

Sonia blasts BJP on terror

12/12/02 11-6 J.P. Khan
BASANT RAWAT

Hadad (Banaskantha), Dec. 3: Sonia Gandhi today launched a blistering attack on the BJP for spreading hatred and fear and trying to divert attention from problems affecting the people of Gujarat.

But in her 13-minute speech, the Congress president did not once name caretaker chief minister Narendra Modi, who has repeatedly ridiculed her as "Italy ki beti" in public meetings.

Kicking off the Congress' election campaign from this tribal-dominated belt in north Gujarat, about 20 km from Ambaji, after offering prayers at the temple, Sonia said the BJP was raising issues not relevant to the state.

In an obvious reference to Modi, who has also been attacking "Mian Musharraf", Sonia said "some people and organisers are raising the issue of terrorism and Pakistan" just to cover up the lack of development in Gujarat.

"This issue of terrorism and Pakistan is a national problem that can be tackled by the Centre. The Congress has extended its support to the government in Parliament on this issue. Nobody has stopped the Union government from curbing this problem of terrorism," she said.

Obviously referring to the chief minister's controversial Gaurav Yatra, Sonia said: "Hate, destruction and backwardness is not the *gaurav* (pride) of

Gujarat. The kind of disgusting language the BJP leaders speak does not make one feel proud."

At the well-attended rally, Sonia struck a chord with the tribals despite the language barrier. She spoke about water, electricity and drought, blaming the four-and-a-half-year rule of the BJP for derailing the state's economic progress.

"You have faced the consequences of the BJP's misrule. The BJP promised a regime free from fear, hunger and corruption, but that is precisely what you have got. So December 12 is your chance to throw the BJP out of power," she said.

The large number of people who turned up for Sonia's first election meeting here indicates that her stock is rising among tribals, who account for 15 per cent of the state's population and 26 of the 182 MLAs. In the dissolved House, the Congress had 18 tribal MLAs.

Sixty-year-old Pithabaru has never heard of Sonia. For him, she is Indira Gandhi. But it does not really matter. People here have made up their minds to vote for the Congress. They remember that power supply was regular when the party ruled Gujarat and there was relief work every time there was a drought.

But this time, despite repeated requests, the state government has not started any relief work though the area is reeling under severe drought for the third consecutive year.

4 DEC 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

Paradise Lost: No Truth In Congress Claims, The Centre Was Not Consulted, Repudiates Deputy Chief Minister

BJP rejects Cong remark on militant issue

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 26 NOVEMBER

WITH the Jammu and Kashmir government's softline approach towards terrorists becoming the centre piece of poll-bound Gujarat's political discourse, the BJP on Tuesday unleashed a major offensive against the main Opposition party and said Congress president Sonia Gandhi's claim that the release of militants had the consent of the Centre was complete falsehood.

Deputy prime minister L.K. Advani, who laid the contours of the BJP's attack on the Congress at the BJP's parliamentary party meeting here on Tuesday morning, said the Centre had not given any approval to the state government. The deputy prime minister said he had himself cautioned against the move and asked for constituting a screening committee to take the decision. "But the state government had rejected the suggestion of the Centre". He also said conflagration that Ms

"healing touch" approach has opened wounds in the terror-ravaged state and that the Congress will have to own up for the present mess.

An aggressive BJP also joined in the attack with the party spokesman asking the Congress president to be more sensitive to the security concerns of the nation. "The Congress is the key element of the Multi dispensation. The state government cannot be allowed to take a soft approach towards the forces that are working against the nation's interests," the BJP spokesman said.

The BJP said the Congress's sincerity on the issue would be judged by its success to get the Mufti government formulate a clear policy against terrorism and harsh steps to contain the jihadis. "The policy of not implementing Pota, releasing prisoners without proper screening and recalling the SOG needs reconsideration," he said. The people of the state needs healing touch, not terrorists," BJP spokesman V.K. Malhotra said.



ADVANI: HEAR NO EVIL

Gandhi had cited in self-defence was merely one of the mutual exchange of inputs that are pretty routine, but didn't amount to consultation.

The deputy prime minister also reiterated the point that the terror attack on two Jammu temples came within 24 hours of a formal central advisory to the Mufti government for restraint. Although the deputy PM was careful not to be seen as attempting score points, the message was clear: the

J&K passes Ehtsaab Bill

Masood Hussain
SRINAGAR 26 NOVEMBER

THE J&K State Legislature on Tuesday unanimously passed the Ehtsaab (Accountability) Bill aimed at establishing an institution to provide clean administration and enforce accountability and transparency at all levels by bringing the office of the chief minister, ministers and legislators under its purview.

The new state government set a new trend of bearing harmonious relationship with the Opposition and adopted their amendments moved by them to demonstrate that the new government's historic bill has no political vendetta. Law and parliamentary affairs minister, Muzaffar Hussain Beig in his speech, in the House, announced that chief minister Mufti Muhammad Sayeed had instructed him to accept the Opposition's point of view.

In the same vein, he announced that the government had no objection in having a committee, comprising the chief justice and two senior most judges of the J&K High Court, for selecting a chairman and its members instead of a seven member committee headed by the chief minister as mentioned in the Bill. The law minister added that the opposition's demand had been accepted to prove that the government did not have any intention of influencing appointment of the chairman and its members.

Justifying the limitation period of seven years for the commission to take cognisance of complaints, Beig said this was based on model of Lok Pal and other similar Acts in the country. Yet the government will go a step forward to delete this section, as this piece of legislation has not been brought in the legislature with some ulterior motives.



AND JUSTICE FOR ALL: All India Anti-Terrorist Front activists shout slogans during a demonstration in front of the Jammu & Kashmir House in New Delhi on Tuesday. — AFP

SP smells a conspiracy in MLAs' arrest

Mayawati wants to save govt at any cost, says Amar Singh

TIMES NEWS NETWORK & PTI

Lucknow: Encouraged by chinks in the camp of the BJP dissidents in Uttar Pradesh, the Mayawati government on Sunday arrested two Independent MLAs, Raghuraj Pratap Singh alias Raja Bhaiya and Dhananjay Singh, on charges of threatening BJP MLA Puran Singh Bundela, a rebel who returned to the ruling camp.

In a pre-dawn swoop, the police arrested the duo after Mr Bundela lodged a first information report accusing them of threatening him with dire consequences if he did not return to the dissidents' fold, senior superintendent of police Anil Agarwal said. The two were remanded to police custody till Friday.

Chief minister Mayawati said in Saharanpur that they were arrested under the Gangster Act for threatening Mr Bundela at gun-point after he met governor Vishnu Kant Shastri and expressed support to the BSP-BJP coalition government.

"He (Bundela) escaped from their (MLAs') clutches and lodged a complaint with the senior SP, Lucknow," she said.

Denying the charge, Raja Bhaiya told reporters over phone from the Cantonment police station that Mr Bundela was a "respected" legislator and he could not even think of threatening him.

Terming the arrest as "an effort to save the state government through the misuse of official machinery", the Samajwadi Party alleged that the top BJP leadership, including the PM, the deputy PM and the governor were involved in the exercise.

SP president Mulayam

Singh Yadav said the arrest of the two MLAs reflected the frustration of the Mayawati government, which was in a "minority". The two MLAs had been slapped with "false" cases, he said.

"The arrest is part of a conspiracy to save the state government by any means," SP general secretary Amar Singh said. He accused the governor of siding with the ruling alliance by rejecting the demand for convening a special session of the Vidhan Sabha for a fresh trial of strength. "He (governor) is behaving like a BJP worker," he said.

Earlier, sources in the government indicated that Ms Mayawati planned to undertake a major cabinet reshuffle next month to accommodate rebel BJP MLAs and others as part of a deal to contain dissidence.

Meanwhile, in a relief to the BJP, chinks appeared on Sunday in the rebels camp as two more dissidents affirmed faith in the state leadership and ruled out quitting the party.

Arrests are not political: CM

Lucknow: Chief minister Mayawati on Sunday denied that the police action against the two Independent MLAs, Raghuraj Pratap Singh and Dhananjay Singh, was "politically motivated" and said they had been prosecuted under the provisions of general law. She said the two were trying to destabilise the government by threatening other legislators with muscle power. PTI

'Togadia remarks show utter contempt for Indian ethos'

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, OCT. 20. The Congress today organised demonstrations throughout the country to protest the 'vulgar remarks' by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader, Pravin Togadia, against their party president, Sonia Gandhi.

