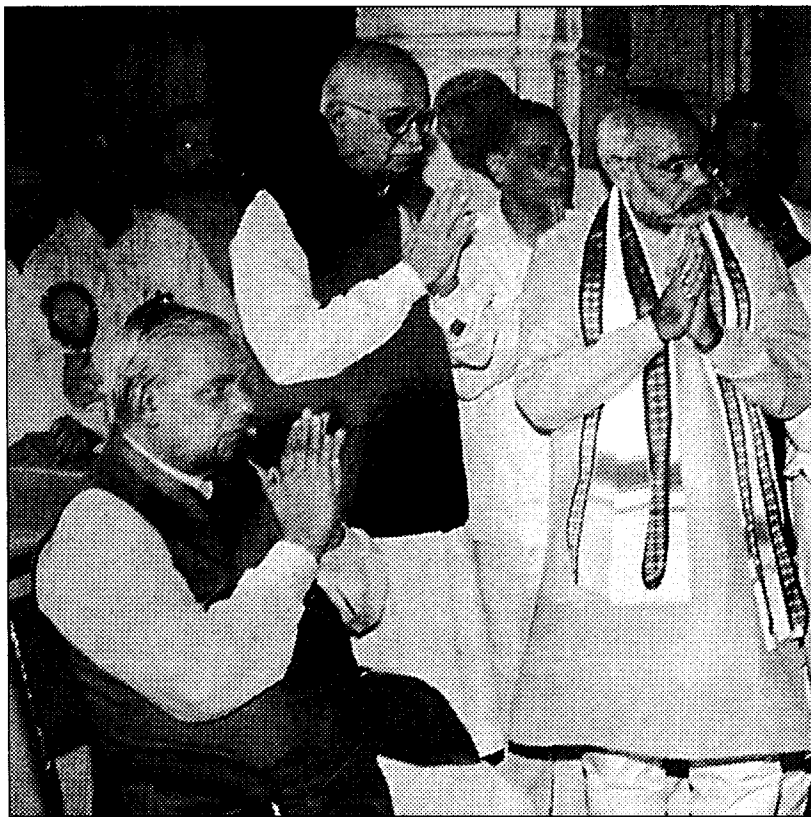
The author is an independent political analyst and a visiting assistant professor at Cornell University, Ithaca

of Indian life. In a bizarre twist, the well off among a religious group are objects of envy. Poor Muslims are sought to be excluded from the labour market. A similar design in 1993 was thwarted by the merchant castes of Surat, as their diamond-cutting business relied on Muslim migrants from eastern India.

But to return to the issue. Not only did Muslims or, for that matter, Chris-

populist bloc of lower castes, minorities and *adivasis* under a reformist Congress leadership. Two waves of anti-reservation movements first sundered the coalition apart and then, the *Hindutva* groups took over the public space long before they came to power. It is this ability to dictate the agenda of politics that sets the party and its sister outfits apart.

Far from sowing the seeds of peace,



tians find themselves unsafe under the rule of the only Indian party which is a front organization of another outfit; but the *sangh parivar* also did not spare Hindus who, at great risk to themselves, intervened to save people's lives. There has been no shortage of attacks against journalists and photographers. A peace meeting in the prestigious Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, was not spared.

The glimmer of hope has been the inability of such attempts at polarization in the rest of the country. It is no coincidence that Gujarat has a two-thirds BJP majority and has been under the rule of the party (except for a brief interval) since 1995. Independent, non-sectarian groups, such as Communalism Combat, had sounded the alarm over two years ago when they pointed to systematic attempts to target "undesirable elements" using official machinery.

In fact, Gujarat has added significance for another reason. In the Eighties, it saw the creation of an allegedly

‘ Moderation sans action is devoid of meaning. Regret is not enough if justice is not done ’

their cultural and educational agendas spread the notion of a clash of civilizations. Certain key groups are targeted: the middle classes, with their critical role in administration and education, the institutions of industry, the law and the poor through social work schemes. The carnage is indeed shocking: Equally so is the "justification" that they are mere retaliation. This is precisely the kind of mentality that justified the militant massacres of bus-passengers in the Punjab in the Eighties, or justifies terrorist bomb attacks on unarmed persons.

In fact, this mentality is more ominous, as it comes in the guise of nationalism. If nationalism seeks to carve

out the territory of India, the *Hindutva* forces seek a division of hearts and minds. It seeks to re-order drastically the way in which most Indians, including most Hindus, live and work. It seeks to elevate to a central organizing principle the notion of a permanent clash of religiously rigid communities. "Hindu raj" means no safety even for Hindus, as one group will define what it means to be a Hindu or an Indian. Worse still, it would bring back the spectre of ceaseless violence which haunted the country at the moment of its birth, and was checked only by the resolute action of those who were then at the helm.

A Nehru or a Patel, an Ambedkar or an Azad, even while they disagreed on much else, did not hesitate to use both administrative means and political mobilization to stem those who practised the cult of the gun. A country, they realized, could either be unified under one criminal law or broken into groups each bent on retributive justice. India could either choose Gandhi or Godse, but not both.

In the aftermath of the incidents, Atal Bihari Vajpayee's was a voice of moderation. But the very accusations his party made about the Congress in 1984 now hold true of his partymen in Gujarat. The delay in sending out the army, the complicity of the police, the repeated statements of the chief minister implicitly endorsing violence have been now compounded by transfers of staunchly apolitical police officers courageous enough to book ruling party members for instigating attacks. The clean chit to Narendra Modi sends a signal not only to his party but also to the rest of India and the world. Moderation *sans* action is devoid of meaning. Regret is not enough if justice is not done.

Far more than anyone else, many of the BJP's allies have now been reminded that it is a party with a difference. It has more than a mission to rule the country. It is and remains part of a movement, with a philosophy, an ideology and a programme. Gujarat and the revival of the Ayodhya plank is not yet the end of the road for the alliance. But they mark the slow beginning of its eventual dissolution. Having failed to make a mark by toning up the economy or providing good governance, ideologues in the premier party are testing the waters with a revival of their core agenda. The country as a whole is on trial. It can succumb to their games or stand firm as a rock. There is no third choice on offer.

The cross currents of regional politics may give the prime minister the breathing space and numbers to stay on in office. But it is the authority of the coalition that has been undermined, its common agenda reduced to a dead letter. Those who stay on with the ruling party may soon find that they are riding a tiger.

Stand against Poto blocks Mamata entry into Cabinet

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 24 MARCH

MAMATA BANERJEE, whose views on politics and the economy are at variance with the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), may find it difficult to secure a Cabinet berth in the Vajpayee government. Government leaders, here, indicated that if the Trinamool Congress MPs abstain from voting for the Poto legislation in the joint session, the Prime Minister will find it difficult to accommodate her in his team. In any case, a significant section of the government is not encouraged by the idea of Ms Banerjee returning to the Cabinet.

In fact, the Trinamool Congress leader was told by finance minister Yashwant Sinha and BJP representative V.K. Malhotra, at the NDA meeting here on last Friday, that her party's persistent attack on the government was hurting the coalition's image. A section of the BJP is unhappy over allowing Ms Banerjee the luxury of criticising the BJP while being a part of the NDA. Ms Banerjee has been voicing her opposition to Poto on the stand her party has taken against the West Bengal's move to enact a Poto-like legislation. Although West Bengal chief minister had to shelve the move because of protests from within his Left Front, Ms Mamata Banerjee's party is not ready to moderate its position.

Ms Banerjee's isolation appeared complete at the last meeting of the NDA, when leaders like Ram Vilas Paswan, who was roped in by her to articulate her agenda, refused to take a confrontationist line. Worse, Paswan and others were the first to agree with the leadership that the phenomenon of a "NDA within the NDA" was not on. In the end, Ms Banerjee had to clarify that her public protests were not aimed at weakening the alliance. Sources in the government said the reshuffle may wait till the BJP decides on the shape of things in Uttar Pradesh.

TMC to boycott jt session on Poto

Kolkata
24 MARCH



Mamata

TRINAMOOL CONGRESS on Sunday asserted that it would stay away from the joint sitting of both houses of Parliament on March 26 to legislate on the controversial prevention of terrorism bill.

"We cannot deviate from our stand against any anti-terrorism law. If we vote for the bill in the joint sitting, it will amount to double standards," TC chief Mamata Banerjee told reporters in Kolkata.

Claiming that the party had always opposed such laws, she said TC had stayed away from the Lok Sabha during the passage of the Bill. It would also skip the joint sitting.