Violence was witnessed at demonstrations by the Mahila Congress protesting outside the VHP headquarters here. In Hyderabad, Congress demonstrators demanded Mr. Togadia's 'immediate arrest'.

Opposition party politicians, including Chief Ministers, academics and even some bureaucrats, agreed that Mr. Togadia had been successful in plumbing "new depths of vulgarity, even obscenity".

A group of five eminent academics and bureaucrats criticised the "cheap remarks" made by Mr. Togadia, who re-

portedly referred to Ms. Gandhi as an "Italian dog", in a speech in Gujarat two days ago. Though he did not name Ms. Gandhi there was no doubt that the remark was directed against her. Mr. Togadia had described others who criticised the massacres in Gujarat as "secularist dogs".

"We express deep anguish at the language used by Pravin Togadia of the VHP against the Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi. This is reducing the political debate in the country to the level of the gutter. It also shows utter contempt for the Indian ethos. We appeal to all political leaders to ensure that politics is not dragged down to such depths of vulgarity." Professors Bipan Chandra, V.P. Dutt, Arjun Sen Gupta, Mridula Mukherjee and a former bureaucrat, Gopi Arora, said here today. If Mr. Togadia was not stopped, political dis-

cussion would be reduced to exchange of abuses and four letter words.

The Karnataka Chief Minister, S.M. Krishna, said in Bangalore that Mr. Togadia's comments showed the "moral and mental bankruptcy" of the Sangh Parivar which had a "fascist culture".

In Jaipur, the Rajasthan Chief Minister, Ashok Gehlot, attributed the use of such "cheap words" to the "frustration and inferiority complex of the Sangh Parivar". He said Ms. Gandhi's popularity had upset the RSS organisations.

The CPI national secretary, D. Raja, saw this "language of extreme right fascists" as a symptom of "lack of strength of their ideology which has no respect for democratic discourse". By uttering such words, Mr. Togadia had "debased all norms of public life".

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20 OCT 2002

Move for Opposition unity

By Our Special Correspondent

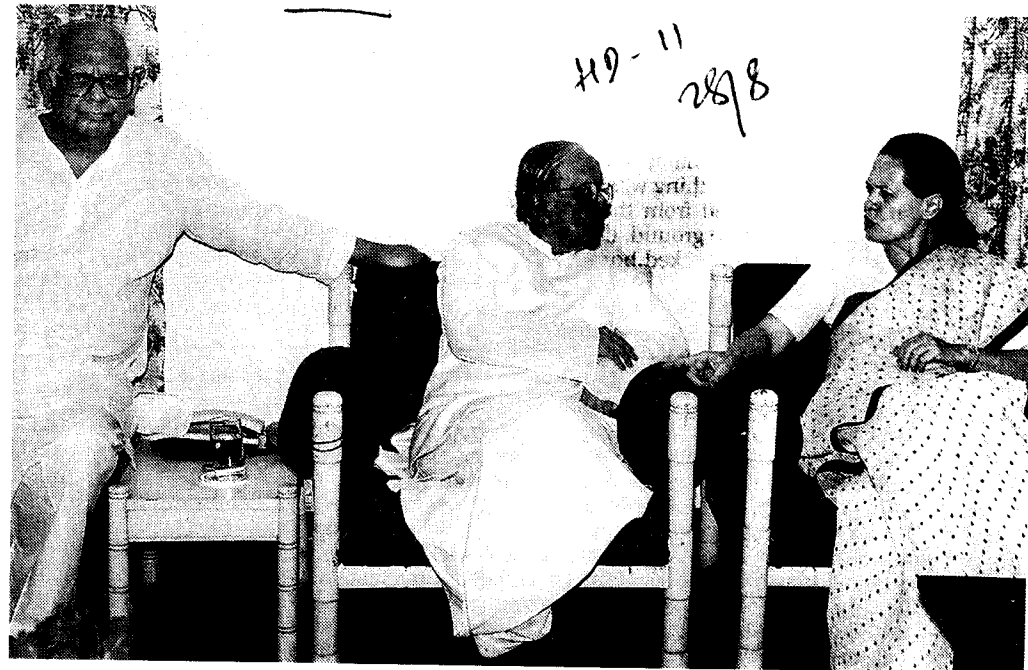
NEW DELHI, AUG. 27. The Opposition parties today began regrouping to launch a fresh onslaught on the Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance outside Parliament, with accent on the twin issues of communalism and corruption.

While leaders of the Left parties, the Janata Dal (Secular) and the former Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, came together at a public meeting organised by the CPI (M) in the Capital, broader Opposition unity was showcased at a dinner hosted by the CPI (M) Parliamentary Party leader, Somnath Chatterjee.

Buoyed by the success in putting the Government on the mat during the monsoon session of Parliament, the Opposition parties responded to Mr. Chatterjee's invitation, which was essentially an exercise to forge a broad understanding and cooperation outside Parliament, though the Samajwadi Party was conspicuous by its absence.

Among those who attended the dinner were the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, senior leaders, Manmohan Singh and Shivraj Patil, the RJD president, Laloo Prasad Yadav, the former Prime Ministers, H.D. Deve Gowda, V.P. Singh and I.K. Gujral, the CPI (M) general secretary, Harkishen Singh Surjeet, his CPI counterpart, A.B. Bardhan, the veteran Marxist leader, Jyoti Basu, the West Bengal Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, and the CPI (M) politburo member, Sitaram Yechury.

Apparently, the death of a party member took the SP lead-



The senior Marxist leader, Jyoti Basu, and the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, holding talks before the dinner party organised by the CPI (M) MP, Somnath Chatterjee, (extreme left) at his residence in New Delhi on Tuesday. — Photo: Rajeev Bhatt

ers out of the city making their attendance at the dinner difficult.

At the public meeting, speaker after speaker focussed on the recent spurt in scams and scandals of the NDA Government as well as attempts of the BJP-led Government to spread 'communalism' in the country, with happenings in Gujarat forming the backdrop. They emphasised on the need to remove the present Government.

The former Prime Minister, V.P. Singh, said corruption, especially in matters of defence, should be treated as treason and said it was more dangerous

than the threat posed to the nation by terrorists. He said transparent methods should be put in place, particularly when public spending was involved.

Mr. Bardhan alleged that the Vajpayee Government carried "on shamelessly" and was making contradictory statements, especially on Gujarat. He said not only had communalism and corruption increased during the last four and a half years, but the problems and hardships of people had increased manifold after the NDA Government assumed power at the Centre.

The CPI general secretary maintained that the real chal-

lenge existed in the divisive policies being pursued by the BJP while Mr. Gowda said it was no longer a NDA Government but of the BJP. He said all secular parties should sink their differences and come together to "free the country from the clutches of fascist forces", and remove the BJP-led Government.

The CPI (M) politburo member, Sitaram Yechury, listed the number of scams during the present regime and said its promise of providing a Government free of fear, hunger and corruption has been tossed out of the window.

Mahajan will not resign, says BJP

I am ready to face any inquiry, says minister
Cong turns on the heat, CPM seeks facts

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The BJP on Friday categorically ruled out the resignation of parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan in the wake of allegations of his involvement in the Shivani Bhatnagar murder case and described the charges as part of a "political conspiracy" against the party and the NDA government.

"Mr Mahajan is a respected leader of the BJP and a senior minister. He will not resign. If we start responding to false and conspiratorial allegations, our democratic setup itself will collapse," party spokesman Mukhtar Naqvi said. Stung by the charges levelled by Madhu Sharma, wife of Ravi Kant Sharma, Mr Mahajan followed up his denial on Thursday night of any involvement with a statement on Friday asserting that he was ready to answer any question put to him by anybody.

However, acting on party advice, Mr Mahajan said he would file a criminal defamation case against Ms Sharma for making "false allegations" against him in the Shivani murder case.

"The party has advised Mr Mahajan to file a criminal defamation case against the spouse of a person who has made such false allegations and he has accepted the advice," party spokesman Arun Jaitley told mediapersons. Agencies

New Delhi: The Congress and the CPM on Friday came out with divergent views on the allegations levelled by Madhu Sharma, wife of IPS officer R.K. Sharma, against Union minister Pramod Mahajan.

The Congress went to the extent of demanding Mr Mahajan's dismissal to facilitate a fair investigation into the Shivani Bhatnagar murder case as well as an inquiry by the Prime Minister into the allegations made against deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani.

The CPM, on the other hand, asked the government to come forward with facts in response to the allegations levelled against Mr Mahajan. CPM politburo member S.R. Pillai said that the prosecution

agencies should make an adequate response to the allegations.

However, he noted that the allegations had come from one of the interested parties.

Madhu Sharma had on Thursday night alleged Mr Mahajan's involvement in the murder.

She had also alleged that as part of the BJP's factional politics, Mr Advani had instructed the Delhi police to arrest Sharma.



R.K. Sharma

Shivani

P. Mahajan

BJP wants Atal review of Cong-era pumps

SPS Pannu
New Delhi, August 7

BJP MPs today launched a signature campaign to force Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to review the allotment of petrol pumps and LPG distributorships made between 1983 and 1999.

But the Congress, buoyed by the discomfiture of the BJP, has decided to launch a nationwide agitation beginning August 16 to "expose the corruption-ridden" BJP-led coalition. The party dismissed as politically motivated attempts to involve Congress leaders in the controversy.

Among those whose signatures a former BJP general secretary collected are Maya Singh, former Minister of State Munni Lal, KS Sangwan, RS Rawat and Ram Nagina Mishra.

The MPs will meet Vajpayee

on Thursday to request him to cancel all allotments made to political leaders or their relatives during the 1983-1999 period and sell them to the highest bidder.

Clearly, the BJP leaders want to hit back at the Opposition after the embarrassment the party faced in Parliament over the allotment of around 350 petrol pumps and gas agencies to partymen or their kin.

Though they lauded the PM's decision to cancel the allotments, the MPs said: "Even though all procedures had been followed, there are allegations that several party functionaries and leaders have obtained dealerships by exercising influence on the dealer selection boards though there is nothing to indicate any such influence."

BJP MPs had approached Petroleum Minister Ram Naik on

Tuesday and asked him to dig up records on allotments made during the Congress regime.

BJP spokesman VK Malhotra said the Congress and other parties could not claim to be more righteous than the BJP when their leaders too had lobbied for pump allotments.

Sources said senior Congress leaders such as Manmohan Singh, Vice-Presidential candidate Sushil Kumar Shinde, Moti Lal Vohra and Oscar Fernandes had written to Naik to favour certain candidates. So had Samajwadi Party MP Raj Babbar and Acharya Vasudev of the CPI(M).

Naik himself cited the case of Sonia Gandhi's private secretary Vincent George, whose wife had got a petrol pump allotted on the ground that she had no source of income as her husband was jobless.

Parties keen on reform Bill ahead of Assembly polls

SANJAY SINGH
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, July 20. — Rival political parties have a common meeting ground these days. It is their unanimous opinion that the amended Representation of People Act should come into existence before the election schedule for Gujarat or Jammu and Kashmir is declared.

Different political parties are expected to submit their suggestions and possible amendments to the draft Bill to the law minister, Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, by Sunday. While the BJP has made it clear that it endorses provisions of the draft Bill with one suggestion that elected members should submit a list of their movable and immovable assets to the Speaker of the House, other parties including the Congress, Left and Samajwadi Party are still in the process of consulting legal experts and their senior party leaders.

A senior Congress leader

said the party was of the firm view that Parliament had to enact a law to override the Election Commission guidelines and would cooperate with the government in getting the Bill passed in both Houses of Parliament.

It was, however, not clear whether it would submit its opinion to the law minister by tomorrow or it would prefer an informal consultation with the government before committing anything in writing. The Left parties are also prepared with their opinion in this regard.

An all-party meeting is expected on Thursday to evolve a consensus on provisions of the Bill before it is laid in Parliament for introduction and passage.

All parties seem to favour the intent of the draft Bill though they may have different opinions on its provisions.

They all agree that enactment of the Bill is urgently required before elections are

held in Gujarat and J&K. If the law is not amended in the current session, then Election Commission's new guidelines would become effective whereby the candidates would have to file a 40-page affidavit, for nomination.

Sources said the government wanted to enact the new law before the Rajya Sabha elections in Maharashtra, something which is not possible now.

The draft Bill has in effect shot down the EC's guidelines and requires candidates to file details only if they are charged of heinous crime and sentenced for two years by a court after a chargesheet is filed. It has sought to make a distinction between heinous and political crime.

The draft Bill has also omitted any obligation on the part of candidates to file details of assets held by them. Under the new EC guidelines, they had been asked to give details of their assets.

THE STATESMAN

21 JUL 2002

Left, Right unite against poll code

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 8: The issue of barring "tainted" candidates from contesting elections has touched a raw nerve in all political parties — be it the Left, Right or the Centre.

As of now, there are no provisions in the Election Commission rules that separately categorise political charges from criminal offences ranging from financial corruption to attempts to rape and murder.

"The Supreme Court has surpassed itself. There will be no democracy in this country if we accept its stricture," said CPM general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet after a meeting with the Election Commission. "What about political charges that are slapped on trade unionists and students? How should they be treated?" he asked.

For once, Surjeet had the support of all parties, including arch rival BJP. "How can the Election Commission legislate on a matter that is the prerogative of Parliament?" asked BJP spokesperson Arun Jaitley.

"The Congress has in place a system of checks and weeding out criminal elements," said senior Congress leader Pranab Mukherjee.

Although advocating their unequivocal commitment to electoral reforms, all political parties balked when it came to abiding a Supreme Court or Election Commission fiat. They argue that there are various complexities involved in electoral reforms — intricacies that defy any simple solution foisted by the apex court.

Jaitley was repeatedly asked whether the Supreme Court strictures would apply to those charged in the Babri Masjid demolition case. Three Union ministers, namely deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, human re-

sources development minister Murlu Manohar Joshi and youth affairs and sports minister Uma Bharati, have been indicted in the case. The BJP has claimed immunity for its leaders on the grounds that the Ram Janmabhoomi issue is a political movement.