However, the party's abstention would not pose any problem for the government to get the Bill passed, she said.

Notwithstanding its opposition to the Bill, Banerjee said her party would remain with the NDA government and render its support in times of crises.

On implementation of the proposed anti-terrorism law, Banerjee said "the state authorities should not be empowered to implement such laws given the possibility of large scale misuse of its provisions."

To prevent any possible misuse, a special authority like CBI, RAW or IB should be created for its implementation, she added.

PTI

The Economic Times

25 MAR 2002

Trinamool firm against Poto, but won't ditch NDA

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, March 24

MAMATA BANERJEE remains a stumbling block in the BJP's way to endorsing the Poto. The Trinamool Congress chief today said that she would stay away from the joint session of Parliament on Tuesday. But she made it clear she wouldn't leave the NDA.

Banerjee, as "part of the NDA family", would like the Centre to abide by the NDA programme. Her party will see to it that the Vajpayee Government continues in power.

She welcomed Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's views on the Gujarat carnage. "We won't do anything to defeat the Government on the floor of the House. I am confident that the ruling alliance will get the Poto passed in the joint session. It won't matter much if we are absent," said Banerjee.

Banerjee stressed her opposition to laws against terrorism and the authorities that enforce them. It is unsafe to leave such sensitive preventive Acts—be it the Poto or the proposed Poca or even the Tada—to the whims of the local administration, she said.

"But I don't want to undermine the dangers of cross-border terrorism. I have been saying that governments need to have a separate wing like the CBI or the RAW to enforce the law. There is no point arming the District Magistrate

or the SP with Poto or Poca because they often yield to pressures from the ruling party," said Banerjee.

These preventive Acts were often misused to marginalise political opponents and innocents. The Trinamool chief recalled how a person in Hooghly was rounded up under Tada for picking coconuts.

"That is why I resigned from Parliament when the Tada was placed in Parliament. I came down to Kolkata and went on a dharna against the black law for weeks. How can I support the Poto? I can't have double standards," Banerjee said.

On the NDA allies who have decided to support Poto, the Trinamool chief said: "It is up to them to decide. But they are in power in the States. They have control over the local administration. We aren't in power. We can't rely on the CPI (M). Its leaders oppose Poto but are testing waters to introduce a similar legislation in the State."



MAMATA BANERJEE

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

25 MAR 2002

HD-10
25/3

Rumblings in the NDA

By K. K. Katyal

Neither Mr. Vajpayee nor the allies may find it easy to maintain the delicate balance.

THEY SURVIVED the assault from outside but may find it hard to counter the threat from within. This is the unhappy lot of the ruling combine, the National Democratic Alliance, and its leading constituent, the BJP. They suffered a debacle in the Assembly elections and, as a result, their credibility was badly dented but it did not pose a danger to the Government at the Centre. Their majority in the Lok Sabha remained intact — which was what mattered for the coalition's survival. The decline of the BJP did cause worry to the allies, but there were no desertions — there could not have been — because of the shared vested interest. The glue of power held them together.

The situation has changed materially because of the sudden spurt of internal contradictions between the BJP and its allies over Ayodhya-related issues. As a result, the alliance's unity could not be taken for granted and the earlier assessments about the Government's long-term stability have to be revised. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and his strategy managers got busy repairing the cracks and succeeded in getting over the immediate problem. But the scars left by the ugly public confrontation between the two sides may not easily disappear and the danger of aggravation will remain.

Even in the "normal" course, the alliance, it was widely believed, would develop strains with the approach of the next general elections (due by October 2004). A year before the due date, the allies — that was the general assessment — may re-appraise their continued association with the BJP. This stage may well be reached earlier. Whenever that happens, the current developments would be regarded retrospectively as the starting point of the break.

Apart from the fruits of office, what held the allies back from taking an extreme step was the absence of a viable alternative. That situation has not changed. The Congress(I), the main Opposition, is too far away from the half-way mark in the Lok Sabha to

be able to lure to its side the BJP's secular allies. The Congress(I) and others in the Opposition, though still outnumbered by the NDA, could through a united front tempt the allies into crossing over. But the chances of such an alliance are bleak, given the reservations of the Left parties and the Samajwadi Party about the Congress(I) — in the first case on ideological grounds and, in the second, because of personality clashes.

This was evident from two recent developments — the Ministry-making moves in Uttar Pradesh and the proceedings of the recent CPI(M) Congress in Hyderabad. The Congress(I) hesitated in committing itself firmly to supporting Mulayam Singh Yadav in his bid to form a new Government in Uttar Pradesh. Many saw it as retaliation for Mr. Yadav's action in 1999 in refusing support to Sonia Gandhi in forming an alternative Government after the first Vajpayee dispensation lost a vote of confidence.

The CPI(M) Congress, sensing acute disenchantment in the NDA camp (among the BJP's allies), decided on giving a push to the third front plan. Implied in it was the distrust of the Congress(I) which, though regarded a secular force qualifying for a joint anti-BJP campaign, was not considered worthy of an electorate alliance because of its flawed economic policies and its occasional compromises with communal forces. Priority, thus, is to be given to the third front — and, what is more important, not the Congress(I) — as an alternative. Whether these plans click is not so important as the nature of this formulation.

In the past, the moves to revive the third force — or the united front — were pursued only sporadically. At one stage, they appeared to be taking some concrete steps, such as formulation of a common programme and criteria for the admission of constitu-

ents but nothing has been heard of late. It is hard to avoid the impression that the united front — proposed or real — is no more than the sum total of important individual leaders and groups, wielding influence in their respective strongholds, and not a positive force on its own. To say this is not to underestimate the potential of the third force or to question its validity, but to drive home the point that the required efforts had not been made.

The Congress(I), on its own, did show signs of recovery. It has been lucky, by and large in the Assembly elections and is in power in more than a dozen States. As against that is its failure to recapture its lost constituency in Uttar Pradesh. Here it remains a marginal force — and without this key State in its bag, no party could hope to be in power at the Centre.

It was the realism of Mr. Vajpayee, and others of his way of thinking, that helped ward off the immediate threat to the NDA Government. They recognised the intensity of feeling among the allies against the BJP's attitude — of pushing its agenda rather than that of the NDA — and provided the necessary assurances. Mr. Vajpayee was able to persuade the VHP to give up its plans for an "asthi yatra" (of taking the ashes of the Godhra train carnage victims to various parts of the country). The BJP's allies had taken strong exception to the yatra and rightly so — because of its potential for inflaming communal sentiments and for alienating the minorities. Its cancellation as also the acceptance of the suggestion for "more frequent and extensive consultations" and for calling the joint NDA Parliamentary Party meetings went a long way in mollifying them. On their part, they agreed not to air in public their grievances about the functioning of the NDA. Whether it was a patch-up, the product of the tactical approaches of the two sides, or a genuine change of

heart would be clear only in the future. But two developments did not go unnoticed. One, the action of the allies in holding their conclave, prior to the meeting of the NDA (where the crisis was defused). The action of the allies in drawing up their strategy for the full meeting was significant and, to the extent that it serves as a precedent for the future, it would be a source of internal pressure and possibly of irritants for the BJP. Two, the whispering campaign among the hardliners in the BJP and hotheads in the Sangh Parivar, about the Prime Minister's "appeasement" of the allies for the sake of office. The second is the bigger of the two dangers.

The current whispers in the Parivar as also the sequence of the recent Ayodhya-related developments do not augur well for the smooth functioning of the NDA. In the agenda of the combine, Hindutva has no place, but the Parivar hawks are not prepared to put Ayodhya on the backburner. They may have chosen to lie low for tactical reasons but they are not reconciled to the "concessions" made to the non-BJP constituents. At some stage, they may come out in the open again posing yet another threat to the ruling alliance. Those who can carry their perversity to the extent of conceiving and planning a diabolical move like the "asthi-yatra" cannot be expected to develop moderation and reasonableness. As for the Prime Minister, there is a limit to his capacity for tightrope walking. In the past he, at times, failed to maintain the correct balance as evidenced by his support to the idea of a "symbolic puja" by the VHP in the "acquired land" in Ayodhya or the stand taken by the Attorney-General in the Supreme Court. But he will keep on working in that direction. On their part the allies may keep on making harsh noises for the consumption of the minorities but refrain from rocking the boat. Neither Mr. Vajpayee nor the allies may find it easy to maintain the delicate balance. And therein lies the danger — though not in the immediate context.