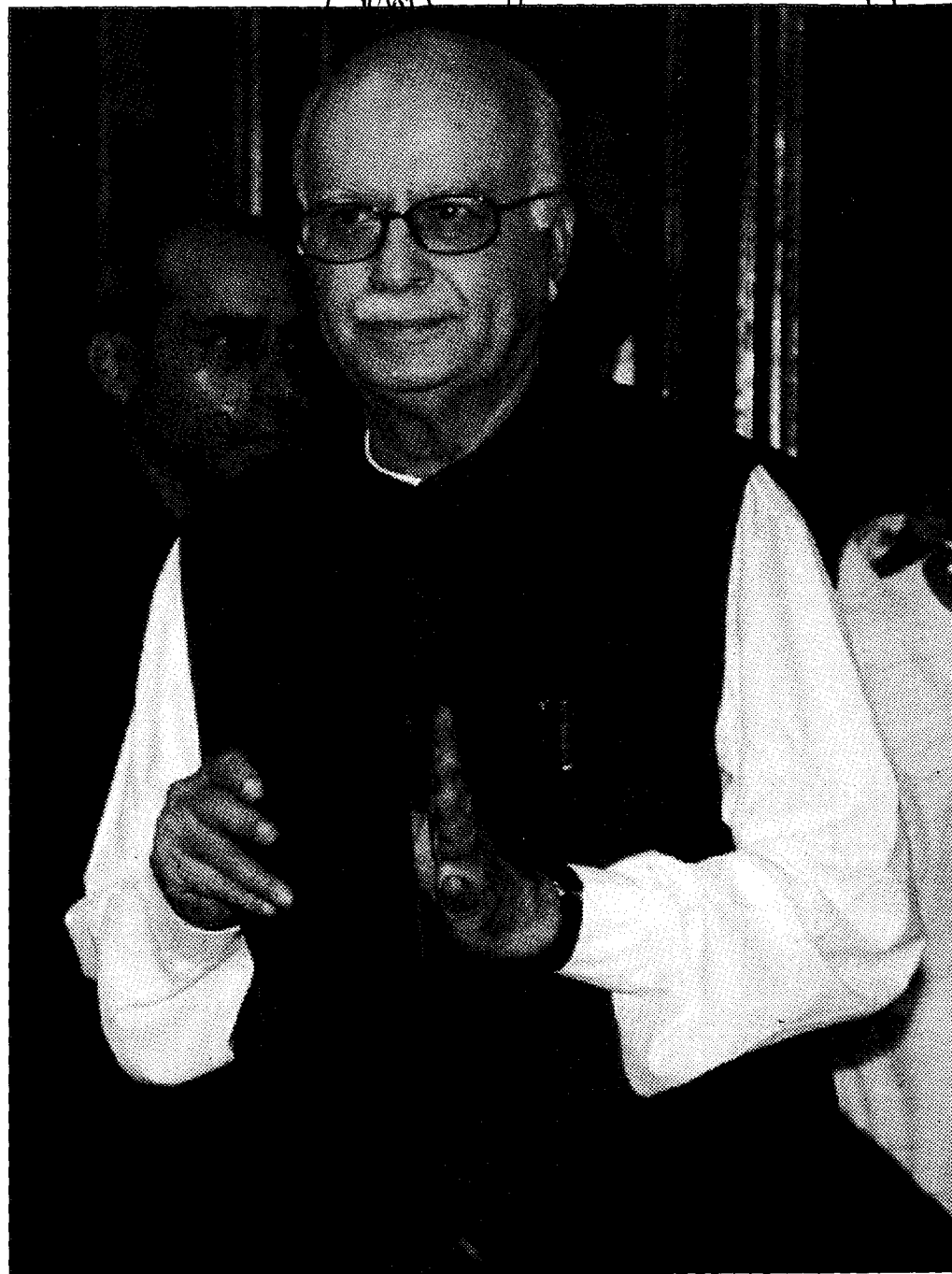
"What about political vendetta? Laloo Prasad Yadav has borne the brunt of it," argues a Left leader. Laloo was forced to quit chief ministership and spent months in the jail for a charge that is yet to be vindicated.

CPI general secretary A.B. Bardhan maintains: "Our stand has always been that a person is innocent unless proved guilty." In fact, the Left parties have for long desisted from maligning ADMK chief J. Jayalalithaa because the cases of corruption filed against her are still to be decided by a higher court.

The other argument voiced by political parties is that they have set up various committees to screen candidates in order to weed out those with criminal records. The Congress has an ethics committee headed by Manmohan Singh. It requires those in positions of authority to declare their assets.

Similarly, the BJP has passed a number of resolutions asking its MPs and MLAs to declare their assets. But leaders in both the parties refuse to reveal how successful the exercise has been in identifying corrupt elements.

Others like the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Janata Dal make no pretence of having screening commissions. Mohammad Shahabuddin from the RJD has more than a dozen cases against him. Pappu Yadav, a known party hopper and now an Independent MP supported by the NDA, has more than two dozen cases against him.



LK Advani at the all-party meeting in Parliament. Picture by Rajesh Kumar

Electoral reforms that never were

FROM OUR LEGAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 8: This is not the first time that electoral reforms have been rejected by almost all political parties.

Earlier, reports of the Dinesh Goswami Committee on electoral reforms and another one headed by the late home minister and veteran CPI MP, Indrajit Gupta, were also ignored.

The law commission and the National Commission to Review the Working of the Constitution, too, had suggested a number of recommendations on electoral reforms to the government, but neither the ruling party nor the Opposition had paid heed to any of them.

While the Goswami committee recommended government or official funding of elections, the Indrajit Gupta committee made elaborate suggestions on political funding and measures to discourage criminals from helping candidates during elections.

The law commission under its earlier chairman Justice B.P. Jeevan Reddy had almost made "sweeping" electoral reforms by incorporating both the committees' recommendations.

In its report submitted to the government, the commission mentioned all the suggestions after the Supreme Court set July 1 as the deadline for the implementation of electoral reforms.

The law commission's recommendations also included changes in the defection law and proving the strength of a ruling party.

Parties close ranks, reject poll reforms

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Political parties across the spectrum made it clear at Monday's all-party meet that they had no intention of allowing the supreme court to dictate the law on electoral eligibility and contest rules.

The issue was the apex court's directive to the Election Commission (EC) on May 2, enforced by the latter on June 28, compelling candidates for parliament or the assembly elections to declare all wealth and assets, details of any past and present criminal cases contested, even if acquitted, besides educational qualifications.

Union law minister Jana Krishnamurthy told reporters after the meeting, "The meeting appreciated the SC judgment..but each of us is supreme in our respective spheres and as far as enactment of laws go, parliament is supreme."

The EC reiterated on Monday that its order on seeking the criminal antecedents of candidates would stand and be enforced in the election to the lone Rajya Sabha seat in Maharashtra on July 25.

"The affidavit is in position. The commission is only following a supreme court directive," EC sources said. Prescribing the affidavit, the commission had made it clear on June 20 that non-furnishing of full and com-

• All-Party meet says it is for parliament to enact law

• Law minister says bill can be enacted by July 25

• Draft of new law will be in 'spirit' of SC judgment

plete information by a candidate would be considered violative of the court's directive.

That the politicians were in total agreement on the issue could be gauged from the fact that the law minister even quoted CPI leader A.B. Bardhan on the "rare unanimity" of opinion.

The apex court had itself given the parties a way out and they seized it. The court order says that when there is an absence of good law in the matter, the EC may frame the rules.

"We (in parliament) shall now fill this gap by enacting a law. Once it is enacted, the new EC rules will automatically give way to the new law," Mr Krishnamurthy said. He said his ministry's officials had been told to get the draft of the new law ("incorporating the spirit and, even, many directions of the SC") ready by the end of this week. Parliament would reconvene on July 15 and the law could be enacted as early as July 25, he said.

9 JUL 2007

Mamata vs Samata

HOW THE self-serving brand of politics pursued by the constituents of the Vajpayee government can tie them up in knots is again evident from the Mamata-Samata spat. Not an iota of principle is involved in this row. Instead, the whole issue revolves round personal and political aggrandisement. To start with, the stormy petrel of West Bengal, Mamata Banerjee, now somewhat weather-worn. She never said a word about the new railway zone in Hajipur when she was the minister even though the proposal was mooted by her predecessor Ramvilas Paswan. If she is now threatening to disrupt Parliament, it is because of her realisation that she has lost out in a game of one-upmanship with the Vajpayee government because of her weakened political position.

When she resigned on the Tehelka issue, she wanted to capture the moral high ground. But her steadily declining political fortune in West Bengal has made her acutely aware of the need to hold on to the lifeline of a ministership at the Centre to keep her restive flock together. But she has been upstaged by

Nitish Kumar, who is playing his own political games. Like Ms Banerjee, Mr Kumar, too, is aware of his shrinking political clout in his home state. To boost his position, therefore, he has seized upon Mr Paswan's idea of a new railway zone, ignoring the Comptroller and Auditor-General's objections. Now, the railway unions, too, are voicing their displeasure.

As may be expected, Mr Kumar was guided not by the railway's interests, but by his own political compulsions. On her part, Ms Banerjee also knows that a bifurcation of the Eastern Railway will damage her political future in a way which even the CPI(M) may not be able to inflict. Ironically, the controversy has brought several old adversaries to the same platform, with Ms Banerjee teaming up with the CPI(M) and Mr Kumar with Laloo Yadav. The reason is that two unsavoury attributes of these myopic politicians — self-service and parochialism — have come to the fore to muddy the waters at the Centre and also in West Bengal and Bihar. The worst sufferers will be the railway travellers in this region.