THE HINDU

25 MAR 2002

MONDAY, MARCH 25, 2002

NDA

40-10

25

HANGING TOGETHER

THE WAY THE ruling National Democratic Alliance has played out the 'unity' act, when its leaders met on Friday against the backdrop of accentuated ideological faultlines, has a dreary familiarity about it. All that it required for the 'secular' constituents, who were unhappy and upset with the Vajpayee administration in the context of the recent developments on the Ayodhya front and in Gujarat post-Godhra, to be made to fall in line was a formal 'reassurance' by the Prime Minister notably on two points. One, that the NDA agenda would be adhered to. And, two, that there would be "more frequent and extensive consultations" among the allies. Such weary assurances from the Government side and impassioned collective calls for better cohesiveness and observance of the 'coalition norms' by the alliance partners have been no more than a ritual, if not a farce, enacted every time the latent discord bursts into the open and threatens to cause a serious damage to the NDA regime's image. It is not going to be very different now. Less than a year ago, the disparate coalition talked of formulating a 'code of conduct', and even put a panel on the job, when an exasperated Mr. Vajpayee sent it on a tailspin by declaring his intent to quit office.

What facilitated the reaffirmation of 'unity' this time were two developments earlier in the day — **tangible actions** evidently secured by the Vajpayee regime as sops for the 'secular' allies. One was the Narendra Modi Government's decision to withdraw charges under the draconian POTO in cases registered against the alleged perpetrators of the Godhra carnage (most of them Muslims). Mr. Modi's blatantly discriminatory action in invoking POTO in Godhra-related cases and not against those said to be involved (mostly Hindus) in the communal killings thereafter had called into serious question the BJP's credibility vis-à-vis its oft repeated assurance that the special anti-terrorism law will not be used selectively against

the minority community. Surely, the Centre would not like to be haunted by the 'Gujarat example' when it faces the joint sitting of Parliament on March 26 convened specially to deliberate and pass the POTO Bill. True, the arithmetic is weighted heavily in the Government's favour; but the spectacle of its own coalition partner(s) registering dissent or disapproval in the House — particularly a party like the National Conference — can be too much of a political embarrassment. More than anything else, these POTO Bill-related concerns would appear to have prompted the BJP leadership in Government to ask Mr. Modi to desist from applying POTO to Godhra cases at the investigation stage. The other development of course was the VHP's retraction on its reported plan to take the ashes of the Godhra victims across the country (asthi yatras), a recipe for communal disturbance given the present charged atmosphere.

Whether it is the abandoning of the 'asthi yatras' or the Gujarat corrective (on the POTO front), the response of the BJP to the 'revolt' by its 'secular' allies is a typical case of tactical retreat, nothing more. For all its professed commitment to the NDA agenda, under which the contentious issues have been kept away, the BJP as the leading partner in the Government has never lost sight of its core ideological objectives, which it has consistently been seeking to serve by subtle and not-so-subtle ways. The sort of leeway the Hindutva outfits like the RSS, the VHP and the Bajrang Dal have been receiving from the Government for their divisive, vicious and, often, inflammatory campaign is a case in point. If anything, the Ayodhya-centred developments only reaffirm this perception. On their part, the 'secular' NDA constituents have indeed contributed to the appeasement of chauvinist forces to the extent that they have conveniently accepted the BJP's pro-forma statements on commitment to the NDA agenda even when its actions demonstrate otherwise.

THE HINDU

25 MARCH 2002

CRISIS DEFUSED; CONSULTATIONS PLANNED

Allies reassured of adherence to NDA agenda

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 22. At a stormy meeting of the leaders of the National Democratic Alliance here this evening, a renewed commitment to adhere to the letter and spirit of the common NDA agenda was made after the BJP's allies articulated their "unhappiness" at the manner in which "divisive issues" outside the NDA agenda had been repeatedly raised in recent weeks.

The allies could not be "silent spectators" to events that had deepened the communal divide in the country. The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Farooq Abdullah, and the Trinamool Congress chief, Mamata Banerjee, were among those who spoke forcefully on the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance, the recent Ayodhya developments and the communal carnage in Gujarat.

At the two-and-a-half hour

meeting, the Union Home Minister, L.K. Advani, was forced to "clarify" that there had been no selective use of POTO against the minorities. He said he had immediately taken up the matter with the Gujarat Government. Over 10,000 pre-emptive arrests had been made in Gujarat "without any bias towards or against any community."

It seems that only after this assurance that Dr. Abdullah was "persuaded" to give his party's support for the POTO legislation that is coming up before a joint sitting of both the Houses of Parliament on March 26.

A major grouse of the allies was that the current consultations on important issues were not enough. A unanimous statement adopted at the meeting, chaired by the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, accepted the suggestion for "more frequent and extensive consultations". There would also be

joint NDA parliamentary party meetings, at least once during every parliamentary session.

Apparently, it was clarified that the BJP was as embarrassed as the allies were with the manner in which Sangh Parivar outfits had raised issues, even defying constitutional bodies such as the Supreme Court.

In response to questions, the Defence Minister and NDA convener, George Fernandes, who was briefing the media, said the allies did not raise the controversial Bangalore resolution of the RSS.

Earlier, leaders of the key allies and supporting parties of the NDA met informally and sent out a strong message that the Vajpayee Government must adhere to the NDA agenda for governance. They favoured enforcing a code of conduct. The message was that if the BJP's Sangh Parivar loyalists felt free

to articulate the RSS agenda or that of its affiliates such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal, it would be a free for all. The allies would not sit silently and watch helplessly as the nation's secular fabric was torn apart.

The view was that BJP MPs must stop pleading the VHP's cause in Parliament and the Government must make every effort to rein in its "wild siblings" in the Sangh Parivar. But there was also another underlying theme. The problems within the NDA must be solved without destabilising the Government.

Later, talking to reporters informally, Sudip Bandopadhyaya (Trinamool) said that in the current atmosphere putting a stop to the reported plan of taking out "asthi yatras" (processions carrying the ashes of the Godhra outrage victims) was a must. Such processions could only worsen the communal tension that had gripped Gujarat. The effect of the informal confabulations was felt even before the formal NDA meeting got started. The Gujarat Government announced that neither the VHP-proposed "asthi yatras" would be taken out, nor would the Muslims' 'tajia' Muharram processions next week. The charges under Muslims arrested for the Godhra outrage would not be proceeded under POTO.

Trinamool not to attend joint session

PTI reports:

The Trinamool Congress today said that its MPs would not attend the joint session of Parliament on Tuesday. "We have not participated in the debate on the issue and there is no question of changing our stand on POTO. Therefore, we will not attend the joint session," the party chief whip in the Lok Sabha, Sudip Bandopadhyaya, said.

20 MAR 2002

NDA allies come to blows with BJP on Hindutva issue

Urge govt to stop VHP's 'asthi yatra'

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The ideological faultline in the National Democratic Alliance widened on Thursday after two of the BJP's allies, the Janata Dal (United) and the Indian National Lok Dal (INLD), donned the opposition mantle and nearly came to blows with the BJP on the Hindutva question.

The allies challenged the BJP in the Lok Sabha, saying that the party did not represent the Hindu community. "Tum log Hinduon ke thekedar nahin hon" (You are not

the sole guardians of Hindus), shouted an enraged Sushil Kumar Indora (INLD) shortly after the JD-U's Devendra Prasad Yadav said that if he had known that the BJP would press its Hindutva agenda despite signing a national agenda for governance, his party would never have joined the NDA. He also added that if this sort of intimidation continued, the allies would have to review support to the BJP. Support came from the Samata Party's Raghunath Jha and the TDP's Venugopachari.

Later, in the evening, minister in the Prime Minister's office Vijay Goel visited Mr Devender Yadav's office in parliament house, apparently on a conciliatory mission.

Despite Mr Goel's visit, Mr Yadav said that a meeting would be held on Friday wherein the behaviour of the BJP MPs as well as the 'dangerous communal agenda' that was being pursued by hardline BJP activists would be discussed.

The Telugu Desam Party, the Trinamul Congress, the DMK, Haryana chief minister Om Prakash Chautala's INLD, the JD

(U), the Samata Party, the National Conference, Ram Vilas Paswan's Lok Jan Shakti and Ajit Singh's Rashtriya Lok Dal are expected to participate in the meeting on Friday.

Referring to the VHP's proposed national 'asthi yatra' carrying the ashes of the Godhra carnage, Mr Yadav said, "The situation is bordering on physical confrontation among the NDA allies. What is the meaning of this 'asthi yatra' after a month? The ashes have to be immersed within 13 days.