18 OCT 2002

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

MLAs' Last Resort

The numbers game in Maharashtra is over. The Democratic Front won the confidence vote in the assembly after a protracted battle that for sheer entertainment value was unmatched by even World Cup football. Here was government as football, a plaything of rival coalition fronts. And Bangalore is fast emerging as the hub of a new technology of democracy by which MLAs are insulated from the temptation to switch political loyalties. The ruling coalition MLAs from Maharashtra were airlifted to a posh Bangalore resort to 'strengthen' their resolve to remain loyal and refrain from biting the opposition's bait. Keeping them active in the resort's swimming pool and entertaining them with a *qawwali*, along with other attractions on offer, helped the Congress and the Nationalist Congress Party hold on to their flock. The Shiv Sena, having thrived on the slogan of "Maharashtra for Maharashtrians", did not do anything so untoward as sending its MLAs outside the state. The Sena and the BJP kept their legislators occupied in local five-star comfort with *tamasha lavani* and *kavi sammelan* on one day, followed by computer training, workshop on development and the staging of a Marathi play on successive days.

The rueful taxpayer who eventually has to foot the bill for all these comings and goings should at least be able to derive, through his elected representatives, the vicarious pleasure of second-hand holiday-making in exotic locales. If Maharashtra's legislators have had to be sequestered in Karnataka now, time was when Gujarat's MLAs had to take refuge in Haryana. It is indeed surprising that the Congress party, which was once the predator, is today afraid of falling prey to smaller fish. As early as 1984, when the Congress party toppled N T Rama Rao's Telugu Desam government, Chandrababu Naidu, along with the BJP's Venkaiah Naidu, discovered the charms of Karnataka as a place to sequester MLAs who were vulnerable to poaching. In the years since, other resorts and hotels have achieved fame for having housed legislators who were in great demand. Despite the spread of this democratic culture, it is disappointing to see that our people's representatives are content with so little and so near when, in this era of globalisation, they can reach for the sky and journey farther to partake of the pleasures in more distant lands in return for their resolute adherence to democratic norms. An evening in Paris, perhaps?

THE TIMES OF INDIA

14 JUN 2011

Left buries front, looks for Ahmadi

FROM MONOBINA GUPTA

New Delhi, June 12: After a night and half-a-day of scouting, the Left today zoomed in on former Chief Justice A.S. Ahmadi as a possible presidential candidate in case the Congress agrees to enter into a contest with the BJP.

The suggestion for Ahmadi's candidature came from academic circles close to the Left. Its leaders have informed senior Congress MP Mannohan Singh and he has given his assent.

Deputy Speaker P.M. Sayeed is the other name doing the rounds. The Left wants to field a

Muslim or a Dalit candidate to beat its rivals in their own game.

As of now, it is not known whether Ahmadi will agree to contest. The former chief justice left for Canada yesterday and the Opposition will contact him there.

The Left is banking on the Congress to open a line of communication with Ahmadi. However, the main Opposition party will have to decide on a contest first.

Some senior CPM leaders believe the Congress has no other choice but to go for a contest after yesterday's fiasco at the People's Front meeting.

With Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav, a known Congress-baiter, walking out of the anti-BJP alliance, the Left is likely to work in closer tandem with the Congress.

The Left is hoping for a positive response from the Congress, which, a Left leader said, is "trembling in its shoes" at the prospect of a contest.

CPM general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet has confirmed the collapse of the front. "The front is no more there. It will be reorganised and some other forces will come," Surjeet told a news conference this afternoon.

"If the Front convenor (Mulayam) first supports President K.R. Narayanan and then changes stand to support the NDA candidate, how can the front continue to exist," Surjeet said, adding that "we will continue to work towards a third alternative".

"We will announce the name of our candidate only after the Congress Working Committee takes a decision," Surjeet said.

A section of Left leaders, however, is sceptical about the outcome of the meeting.

The CPM leader was non-committal on whether the Left would field a candidate if the Congress decides against a con-

test. "Why should we say anything now? The Congress is yet to take a decision," he said.

Sources indicated that Left leaders would not go for a contest if the Congress ditched them. They will not vote for A.P.J. Abdul Kalam under any circumstances. If it came to a crunch, the Left might decide to abstain.

Surjeet said once the Congress makes up its mind, the CPM will start getting in touch with other parties.

The People's Front might have collapsed but the Left is not giving up hope of bringing together third front parties on a common platform.

13 JUN 2002

THE TELEGRAM

Govt accepts motion of thorns

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, May 2: The Centre is in a fix after it took the Opposition by surprise by deciding to support the Congress-sponsored motion on Gujarat under Rule 170 in the Rajya Sabha.

This rule, like its equivalent in the Lok Sabha, involves voting. Going by the numbers, the government would have been sure to lose in the Upper House where it is in a minority.

The reason for the govern-

ment being uneasy lies in the motion's wording that "urges" it to "intervene effectively under Article 355 of the Constitution to protect the lives and properties of the citizens and to provide effective relief and rehabilitation to the victims of violence".

The Centre is under no obligation to "intervene" — in spite of the motion being passed — but having now offered support, it has left itself open to continued Opposition heckling for not keeping its word if it does not.

Government sources said the decision to back the Congress

motion was taken three days ago for two reasons: first, its strategists felt the text was "mild and mutually acceptable" and second, the BJP wanted to cover the cracks in the ruling coalition after allies Telugu Desam and Trinamul Congress insisted on Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi's resignation.

When the leader of the House, Jaswant Singh, announced the government's support to the Congress motion this morning, BJP sources claimed the Opposition was stumped. "You have thrown a googly at us," govern-

ment sources quoted a Left MP as saying.

The BJP's explanation was that the move to support the motion was made last week when its floor strategists pre-empted the CPM's Jibon Roy from bringing in a private resolution on Gujarat which was "more strongly worded than the present one."

A joint resolution, the sources said, would have projected the image of a "united" House and, to an extent, washed away the acrimony that marked the Lok Sabha debate on Gujarat.

Though the BJP felt it was

mild, the motion was based on the assumptions that: the Gujarat violence was very serious, the state government had done little or nothing to uphold the Constitution, and the Centre so far had been a mute spectator.

Dwelling on the ambit of Article 355, Congress MP Kapil Sibal said it was recommendatory and "imposed a duty and obligation" on the Centre to protect states against external aggression and internal disturbance, but was not a source of power.

Sibal suggested 355 should be read in tandem with Articles 352

and 356 according to a Supreme Court judgment. Both confer actual powers on the Centre — Article 352 to proclaim internal emergency in the event of external aggression or internal disturbance and 356 to impose President's rule.

Sources made light of Sibal's speech and said they were under no "obligation or pressure" to implement the motion which, in effect, meant the Centre would have to issue a warning to Modi to act in accordance with the Constitution and, if he did not, have no choice but to dismiss him.

THE TELEGRAPH

THE TELEGRAPH

BJP, Cong face-off over apology

Siz
17/4
Pawar

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, April 16. — The face-off between the BJP and the Opposition on the Gujarat issue took an interesting turn today. The BJP demanded an apology from the Congress president for her recent remark in Guwahati that the Prime Minister had lost his mental balance. The Congress, in turn, asserted that if the BJP stuck to its demand despite Mrs Sonia Gandhi's "clarification" it would seek an apology from the Prime Minister for his "anti-Muslim" speech in Goa last week.

There was no let-up in the BJP's new found aggression. At the parliamentary party meeting, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee described the disruption of Parliament proceedings by the Opposition on the Gujarat issue as a "challenge" to the ruling NDA and asked all MPs of the ruling coalition to face it together. He approved of the party's overwhelming sentiments on the issue and said the Opposition parties were not interested in a test of strength, but only in creating confusion and vitiating the atmosphere.

The party opposed any adjournment motion on the Gujarat issue or any move to discuss it under Rule 184 which provided for voting, saying law and order was a "state subject".

The BJP spokesperson, Mr VK Malhotra, hit out at Mrs Gandhi and accused her of acting like the leader of the Muslim League and not of a national party. "She attended a dharna organised by her party state unit on Gujarat issue but never did anything for Godhra and also never met relatives of Godhra victims. She also never came out against proxy war unleashed by Pakistan and killing of thousands of civilians by the terrorists," he said.

The BJP's belligerence was, however, coupled with efforts to mollify Mr Chandrababu Naidu.

In the Opposition camp, a day after the Sonia-Mulayam patch-up, today it was the turn of Mr Sharad Pawar to jump into the fray. The NCP leader, who has been extending support to the government on various issues like Pota and labour reforms Bills, attended a meeting called by Mr Somnath Chatterjee.

The meeting triggered speculation about a Pawar-Sonia meeting too but later the Congress spokesman, Mr Jaipal Reddy, said "it was not true". The Congress today insisted the government agree to a "substantiative motion" (read that allows voting) on Gujarat, but clarified the party was not interested in "toppling games".

Mr Chatterjee said "secular unity" is the need of the hour and underplayed the differences Mr Pawar has been having with the Opposition. He also talked about providing "opportunities" for secular parties to join hands.

The non-Congress leaders also sought a discussion on Gujarat under Rule 184. Mr Pawar reportedly demanded the imposition of President's rule in Gujarat. Till recently Mr Pawar's NCP had been short-listed by the NDA along with the AIADMK and BSP as potential recruits to neutralise the TDP's clout.

Meanwhile, the People's Front is holding a Gujarat protest day tomorrow amidst hope of meetings between Mr Jyoti Basu and Mrs Gandhi and also some "potential allies".

Shanta may face flak

BJP president Mr Jana Krishnamurthy today did not rule out action against Union minister Mr Shanta Kumar for his criticism of Mr Modi at the Goa conclave on his failure to control violence in Gujarat, adds PTI.

Naidu spits out Gujarat gambit

Adamant Atal works phone

FROM KAY BENEDICT AND G.S. RADHAKRISHNA

April 13: With other allies looking to him for signals, Chandrababu Naidu today struck back at the BJP for the Gujarat snub, declaring his opposition to the use of the "noble process" of polls for achieving "blatantly narrow and communal ends".

The scathing attack prompted Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee to confer with home minister L.K. Advani and parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan. All three spoke to Naidu over phone and appealed to him to reconsider his stand.

The Telugu Desam Party chief stuck to his demand that elections should not be held in Gujarat and Narendra Modi should be replaced. But Vajpayee made it clear that the BJP could not go back on its decision to back Modi and its advice to him to go for elections to seek a fresh mandate.

The Desam resolution, passed after an impromptu politico meeting in Hyderabad, accused the BJP of trying to make "political capital" out of a "human tragedy" and slammed its poll gambit as a "covert attempt to clothe its narrow and partisan ends to sabotage the democratic process".

The resolution capped a day of frenetic activity in the Andhra Pradesh capital, though Desam sources said the party would find it difficult to immediately withdraw the support it lends to the NDA coalition from outside. But to distance itself from the BJP, they said the

Desam has decided not to accept the post of Lok Sabha Speaker lying vacant since G.M.C. Balayogi's death in a helicopter crash.

Sources said the party may from now on extend only "issue-based" support to the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government. The parliamentary party would take a decision tomorrow at Hyderabad, they added.

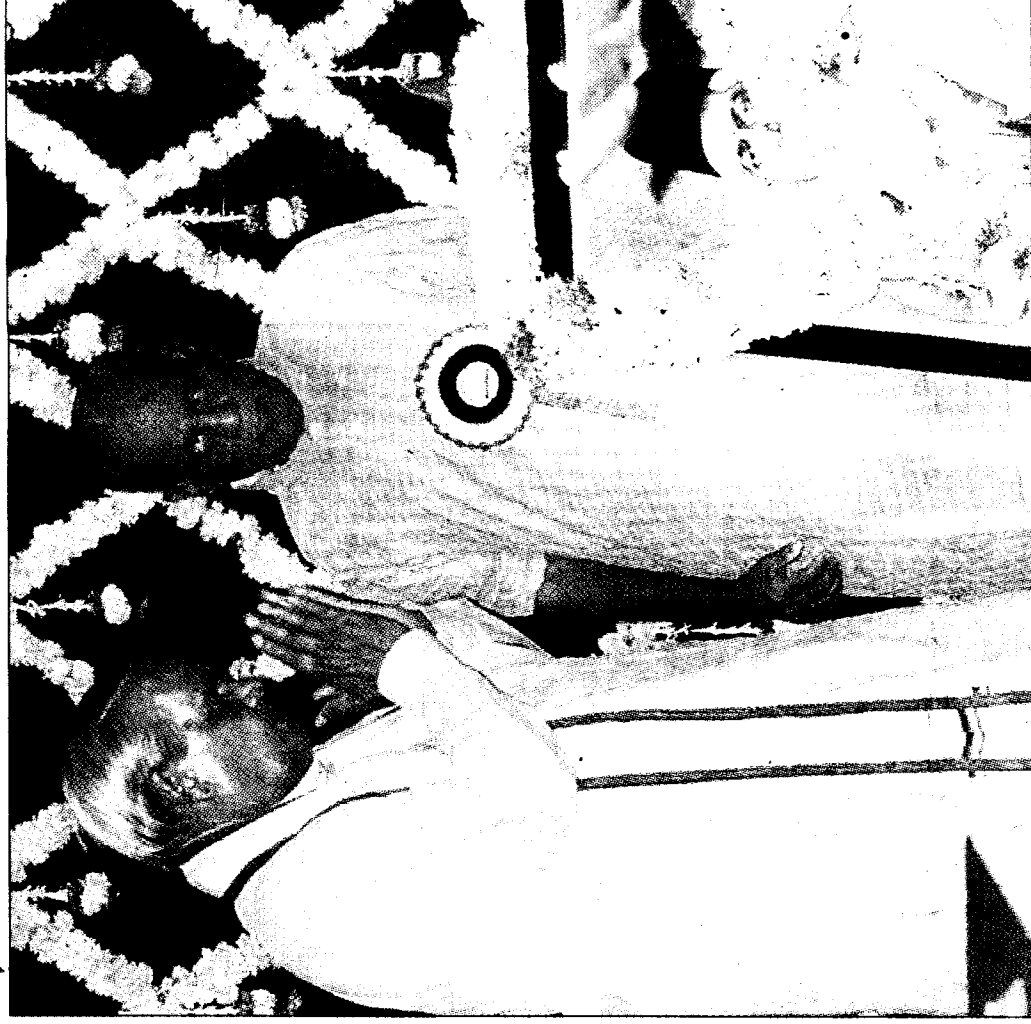
NDA sources said though the Desam is deeply embarrassed at the rejection of its demand for Modi's scalp and the Prime Minister's "hawkish" speech at the BJP national executive in Goa, it would not do anything drastic as the Congress is fast gaining ground in Andhra.

Alliance leaders said small parties would do what Naidu tells them. "If the Desam withdraws support, we will also do so," said Jainarain Nishad of the Lok Janashakti Party. "We will discuss our strategy with our leader Ram Vilas Paswan before Monday," he said.

Asked if his party would withdraw support, he said he was opposed to burdening the people with another election, but would go along with what the Desam decides.

Samata Party leader Shambhu Shrivastava, who had resigned as the party spokesperson over Modi's continuation in office, said the allies, specially the Desam, should now decide whether to remain with the NDA or not. "The time of reckoning has arrived. It is a litmus test for the allies whether their concerns and protestations about the communal carnage in Gujarat were genuine or not," he said.

SANGH PUJA UNDER PARTY EYES



AB Vajpayee pays his respects to RSS founder Keshav Baliram Hedgewar in Panaji as BJP chief Jana Krishnamurthi looks on. (PTI)

Shrivastava said the Prime Minister's speech has "virtually cast aspersions on the Muslim community as a whole, which is the second largest segment of the population in the country".

The Janata Dal (United) went to the extent of saying it would boycott the Gujarat elections if held under Modi and demanded imposition of President's rule in the state. "First bring peace and normality back to the state and restore people's confidence in the administration. Till then, Article 356 should be imposed," said spokesperson Mohan Prakash.

Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee said: "We still stick to our demand that Modi should resign for his failure to

contain communal violence in Gujarat... We are all together on this crucial issue."

Sources said Biju Janata Dal leader and Orissa chief minister Naveen Patnaik had asked Union labour minister Sharad Yadav "to do something" to restrain Sangh hardliners.

Yadav told Patnaik to speak to Naidu.

Sonia takes shot at

PM, not power

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

Guwahati, April 13: Sonia Gandhi today tore into Atal Bihari Vajpayee, accusing the Prime Minister of losing his "mental balance" and saying his comments against the minority community have "completely exposed" his mask.