We are all devout Hindus who have done it. But this yatra is being proposed by just two per cent of the Hindus who organised the riots. It has to be stopped."

The atmosphere in the house was so surcharged that even after deputy speaker P.M. Sayeed abruptly adjourned the lower house for an hour amidst deafening exchanges among the members of the NDA and the BJP, Mr Yadav and the BJP's Vinay Katiyar had to be separated by ministers Pramod Mahajan, Santosh Kumar Gangwar and Digvijay Singh as well as other NDA MPs.

The clash began after Mr Yadav said that the ruling coalition needed to condemn organisations which challenged the constitution. "We are Hindus and the VHP does not represent us," he said, adding that Mr Indora had been browbeaten by the *bhagwa* (saffron) flag-bearers in his own constituency. This proved to be the proverbial red rag for Mr Katiyar, who said that Mr Yadav could name the organisation but not use the word 'bhagwa', which was a sacred colour.

Poto bill defeated in RS

NEW DELHI: The government on Thursday suffered a major setback when the Rajya Sabha defeated the Prevention of Terrorism Ordinance (Poto).

The Congress-sponsored statutory resolution disapproving the ordinance was passed in a division with 98 votes in favour and 87 against. One member abstained. After a voice vote, the opposition pressed for a division in which the resolution was adopted.

Subsequently, the bill to ratify the Prevention of Terrorism (second) ordinance, 2002, already approved by the Lok Sabha, was also put to vote and in a division, the motion was rejected by the upper house. As many as 113 members voted against the bill while 98 supported it. The government now has plans to convene a joint session of parliament on March 26. (PTI)

Allies step up pressure on BJP

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 20. — The liberal-hardliner divide in the BJP over the Sangh Parivar outfits seems to have egged on the NDA allies to further embarrass the government on Hindutva and salvage their secular credentials.

Leaders of the TDP, Trinamul, DMK, Janata Dal (U), Samata Party, Lok Janshakti and the National Conference met this afternoon in Parliament to discuss what they called the "dangerous current political trends".

The meeting assumes significance as the allies have now decided to put pressure on the government on the economic issues and the Poto Bill, which is yet to be passed by Parliament.

(Late tonight, the Lok Sabha passed the budgetary grants for the 2002-03 fiscal.)

The Janata Dal parliamentary party, led by labour minister Mr Sharad Yadav, met in the morning and demanded a rollback of fertiliser and kerosene prices hiked in the budget. A similar demand was made separately by Miss Mamata Banerjee and the Rashtriya Lok Dal president and agriculture minister, Mr Ajit Singh.

The allies are concerned about salvaging their image as "secular" parties.

They are disturbed over the recent build-up in Ayodhya, communal riots in Gujarat, the attack on the Orissa Assembly and provocative state-

ments by the RSS.

Mere assurances that the government has not deviated from the NDA agenda are not enough for the partners. They feel the government would have to tame the Parivar outfits.

The JD(U) leader, Mr Devendra Prasad Yadav, said the allies cannot wait for long for the government to take action against the outfits.

The DMK is now taking the lead to ensure better coordination among the allies.

The party is a bit uncomfortable after the AIADMK openly sided with the government on Poto and voted for it in the Lok Sabha.

The deputy leader of the DMK in Lok Sabha, Mr C Kuppaswami, said his party "can't tolerate any view that seeks to destabilise the delicate harmony existing among various communities".

Referring to the RSS' Bangalore resolution on Muslims, he said no right-thinking citizen or organisation would support such an overbearing approach.

"Is it a threat call to the Muslims or an expression of 'big brother' attitude of the majority?" Mr Kuppaswami asked.

The country has just heaved a sigh of relief after the Prime Minister found a

satisfactory solution to the Ayodhya crisis. The issue has the potential to trigger another explosive outburst and endanger the amity among various communities, he said.

FM hints at relief for middle class, page 6

NDA partners must rethink ties: Surjeet

HYDERABAD, March 20. — The NDA allies must reconsider their association with the BJP "if any secularism is left in them", Mr Harkishan Singh Surjeet, CPI-M general secretary, said here today.

Mr Surjeet took serious note of the RSS resolution in Bangalore telling the minority community to enjoy the goodwill of Hindus for their safety. He termed it a "devastating slogan".

What would be the CPI-M's move if the allies reconsider their support? He said: "Let the situation develop... The first job is to fight communalism."

Ruling out an alliance with the Congress, he said it was not communal but was compromising on secularism. — SNS

THE STATESMAN

21 MAR 2002

NDA govt plans joint session to enact terror law

5.1 2003
D.P.P. NDA

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The government is toying with the idea of convening a joint session of parliament to get the prevention of terrorism bill passed if it is defeated in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday.

The frantic efforts being made by the government for such an unusual occasion—a joint session was last held in the 1970s—are clearly an indication of its urgency to get the bill passed before parliament goes into its mid-session recess around Holi.

The prevention of terrorism ordinance (Poto) is slated to lapse on April 6. "If we cannot have the ordinance replaced by legislation by then, all the terrorists arrested under Poto, including the accused in the December 13 attack on parliament, will have to be released," admitted a worried minister.

Going by the arithmetic of the upper house, a united opposition can defeat the bill. To save the bill, the government would then be left with no choice but to invoke Article 108 and call a joint session

of parliament to see that its comfortable majority in the Lok Sabha can blunt the opposition's edge in the upper house.

In anticipation of the bill's defeat in the Rajya Sabha, the ruling alliance's political managers have begun preparing for the joint session. March 26 has been tentatively fixed for the purpose.

But according to a minister, the government is still persuading the

The government will have to call a joint session of parliament to ensure that its comfortable majority in the Lok Sabha blunts the opposition's edge in the upper house

opposition groups to support the bill in the Rajya Sabha. The absence of a large number of Congress members in the Lok Sabha during Monday's voting is perhaps a pointer

to the dilemma in the main opposition party on its role in the passage of the bill.

Both Sharad Pawar's NCP and J. Jayalalitha's AIADMK have indicated their willingness to support the bill. Using its new clout with Mayawati's BSP, the government hopes to ensure at least its members' abstention. Mamata Banerjee's Trinamul Congress abstained from the Lok Sabha vote on Monday.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

20 MAR 2002

Allies want ban on VHP, Bajrang Dal

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 18

THE LOK Sabha was thrown into turmoil today with the Opposition as well as NDA allies like the Trinamool Congress, Samata Party and the JD(U) demanding a ban on the VHP and Bajrang Dal for storming the Orissa Assembly on Saturday.

Voicing concern over the incident, DP Yadav of the JD(U) said in the Lok Sabha, "Fundamentalism in any form should not be allowed in the country and organisations like the Bajrang Dal and the VHP should be banned." Democracy could not function in the country when such groups attacked democratic institutions like the Assembly. "We should not allow communal harmony to be disturbed within the country and what has happened in Orissa is a matter of concern," he said.

Almost echoing him, Prabhunath Singh of the Samata Party suggested the use of Poto to ban the VHP and Bajrang Dal, saying the atmosphere being created by incidents like the Assembly raid was not conducive for functioning of democracy.

Nitish Sengupta of the Trinamool said as these two organisations had not said a word on the incident, "there is need for stronger action against them". The Opposition termed the Orissa Assembly storming as "an attack on parliamentary democracy" and sought an immediate ban on the VHP and Bajrang Dal.

However, BJP spokesman VK Malhotra told reporters afterwards, "The allies have their own views and they are free to hold them." He said Home Minister LK Advani too had assured the Lok Sabha that action would be taken against any BJP worker found involved in the incident.

The House plunged into chaos as soon as it assembled for the day, with agitated Opposition members pressing for suspension of the Question Hour to discuss the matter, but this was strongly opposed by NDA members. Amid the pandemonium, the House was adjourned for an hour.

Raising the issue soon after the House reassembled, CPI(M) leader Somnath Chatterjee said over 500 people belonging to the VHP and the Bajrang Dal and armed with trishuls and shouting 'Jai Shri Ram' and 'Atal Bihari Vajpayee Zindabad' entered the Assembly premises and ransacked the rooms of the Chief Minister and other ministers, roughed up members and misbehaved with women staff.

"There is no qualitative differences between the December 13 attack on Parliament and the October 1 attack on the J&K Assembly and the one that occurred in Bhubaneswar on Saturday," he said amid protests from NDA MPs.

In Orissa, CM Naveen Patnaik announced in the Assembly that a House Committee headed by the Speaker would probe Saturday's attack on the highest democratic symbol of the State.