Addressing her second press conference since taking over as Congress chief four years ago, Sonia put the party back on the "ekta chalo re" path, though she spoke about the possibility of talking to "secular allies" of the National Democratic Alliance.

"Why not? We could talk. We had earlier talked to the Trinamul Congress," Sonia said.

But Congress sources later pointed out that Sonia was merely responding to a question, and the party was not expecting a favourable response from any BJP ally, barring Trinamul.

Sonia minced no words while attacking Vajpayee. Asked to comment on the Prime Minister's challenge in Goa yesterday to the Congress to bring down his government, she said: "Vajpayeeji jab jab apna mansik santulan kholte hain, woh aisi baat karte hain (Whenever he loses his mental balance, he talks like this)."

The tone and tenor of the remark stunned some of her party's chief ministers, who later sought to defend her by pointing to Vajpayee's numerous outbursts against her both inside and outside Parliament.

In Goa, parliamentary affairs minister Pramod Mahajan said Sonia's "remark only shows whose mental balance is lost".



Sonia in Guwahati.

Picture by Eastern Projections.

In her 85-minute interaction with the media, Sonia constantly targeted Vajpayee and the BJP. Referring to the Prime Minister's speech yesterday, Sonia said: "We always knew that the BJP had one face — a communal face. Its acts of pretence stand exposed. The Prime Minister's mask that kept falling has been completely exposed."

At the press conference, the numbers game does not favour the main Opposition party, BJP allies, like the Telugu Desam Party, the Biju Janata Dal, the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (United), and those like the Nationalist Congress Party are unlikely to have any truck with a Sonia-led Congress.

Congress chief ministers like Digvijay Singh and S.M. Krishna favour the "go-it-alone" formula and feel that the party should wait to get a "decisive mandate".

QUOTE

Whenever he loses his mental balance, he talks like this

SONIA GANDHI
on AB Vajpayee

See Page 6

Sonia also snubbed Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav much to the delight of some Congress Working Committee members. Asked if she agreed with Mulayam's call to boycott the Gujarat polls, Sonia said: "Mulayam is a leader from Uttar Pradesh. What has he got to do with Gujarat?"

Her remarks are likely to have a bearing on Opposition unity in Parliament when the budget session resumes on Monday.

Sonia iterated her party's commitment to economic reforms, pointing out that she had directed Punjab chief minister Amrinder Singh to replace free power to farmers with "assured power supply" at an "affordable price".

Sonia said the Congress was ready to face general elections and Assembly polls in Gujarat whenever they are held.

The AICC chief, however, appeared lukewarm to the idea of stitching together a coalition against the BJP. The Congress feels it is a futile exercise to explore the possibility of government formation now.

The numbers game does not favour the main Opposition party, BJP allies, like the Telugu Desam Party, the Biju Janata Dal, the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (United), and those like the Nationalist Congress Party are unlikely to have any truck with a Sonia-led Congress.

Congress chief ministers like Digvijay Singh and S.M. Krishna favour the "go-it-alone" formula and feel that the party should wait to get a "decisive mandate".

Rebellion threatens Marandi-Soren revelry

MANOJ PRASAD
RANCHI, MARCH 28

AS THE Rajya Sabha poll results were announced last evening, NDA leaders, including Chief Minister Babulal Marandi, Samata party MLA and State Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ramchandra Kesri, JD-U MLA and State Energy Minister Laichand Mahato, and Jharkhand Mukti Morcha President Shibu Soren, raised their arms in tandem signaling change in the polity of Jharkhand.

In the 82-member Assembly in the state, the Marandi government had survived with the support of a thin majority of 45 MLAs belonging to the NDA.

The JMM with 12 MLAs was the main Opposition party. After Soren's victory with NDA sup-

port, the JMM was no longer a cause of concern for Marandi even if it had not declared it was going to be its ally yet. Which is why Marandi welcomed Soren at his residence minutes after the latter won the RS seat.

The timing of the NDA-JMM bonhomie is significant since the polls to the local bodies — municipalities and panchayat — are proposed to be held in the first week of May.

Political observers say that if the NDA contests these polls in alliance with the JMM, the Opposition led by the Congress and its ally, the RJD, will be virtually



wiped out. But there are certain undercurrents which the party cannot afford to ignore.

Two JMM leaders — Stephen Marandi and Simon Marandi — both Christians, are supposedly angry because of Soren's decision to garner NDA support for the RS seat.

Even within the NDA, two United Goa Democratic Party MLAs who are Ministers in the Babulal government — Joba Manjhi and Sudesh Mahato — have indicated that they may not shake hands with Soren against whom they have been fighting at the grassroots level in Ranchi

and West Singhbhum district for ages now.

Asked if there was any truth in all this speculation, BJP's Jharkhand in-charge Saryu Rai replied, "Our support to him was totally unconditional."

Soren, on the other hand, said that nothing was impossible when it came to politics.

For Soren this was the second victory in the Rajya Sabha polls. He had won it for the first time with RJD support in 1998 only to forfeit it after the Supreme Court had held his election illegal last year on the grounds that he had violated the law by holding office of profit as the Jharkhand area Autonomous Council Chairman on the date of nomination.

Ever since Jharkhand was set up on November 15, 2000, Soren has been a critic of the Marandi government.

Sonia & Vajpayee

The Poto debate exposes all politicians

The passage of the Poto Bill through the joint session of both Houses was not really in doubt, the simulated uproar and rushing to the well of the House at periodical intervals right through the long session, left one with a sense of déjà vu; what was a surprise was the vehemence of the Prime Minister's riposte to Sonia Gandhi's personal attack on him questioning whether he was acting under pressure or was true to his office. This is not the first time that Sonia has attacked him and he has always got the better of her by good humoured repartee for which Atal Bihari Vajpayee has few peers in Parliament. That Vajpayee scored easily on this occasion as well is of less moment than the reason why Sonia did manage to get under his skin. Right through the exhibition of power play with the Viswa Hindu Parishad over their political programme leading up to 15 March; getting Ashok Singhal off his 24-hour fast unto death and speaking of the blessings he had received from the Mahant Ramchander Das even as the latter decided not to attempt the suicide he had threatened, the on again, off again vacillation over allowing VHP activists to go to Ayodhya in their thousands and finally sending an official from the PMO to receive some pillars from the Mahant and giving a receipt involving his Government directly in the business of temple construction; all this has certainly affected the prime minister's image and credibility. Vajpayee is too good a politician and too decent a man not to be affected by it all.

That Sonia's barb has gone home is evident from the Prime Minister's summons to Narendra Modi to come to Delhi to explain himself and his government's sins of omission and commission to the Central leaders. Deep-seated prejudices apart, Modi's shameful performance is also explained by being hell-bent on ensuring victory in the Assembly elections due in a couple of years, crafting and executing a strategy, which would have shamed Adolf Hitler. As an RSS pracharak he probably has the clout to arrange an early election if he thinks this is advisable before the memory of Gujarat's shame and vulgarity has dimmed in people's minds. The people of Gujarat, especially the ordinary decent people, specially Hindus, should be getting ready to show Narendra Modi how wrong he was in his calculations. At the moment he is cock-a-hoop. On arrival in Delhi on the Prime Minister's summons he is not worried; he calmly explains that he has been keen on seeing Vajpayee but a meeting has only just been possible! This is not the demeanour of a man about to appear in sackcloth and ashes. This damage limitation exercise comes too late to be credible; Modi has done enough for him to be summarily removed, certainly not given a clean chit in undue haste by the Union Home Minister.

Narendra Modi has come and Narendra Modi will go and no one expects that he will turn over a new leaf on his return to Ahmedabad. The Central leaders and the RSS may have had a change of tactics — a change of heart is not to be expected.

To return to the Poto debate, Sonia Gandhi is not entitled to any satisfaction. The party of Misa under Indira Gandhi and Tada under Rajiv Gandhi has no credibility on the issue of human rights. Was Sonia so worried about abuses under Poto because somebody has told her of the gross abuses under Tada in particular against minorities in Maharashtra?