Just bytes, no bite in shila daan

Singhal and Paramhans booed by angry kar sevaks

Ananda Majumdar, Umesh Raghuvanshi & Sunita Aron
Ayodhya, March 15

THE HIGH drama over the VHP's programme ended today in an anti-climax with a hush-hush *shila puja* and a low-key *shila daan* at two different places in Ayodhya.

Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas president Ramchandra Das Paramhans decided to cut the heroics and tamely handed over the *shilas* to the receiver, Shatrughan Singh, outside the acquired land, drawing the ire of indignant kar sevaks tutored over weeks to expect something far more spectacular than a mere telegenic procession.

Paramhans and VHP general secretary Ashok Singhal handed over two *shilas* at Digambar Akhara. Singh had been flown in apparently after the Centre decided that getting the Faizabad divisional commissioner Anil Kumar Gupta to accept the stones as receiver might create legal complications as it might suggest an acceptance of the VHP's claim over the disputed land, local observers said.

Till at least 1.15 on Friday afternoon, the Nyas and VHP gave the impression that there would be no change in the programme hammered out late on Thursday night. The *shilas* would be handed over to Gupta at Bara Sthan in the Ramkot area, 300m from the boundary of the acquired land. Over a microphone, Paramhans asked kar sevaks to join the procession starting from Karsevakpuram at 2.15 pm.

When the procession reached Digambar Akhara, however, the Nyas and VHP appeared suddenly to decide to donate the stones at that point itself. "I took the decision because large crowds had joined the procession," said Param-

hans in lame justification later. "I will not enter the acquired land till its possession is given to Hindus," he said

But the charged-up sevaks would have none of it. Angry slogans went up to protest the backtracking, and a large crowd booed Paramhans and Singhal, as well as the Prime Minister and the Union Home Minister. A BJP flag went up in flames. By evening, hundreds of sevaks had jumped over the wall of Karsevakpuram, and indignant, slogan-shouting groups had filled the streets of Ayodhya and Faizabad.

"They have sold themselves and made fools out of us," cried Prabhu Das, a kar sevak. "If the donation was to take place at the Akhara, why did they raise our expectations this high?" 'Mandir wahin banayenge' — behind him the roar went up.

VHP general secretary Pravin Togadia tried to make the most of a manifestly lost case. "Today, the VHP overcame all obstacles, and successfully completed the *shila daan* on deadline," he told reporters.

The ceremony at the Akhara was followed by a near-clandestine puja of the donated stones. Paramhans and some close aides were taken out of the Akhara's back door, and whisked off to Bara Sthan in an official vehicle. Neither reporters nor kar sevaks got to know. One of the donated *shilas* had already reached Bara Sthan.

There, a small Nyas and VHP group performed a *shila puja*. The ceremony lasted no more than five minutes. Immediately afterward, then Mahant and Singhal were taken to the disputed site for a darshan of Ram Lalla.

More reports on Page 9



Ramchandra Das Paramhans handing over the *shila* to a Central observer in Ayodhya on Friday.

AFF PHOTO

Shatrughan: PMO's man in the muddle

Jay Raina
New Delhi, March 15

SHATRUGHAN SINGH, who received the *shila* from Mahant Paramahans Ramchandra Das in Ayodhya on Friday afternoon, has brought into focus the little-known Ayodhya cell under the PM in the Cabinet Secretariat.

Singh, a senior IAS officer in charge of the Ayodhya cell, was rushed to Ayodhya on Friday morning, to keep an eye on the law and order situation. His rapport with the VHP and Nyas is well-known. He was Faizabad Commissioner in the early 1990s.

Following his decision to work out a negotiated settlement of the Ayodhya dispute, the PM had picked Singh for the Ayodhya cell and announced the appointment to the VHP.

Sources said Singh's participation in the *shila* ceremony was decided on after Paramhans agreed to a climbdown from his suicide threat late on Thursday night during telephone conversations with L.K. Advani and George Fernandes. Paramhans reportedly expressed dissatisfaction with current Faizabad Commissioner A.K. Gupta, who was supposed to receive the *shila*.

Sangh parivar leaders reportedly preferred Singh since he represents the PM and would "provide respectability" to the ceremony.

VHP claims victory: The VHP claimed that the acceptance of the two *shilas* by the Centre's representative at Ayodhya indicated that the Government had, in principle, acknowledged the demand for the construction of a Ram temple on the disputed land.

Allies feel betrayed, Mamata boycotts meet

B.S. NAGARAJ
NEW DELHI, MARCH 13

THE National Democratic Alliance met this evening to endorse the Government's decision to implement the orders of the Supreme Court on Ayodhya but its show of unity was badly dented by a boycott by a key ally, the Trinamool Congress.

After a 90-minute meeting at Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's residence, none of the leaders of the allied parties, save Vaiko of the MDMK, chose to speak to the media. Even he refused to comment when asked if he was satisfied with the Government's explanation at the NDA meeting about the stand taken by it in Supreme Court on allowing a symbolic puja at Ayodhya. "I have expressed my views at the meeting," was all that he said, although he made it clear that "there is no threat to the government."

Briefing reporters after the meeting, NDA convenor George Fernandes also refused to divulge what transpired during the deliberations.

Fernandes said the "NDA upholds the Government's decision to implement the orders of Supreme Court in respect of Ayodhya and on maintaining status quo in the acquired area. The NDA is confident that the Government will take all necessary steps to see that today's orders are implemented in letter and spirit."

Sources however said the leaders of the 'secular' allies had given vent to their feelings about the undesirability of the Government taking the position in the court that a

symbolic puja could be allowed at Ayodhya. Vaiko, Ram Vilas Paswan, Murasoli Maran of the DMK and Omar Abdullah of the National Conference did not mince words in criticising the stand taken by Attorney General Soli Sorabjee.

Despite saying on the floor of the Rajya Sabha that the AG's submission was a reflection of the Government's view, Law Minister Arun Jaitley sought to give the impression at the meeting that Sorabjee had given his individual opinion. He also explained that the AG had not given anything in writing in the form of an affidavit but had only made an oral submission.

Vajpayee on his part sought to cool down tempers by saying that the court orders would be implemented in their letter and spirit, but sources said the allies were certainly not convinced.

The mood in the allies' camp reflected a sense of betrayal with Omar Abdullah articulating their feelings by saying that the allies were being treated as some kind of a 'C team' of the Government.

No sooner than the Government's stand before the court became public, angry leaders of the TDP, which supports the Government from the outside, and Trinamool Congress objected to the fact that the allies were not taken into confidence.

While they refused to say if they would withdraw support to the Vajpayee Government, both the TDP's Yerran Naidu and Trinamool's Mamata Banerjee said they were "unhappy" with the Government's stand. "We were not consulted. It is objectionable that the Government did not consult us before taking a stand on



Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee with NDA leaders in New Delhi on Wednesday. Express photo by Naveen Jora

such a sensitive issue."

The two leaders pointed out that the Government at the Centre was not run by the BJP alone. "It is a coalition government and there is an agreed common agenda," they said. Asked if the Government had deviated from this agenda, Banerjee remarked: "Yes, we feel so."

"When the NDA agenda deleted contentious issues like Ayodhya, how did the Government take the position in court that

pooja could be allowed?" fumed Naidu. "Other allies are also feeling bad," he said.

After the Supreme Court hearing, the allies met and decided to call on the Prime Minister to seek an explanation. Besides Naidu and Banerjee, Ram Vilas Paswan of the Lok Janshakti was also among those who met Vajpayee. They also got in touch with TDP chief and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N.Chandrababu Naidu. But then none of them categori-

cally said they were satisfied with the Government's explanation.

What riled the allies even more was the fact that when Chandrababu Naidu called up Vajpayee this morning before the court hearing, Vajpayee did not even give a hint of the position that the Government would take in the apex court. The TDP chief urged Vajpayee to take all necessary measures to maintain law and order and maintain status quo at Ayodhya.

Allies fall in line, Mamata sore

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 13. — After a series of meetings in the afternoon with leaders of the TDP, Trinamul and the DMK, the Prime Minister convened an emergency meeting of the NDA to placate some allies who took umbrage at the government's submission in the Supreme Court seeking permission for a symbolic puja on the undisputed site in Ayodhya. The allies are sore that they were not consulted by the government before asking the Attorney-General to make the submission.

But at the end of the meeting, the allies had clearly fallen in line and the crisis in the government appeared to have blown over.

The NDA convener, Mr George Fernandes, announced that the Prime Minister would make a statement in Parliament tomorrow to clarify the government's stand in the light of the Supreme

Court order. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee is likely to clarify that the status quo, which earlier stood for the disputed site, was now extended to the entire 67 acres, sources said.

Mr Murasoli Maran, Mr Sharad Yadav and Mr Ram Vilas Paswan (all ministers)

and the MDMK chief, Mr Vaiko, reportedly contended that Mr Soli Sorabjee's position had embarrassed the allies. The BJD president, Mr Navin Patnaik, said in Bhubaneswar that the allies should have been consulted on the submission.

They were particularly peeved that the law

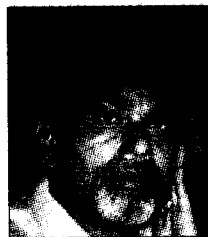
minister, Mr Arun Jaitley, made it appear as if the government had backed Mr Sorabjee's argument.

The Attorney-General, however, claimed he had made observations as a lawyer. The government tried to explain that it merely sought to know from the court if the puja could be allowed.

Miss Mamata Banerjee and Mr Ajit Singh were conspicuous by their absence. Mr Fernandes



"We object to the Attorney-General's pleading. This is not a BJP government but an NDA government. We feel we (allies) are being isolated"



"It is time for everybody to maintain restraint. The court order should not be interpreted as a victory for one and defeat for the other"

plan for a press conference by the allies, a government clarification that it did not file any affidavit, that the Attorney-General was merely responding to the query from the court and that it would adhere to the court direction gave the allies a cover, especially after a telephonic conversation between the

Prime Minister and Mr Naidu.

It was clear that nobody wanted to rock the boat.

Mr Sorabjee also addressed a meeting of the NDA. He explained his position there and then at a press conference.

The Trinamul leader justified her absence, saying she had met the Prime Minister thrice today. The JD-U leader, Mr Devendra Prasad Yadav, said some NDA allies would meet tomorrow and monitor the scheduled statement of the Prime Minister in Parliament.

When the allies argued that the government's position was a violation of its own commitment on the status quo, the government clarified that after the

court order status quo would be maintained on the acquired area, besides the disputed 80x40 feet site.

Mr Fernandes said: "The NDA upholds the government's decision to implement the Supreme Court order in respect of Ayodhya."

Allies sulk but won't quit NDA

CL Manoj in New Delhi

March 12. — Ayodhya is an issue between the BJP and its allies. But staying in power is even a bigger issue for the allies. Sources said the "hostile ground realities" in their home states, where their respective rivals are doing well electorally, have made the allies all the more anxious to retain power in Delhi. Proof: all allies parry questions on their course of action if VHP and Sangh Parivar defy an "unfavourable court order".

The allies, more than the BJP, have become insecure after the recent defeats in the Assembly elections which also signalled the resurgence of the Congress as a force. Interestingly none of the allies distanced themselves from the government when the Gujarat carnage was discussed in Parliament, despite their earlier criticism. Further, the BJP has been successfully manoeuvring the number game in

such a way as to limit the bargaining of the individual allies on one hand and exploiting the inner divisions of many allies on the other.

Mr Sharad Yadav's JD (U), sulking ever since their leader was shunted out of the civil aviation ministry and then made to fall in line on the labour reforms, had been showing signs of dissent till a few days ago over the VHP's Ayodhya line.

But on the eve of the Supreme Court hearing, the party's general secretary, Mr Mohan Prakash, said: "In Ayodhya, we are all for maintaining the status quo. Now the Prime Minister has said on the issue of the puja that the government would go by the court decision and we



Miss Banerjee and Mr Naidu



fully agree with it. In any case, this is the time to strengthen the hands of the Prime Minister and not to weaken them."

Miss Mamata Banerjee, who called on the Prime Minister some days back to convey her "secular concern",

virtually ended up once again with playing the role of "the daughter" to Mr Vajpayee.

She said in the Lok Sabha that everyone should agree with the Prime Minister's stand that the court verdict will be adhered to.

The Lok Janshakti leader, Mr Ram Vilas Paswan, today blamed the BJP's lack of accommodation of the allies for the debacle in Uttar Pradesh and said his party would now fight the local elections in

Delhi and later in Bihar on its own. But asked why his party, despite the criticism of the BJP on many issues including the Ayodhya, is still sticking to the "chair," Mr Paswan said, "Why do you want me to quit? We will fight from within."

The defence minister, Mr George Fernandes converted the Ayodhya issue into an opportunity to further strengthen his ties with Mr Vajpayee by being the facilitator of the talks between the Shankaracharya and the Muslim Board.

The Samata Party spokesman, Dr Shambhu Srivastava, said: "It's clear that the government will go by the court direction and nobody will be allowed to defy that."

Though the TDP tried to act tough initially, declining the vacant Speaker's post, sources said some telephone calls from Delhi have made Mr Chandrababu Naidu to change his mind. For the allies it looks like a case of either swim with the BJP or sink together.



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee receives blessings at his residence in New Delhi from Swami Dikshanand on Tuesday on the 178th birth anniversary of Maharishi Dayanand. — PTI

(Continued from page 1)

Maulana Abdul Koyya, he said.

To a query on whether these proposals would be conveyed to the apex court tomorrow when it begins hearing on the planned puja, he said: "We don't have to go by the dates of court hearings or deadlines set by others (read VHP's 15 March 15). Ours is a religious initiative which will take its own time".

The Shankaracharya attacked VHP leaders and the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas: "Lord Ram always stood up to uphold law and justice. He even sacrificed power for that. No true disciple of Lord Ram will ever challenge the rule of law. But here some people are talking about defying the court order in the name of Lord Ram, they are only politicians who want destabilise this country".

Dismissing the Kanchi Shankaracharya as a "sub-head", Adhokshajananda said the Puri Math was the highest Hindu peeth with branches in Dwaraka Math, Jyotir Math and Goverdhan.

He, however, conveniently left out the fact that

(Continued from page 1)

security measures. Hitlershahi prevails here and the political leadership's directions make no difference to the officials."

Mr Singhal said Mr Vajpayee was facing pressures from three other quarters — Opposition parties, NDA allies and the Muslim Personal Law Board — and thus it was very difficult for him to take an independent decision on the subject. The Muslim outfits had no role to play in the "acquired land" but different parties were politicising the issue.

Mr Singhal's conciliatory approach is believed to be the outcome of the displeasure of senior RSS leaders who blamed him for taking the agitation to such a high pitch without thinking about the consequences.

The home minister, Mr LK Advani, is understood to have already conveyed to the RSS leadership that he would resign if anything untoward happened on 15 March.

Also, there appears to be a rift between Mr Singhal and the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas over the modus operandi to resolve the impasse.

The Nyas president, Mahant Ramchander Das, enjoys some clout as he has been close to the RSS.

Seer:

he himself is in the thick of a power-game in his own math, where a section does not accept

his leadership.

On whether he would meet the Prime Minister, he quipped: "The Shanakaracharyas don't hang around at leaders' houses. If some one wants to meet the Shankaracharya, he will have to seek an audience which may or may be granted on merit. By going to the Prime Minister's residence to see politicians the Kanchi Shankaracharya did not do the right thing".

Reminding the Prime Minister that he was bound by oath to protect the Constitution, he said: "Mr Vajpayee should not allow these people to take law into their hands. He should explain how the VHP leader, Mr VH Dalmia, reached Ayodhya when the Babari Masjid leaders are being prevented from entering there. The Prime Minister may have his SPG men to protect his body, but he can only protect his self-esteem through his conduct. He has failed on many fronts including on Kashmir issue".

VHP:

Mr Singhal was not even informed about the Mahant's decision to take a pillar to the makeshift temple on Friday instead of the puja at the undisputed site.

The BJP MP from Faizabad, Mr Vinay Katiyar, has been saying that Friday was an inauspicious day for puja. He is believed to be working in tandem with the Mahant.

The Uttar Pradesh Home Secretary, Mr Naresh Dayal, today said that no stones would be allowed to be taken out of the VHP workshop.

He, however, said the Faizabad Divisional Commissioner, the receiver of the property acquired by the Centre, could accept the donation of a stone inside the workshop, SNS adds from Lucknow.

Mr Dayal said restrictions in Ayodhya could not be lifted because it was being apprehended that besides Ram sevaks, terrorists might reach there.

Police will not allow Ram sevaks from leaving the Lucknow railway station if they come from Gujarat by the Sabarmati Express. The train was being terminated in Lucknow.

The government has released funds to the districts adjoining Faizabad to set up temporary jails to detain the Ram sevaks. Officials said 18 jails were being established.

Officials sending children abroad under scanner

Shivnath Jha in New Delhi

March 12. — Government officials and politicians who have sent their children abroad for higher studies are being examined. Methods of money transfer and sources of financing the expensive higher education in countries like the USA and UK are being probed, CBI sources said.

Senior officials and politicians have transacted money — ranging between Rs 12 lakh and Rs 22 lakh per head — either through NRI relatives or some NGOs, trusts and export companies. Some students abroad are also receiving money through hawala and other money laundering channels, sources said.

More than 450 names figure on the investigation list and most of them are IAS and IRS officials.

The CBI has sought cooperation from the income tax department and the Enforcement Directorate. The Central Vigilance Commission is also examining the matter, sources added. "We've requested the income tax department to examine details of their income and returns filed," a CBI official said. "The ED is examining the NGOs, trusts and export houses."

The CBI says between 15,000 and 20,000 students leave every year for undergraduate, post-graduate and other professional courses in the USA and the UK. Only a handful among them go with scholarships. Currently, more than 1,300 Indian students abroad are children of senior officials and politicians. The universities hosting these "VIP

children" include Tufts, Boston, Yale, North Western, Princeton, Stanford, Purdue, Brown and Texas in the USA and Cambridge, Oxford, Leeds, London University and London Business School in the UK. The finance ministry had recently asked Mr AK Pandey, member (personnel, vigilance and anti-smuggling) of the Central Board of Excise and Custom, to explain how he got his son, Aditya Pandey, admitted to Stanford University, California.

Aditya got assistance of Rs 2,00,000 from one Jan Seva Trust, associated with the Zenith Industries. The DRI, Mumbai, has booked a customs fraud case against Zenith. "As the annual expenditure in the university works up to US \$35,000 per year and as I can't raise such resources on my own, the trust may consider sanctioning the additional amount to me," Aditya Pandey's letter to the trust on 4 May 1999 said. Aditya's father was the DG of the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence when his son joined a two-year (1999-2001) course at the electrical engineering department at Stanford University.

The CBI possesses a letter from Prof Antony Fraser-Smith of the graduate admission authorities of Stanford University.

In his letter, Prof Fraser-Smith says: "The trust had no balance in its account. It has no record of funding any student either before or after Aditya. It never publicised its offer of funding students for higher education abroad in any manner nor had it adopted any judicious or transparent method of selecting him for the purpose of its funding."

Eunuch to contest Bihar civic polls

Statesman News Service

PATNA, March 12. — The Bihar Election Commission has allowed Kali, an eunuch, to contest the municipal corporation elections as a woman candidate for the ward no 10 in Patna.

Kali filed nomination papers for the Ward No 10 which is reserved for women. But the voter list of ward no-12 says Kali is a 38-year-old male. Scrutiny officials refused to accept Kali's nomination papers. Kali had to produce the identity card issued by the Election Commission which declared that Kali was a female. Officials then asked the state election commission for directives on the matter. Patna West constituency's returning officer, Mr Naramdeshwar Lal said: "The election commission has asked us to treat Kali Hijra as female and let her contest as a woman candidate from ward no 10." Mr Lal said a voters list prepared in 1995 shows Kali Hijra is a female. "The Election Commission accepted her as female on the basis of 1995 voters' list." Kali is happy at the Election Commission's decision. Her election campaign has been a colourful one with a group of eunuchs dancing and singing to the beats of drums.

NDA faces tough time in Parliament

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 24. — A beleaguered government and a besieged Parliament. That is the opening scenario for the Budget session beginning tomorrow. Beset by reverses in the four states' Assembly polls, the BJP-led NDA will have a tough time now. The Parliament House itself will see stringent security measures, including gun-toting commandos and strict entry checks, in force since the 13 December attack.

For the passage of the Finance Bill (General Budget), the government will have to tread cautiously as it will be under pressure both from the Opposition and some of its allies who may find it difficult to allow certain economic reforms like ones proposed by the Industrial Disputes Act amendment or a 'harsh' budget for the middle class.

Money Bills are crucial too. The Opposition would not miss opportunities and may even attempt to move 'cut motions' to try to defeat the government on the floor of the House. The government's competence and Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's acumen would be under test.

In the past, the parliamentary affairs minister, Mr Pramod Mahajan, had not been very effective. For Mr Vajpayee, Mr George Fernandes had generally been the answer to the Opposition fusillade. But Mr Fernandes himself is the main target of the Opposition which will continue hitting at the defence minister inside Parliament.

On the first day, there would be little scope for the Opposition to shout since the President's address to the joint session of Parliament is scheduled. The business schedule till 28 February is packed with constitutional obligations of Parliament which

include presentation of the Railway Budget and the Economic Survey on 26 February and presentation of the General Budget on 28 February.

The political 'hangama' being planned by the main Opposition parties would have to wait for the session's second week. Going by the mood in the Opposition camp, there would be an outcry in Parliament asking the government to step down in view of the verdict in the states. Mr Vajpayee's statement in Varanasi during the poll campaign is also likely to be raised. The thrust would be to maintain pressure on the government on every possible issue and on some Bills which the Opposition would like to obstruct.

The worst the government could expect from its adversaries is a cut motion on Money Bills since a defeat on it would be close to a defeat in a 'no-trust motion' against the government

THE STATESMAN

25 FEB 2002

BJP will toe NDA line on temple issue

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The Bharatiya Janata Party officially amended its position on Ayodhya on Thursday.

Party president Jana Krishnamurthy announced that the party now believed a solution should be found either through a court verdict or negotiations. He said that the BJP was bound by the NDA agenda and that the Ram temple would not be on the BJP's agenda till 2004.

He admitted that the BJP was reneging on the national executive resolution it passed in Palampur in 1989 declaring that the disputed land should be handed over to the

Hindus either through a negotiated settlement or legislation, but ruling out litigation.

Mr Krishnamurthy said that the resolution was valid then, but the BJP had to accept a court verdict as a possible option because it was now part of the NDA.

"We are not bothered whether the VHP accepts the court verdict or not," he said. "In a civilised country, you have to go by the rule of law." He said that if the VHP does not accept the court verdict, "legal consequences will follow".

He claimed that "the dilapidated



J. Krishnamurthy

structure that went by the name of Babri masjid fell down" and the matter is pending before a commission and the court. He said that the NDA was bound by the constitution, the rule of law and its agenda.

Mr Krishnamurthy said he sympathised with the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's

desire to see that the legal cases on issue speedily settled and urged the government to take necessary steps. He also appealed to party workers to await the law ministry's opinion on the status of the undisputed land around the site on which the Babri masjid once stood.

Meanwhile, VHP chief Ashok Singhal struck a conciliatory note on Thursday, saying that he was still prepared to talk to the government on the Babri masjid issue until March 12, after which the date for construction would be announced.

This comes two days after his party's international general secretary, Pravin Togadia, said the VHP was no longer prepared to talk to the government. Mr Singhal added that he understood the compulsions under which the Prime Minister was operating as head of the NDA coalition.

"We know the law ministry will decide in our favour," he said.

PM CONSULTS ALLIES AS 'SANTS' ARRIVE IN DELHI

NDA not for handover of disputed land in Ayodhya

By Neena Vyas and K.V. Prasad

NEW DELHI, JAN. 26. The 'sants' led by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Government could be heading for a showdown on the Ayodhya issue.

As the 'chetavani sant yatra' which left Ayodhya on January 20 entered the capital today from Ghaziabad, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, hurriedly consulted leaders of his coalition partners this evening. He informed them that tomorrow he would receive a delegation of 'sants' led by the VHP leader, Ashok Singhal. Apparently, the informal NDA meeting decided that the Prime Minister should simply reiterate the known stand of the Government on the Ayodhya issue.

While the 'sants' have made it clear that tomorrow its leaders will ask Mr. Vajpayee to hand over 47 acres of the 67 acres acquired by the Centre in Ayodhya in 1993, to facilitate the start of construction of a Ram temple, NDA leaders emphasised that the Ayodhya tangle should be resolved either through a verdict of the court or through negotiations. There was no question of handing over any

part of the acquired land to any VHP-controlled trust.

The sole purpose of the 'yatra' was to finalise a date for the start of construction of a temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya. The decision on this is to be taken by the Marg Darshak Mandal committee of the 'dharam sansad' which will meet tomorrow and will be followed by a rally at the Ramlila grounds. A VHP delegation including some 'sants' — Ramchandra Paramhans, Nrityagopal Das, Mahant Avaidyanath, Swami Vishwasteerath of Udipi and Swami Satyanand of Kerala — are to meet Mr. Vajpayee around noon immediately after the meeting.

A three-hour meeting of the Mandir Nirman Samiti was held here this afternoon and several important 'sants' and senior VHP leaders attended. The VHP leader, Acharya Giriraj Kishore, said there was no question of delaying further the plans to start building the temple "anytime after March 12 this year" which was a decision taken at the Kumbhmela early last year. The delegation would ask Mr. Vajpayee to hand over the acquired land to the VHP-controlled trust. "We cannot give any more time to the Government."

The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, who briefed reporters later, pointed out that although the Ram temple issue was not on the NDA agenda for governance, the Prime Minister would simply be giving a hearing to the delegation of 'sants'.

Although Opposition parties had alleged that the 'yatra' would create tension and even communal disharmony at a time when the India-Pakistan relations were at a low and Assembly elections were on, Mr. Mahajan pointed out that the 'yatra' had been peaceful. Clearly, the fears of Opposition parties were not well founded, he asserted.

Asked whether the Prime Minister had sought permission from the allied leaders to meet the VHP-led delegation tomorrow, Mr. Mahajan said the Prime Minister was always free to receive delegations and hear them out, irrespective of the fact that the issue they might want to discuss was not on the NDA agenda.

Mr. Mahajan said none of the leaders of coalition parties who met today objected to the Prime Minister receiving the VHP delegation. The question of any solu-

tion to the Ayodhya tangle being discussed did not arise at all.

In fact, Mr. Mahajan insisted that the Government did not know what the delegation wanted, although the 'chetavani yatra' (a 'yatra' to give a warning) had made its intention and demands clear.

The INLD chief and Haryana Chief Minister, Om Prakash Chautala, who attended the meeting, distanced himself from the ongoing 'yatra'. He told reporters earlier that no party should include the temple issue in its election manifesto.

Others who attended the two-hour meeting at the Prime Minister's residence included Sharad Yadav (JD-U), Ramvilas Paswan (LJS), Omar Abdullah (NC), Vaiko (MDMK), Mamata Banerjee (Trinamool Congress), besides the NDA convener, George Fernandes, (Samata). The Home Minister, L.K. Advani, and the External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, were also present.

The NDA leaders were also briefed about the U.S. visits of Mr. Advani and Mr. Fernandes while Jaswant Singh spoke about the latest situation.

THE HINDU

27 JAN 2002

7/2/02 87
M. J. ...

MONDAY, JANUARY 28, 2002

ENRON AND DABHOL ^{49-8 28/1}

THE SENSATIONAL COLLAPSE of Enron and the ever-expanding sequel to it hold important and varied messages, including for us in India. The fate of the Dabhol project comes into sharp focus. Even before the totally unanticipated plunge of its chief promoter into bankruptcy, the future of India's largest and most controversial foreign direct investment was delicately poised. Among the several suggestions made to restart the project, the only feasible course seemed to be the one which would involve the buy-out of Enron's stake by one or more of Indian companies and thereafter renegotiate the entire project terms, including the contentious power purchase agreement with all its stakeholders. That route needs to be pursued even in the vastly changed circumstances, by all accounts with an even greater sense of urgency.

Many in India who believe that Enron's troubles in America would help in an early resolution of the DPC imbroglio might be mistaken. On the contrary, Enron's demise seems to complicate matters. Despite its tough posturing before its fatal flaws became public, Enron was reportedly preparing to exit from the DPC. Although not confirmed, there were indications that it would have accepted much less than the one billion dollars, which it had claimed was a fair price for its 60 per cent stake. It is highly unlikely that such a decision will be made by Enron alone: the bankruptcy proceedings now going on will determine the way and the speed with which its assets will be sold.

In any case, the time for reckoning has come for the DPC. Prospective Indian buyers, the Tatas and BSES in the beginning joined by a few others later, would have to move faster, complete the due diligence and arrange the funds. Both the tasks were never easy even in what by today's standards seem to be normal times. A

failed Enron will be more difficult to handle, posing major challenges to those determining the price of its investments here and thereafter funding the acquisition by an Indian party. Needless to add, a distressed vendor would rather receive the bulk of its sale consideration at one go rather than accept a leisurely deferred payment schedule, which it might have accepted in its better days.

All other stakeholders of the DPC face a similar uncertainty in the wake of Enron's collapse. Indian financial institutions and banks having a very large exposure have special reasons to be worried, even though they are publicly claiming that they have adequate security. Not getting interest on their loans, they will soon have to make provisions. For all of them there would be a serious dent in their profits for the current year. Moreover, since the Dabhol project has for all practical purposes been closed and nearly all its employees laid off, it is going to be particularly expensive to restart the operations.

In short, none of the controversies — relating to its economics, legal or any other — seem abating in a post-Enron scenario. The legal route on which the Maharashtra State Electricity Board and the State Government were banking on will not move any faster than before. The fact remains that both of them have been in default, having reneged on valid contracts. The other legal option of striking at the roots of the original one-sided contracts alleging ignorance, even malfeasance on the Indian side, suddenly looks good in the light of the voluminous material now available on Enron's unethical behaviour in the U.S. However, no India-specific shenanigan has yet come to light and even if it does it will be useful to remember that another cumbersome process can be fatal for Indian interests in the DPC and on the flow of FDI into the country.

THE HINDU

10 JAN 2002

Opposition members shun Fernandes

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, NOV. 22. Continuing its campaign against the re-induction of the Samata Party leader, Mr. George Fernandes, in the Union Cabinet as the Defence Minister, the Opposition benches in the Lok Sabha today refused to put any questions to him, claiming that he was "illegally occupying" the post. The Opposition's noisy protest during question hour forced the Speaker to adjourn the House for three hours.

The matter appears headed for a confrontation with the Congress making it known outside the House that it has already given notice for a censure motion against the Minister.

This fracas took place even as the current tenure of the Venkataswami Commission — probing the Tehelka expose — is coming to an end tomorrow and the Commission is awaiting the Government's response to its request for an extension.

Congress sources said that notice under Rule 184 was given by Mr. Jaipal Reddy and others and cited the precedent of a similar motion against the former Home Minister, Charan Singh, during the Morarji Desai regime.

Maintaining that the Speaker would consider the notice "under rules," Government

sources said that it was for him to examine the wording of the Opposition motion and decide whether it was permissible under the rules.

At the same time, Government sources indicated that the ruling coalition was willing to discuss any motion which the Opposition could bring under the rules but "would not allow any discussion on the Prime Minister's prerogative to choose his Cabinet which was his Constitutional right."

Earlier, in the Lok Sabha, Congress members, the Left parties and the Rashtriya Janata Dal gave vent to their feelings against Mr. Fernandes' return even as the Venkataswami Commission was yet to submit its report.

As the Speaker, Mr. G.M.C. Balayogi, called out to Mr. Prabodh Panda, to pose his supplementaries to the Defence Minister, the CPI(M) member said: "I do not want to put any question as the Minister is illegally occupying the chair." His action elicited support from the Congress and the RJD benches which began protesting loudly.

Mr. Panda's refusal to put any supplementary to the Minister prompted the Speaker to say: "You are creating a new precedent. This is not proper, this is not the way. If you are not interested, you allow other members to put supplementaries." His plea went unheeded.

When Mr. Balayogi asked Mr. G. Puttaswamy Gowda (Congress) to ask his supplementary, the member followed Mr. Panda's line. With both members refusing to pose any queries, the Opposition members displayed remarkable unity in not wasting any moment to be on their feet and criticise the Government for re-inducting Mr. Fernandes. The only thing audible were the occasional shouts of "shame, shame."

In the treasury benches, Mr. Fernandes sat quietly flanked by the Petroleum Minister, Mr. Ram Naik, and the Information and Broadcasting Minister, Ms. Sushma Swaraj.

From the Congress benches, the chief whip, Mr. Priyaranjan Dasmunshi and Mr. Kamal Nath, were on their feet and using their lung power to the maximum. The Leader of the Opposition, Ms. Sonia Gandhi, sat quietly witnessing the row between the Government and the Opposition benches. The uproar continued for nearly 15 minutes when the Speaker announced adjournment till 2 p.m.

Later, the BJP spokesperson, Mr. V. K. Malhotra, criticised the disruption of question hour by Opposition members, saying it was their loss.

THE HINDU

23 NOV 2002