THE STATE

29 MAR 2002

Government certain of Poto passage

26/3
HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 25

HF 1
A Political Lie

THE GOVERNMENT may be dismayed over NDA allies like the Trinamool opting out of tomorrow's joint session of Parliament. But it is confident of passing Poto with a comfortable majority when the draft legislation is put to vote.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, however, still made a last-minute appeal today to Opposition parties, the Congress in particular, to end their "politically motivated" resistance to the legislation. The Congress should not make an issue of the fact that the Government had not talked to its leaders before finalising the Bill, he added. Tada, he recalled, was the brainchild of a Congress Government, and the BJP, then in the Opposition, had given it whole-hearted support because of its conviction that such a law was in the nation's best interests.

While Parliament House staff burnt midnight oil to make preparations for the third such congregation since Independence, floor managers of different parties kept busy rounding up their members for the historic showdown.

After the Bill was defeated in the Upper House by 15 votes, the Government moved fast to herd its supporters to ensure a convincing victory.

The ruling NDA combine, which is in a minority in the Upper House, enjoys a clear lead over the Opposition parties both in the Lok Sabha and the two Houses taken together. With the five Indian Federal Democratic Party MPs joining the NDA on Saturday, the Treasury benches expect to poll nearly 410-odd votes (out of the effective strength of 781 of the two Houses) in support of the Bill, which the Opposition has described as

Joint sittings

6 & 9 May, 1961: Dowry

Prohibition Bill 1959

Bill is passed after rejecting objection to certain amendments.

Ayes: 230

Noes: 192

16 May, 1978: Banking Service Commission (Repeal) Bill, 1977

Bill is passed

Ayes: 439

Noes: 208

26 March, 2002: Prevention of Terrorism Bill, 2002

"draconian".

But there is speculation that some MPs may walk out to record their protest against the manner in which the Government has tried to shore up a legislation which was not only promulgated twice as an Ordinance but was also thrown out of the Rajya Sabha last week.

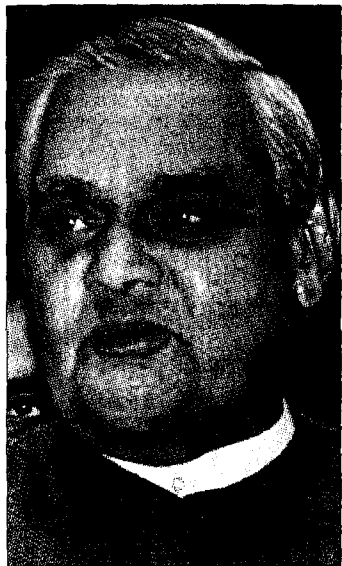
Most parties have already taken a stand on the Bill and most of them are unlikely to change their stance despite the PM's appeal for consensus. The BSP, too, which stayed away during voting in both Houses, is unlikely to reformulate its stand without a last-minute commitment from the BJP on propping up a Mayawati-led Government in UP.

Meanwhile, the Nationalist Congress Party was gripped today by sharp differences on the party's stand tomorrow on the anti-terrorism Bill, with senior leader Jagannath Mishra questioning the party's decision to support the measure.

In a letter to NCP chief Sharad Pawar, Mishra described Poto as "undemocratic and fascist" and urged him to instruct his MPs to vote against the Bill.

Mishra said in his letter, "The NDA Government wants to use the measure for its political gains. The anti-terrorism legislation was not applied by the BJP Government in Gujarat to detain the culprits behind the recent Godhra train tragedy and the communal riots that followed. Besides, the VHP activists who attacked the Orissa Assembly were not booked under Poto."

Mishra said there was every possibility that the NDA Government at the Centre would misuse the law to settle scores with its political opponents.



ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

26 MAR 2002

RSS forces VHP to tone down stridency

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 15 MARCH

9 Political scene

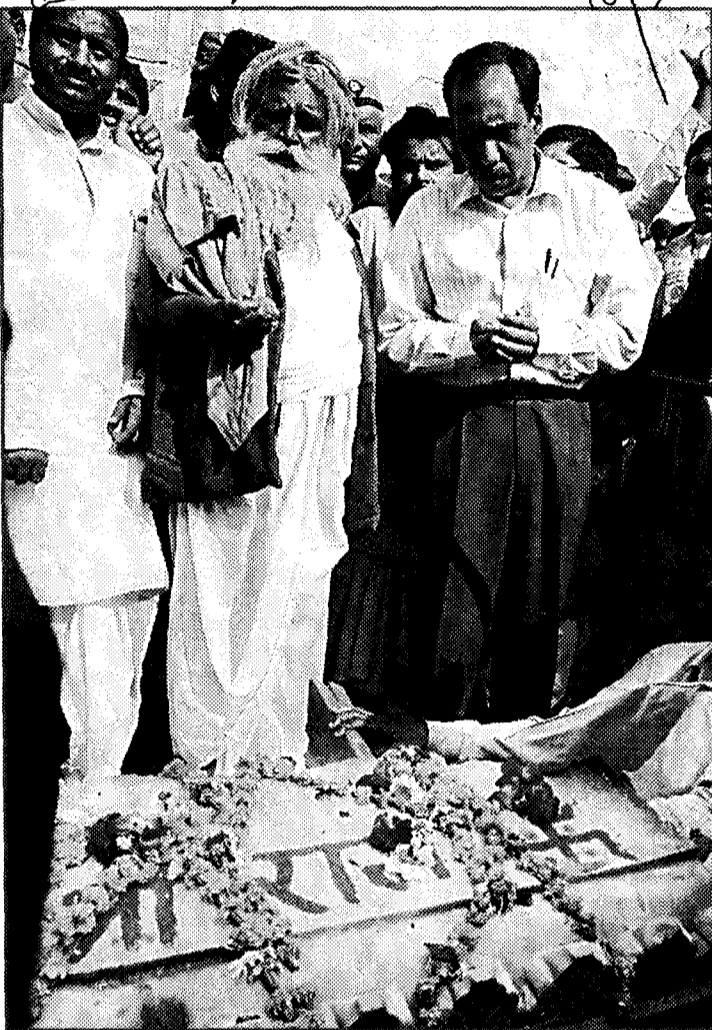
THE RASHTRIYA Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS) forced the VHP to give up confrontation with the Vajpayee government, but compensated Mr Ashok Singhal and other temple die-hards with a strong dose of hard-core Hindutva rhetoric. The guardians of the Sangh Parivar, gathered Channehalli on the outskirts of Bangalore, served a volley of statements that will go down well with VHP hawks. According to agency reports, RSS leaders took a dig at BJP leaders for their lukewarm approach to the temple movement.

"While we note the zeal of the sants and Ram sewaks towards construction of the Ram temple, the hesitation and nervousness of Ram bhaktas sitting on treasury benches is also visible," RSS general secretary Mohanrao Bhagwat told the annual meeting of Pratinidhi Sabha, its general council.

While an agency report quoted Mr Bhagwat applauding the growth of Hindu awakening and how it would guarantee "peaceful" resolution of the Ayodhya dispute, Mr M G Vaidya, RSS spokesperson, was reported to have said that the Sangh no longer had links with the BJP.

Mr Bhagwat's dig at the BJP is seen as significant despite the fact that it seems just a gentle wrap on the wrist when contrasted with the attack on the Opposition. Mr Bhagwat flayed the Opposition parties for "obstructing" the temple construction on vote considerations.

Though references to BJP appear to be designed to humour VHP, which was forced to get off the path of confrontation, they also signal a desire to quieten anxieties that Parivar's Hindutva ardour had waned. Sangh circles feared dilution and deviation ever since the BJP put the temple and other Hindutva themes on the back burner.



A STONE FOR THE HINDUS: Temple Nyas chairman Ramchandra Paramhans hands over a stone for the construction of the temple to the government's envoy Shatrughun Singh in Ayodhya on Friday. — AFP

The RSS meet defended the Narendra Modi government in Gujarat. Even though it termed the

violence as unjustifiable, Mr Vaidya also described it as a "natural upsurge" of Hindus, cutting across castes and political affiliations. This could not have been controlled by any government, it said.

and Mr Murli Manohar Joshi. "Gujarat is a symptom of a deeper malaise afflicting India. That disease is called the politics of hate," she said. "The proponent of such politics sit right in front of me. Some of them are chargesheeted," she added, referring to the cases against the Union home minister.

PM's stand on Ayodhya smacks of duplicity: Sonia

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 15 MARCH

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Sonia Gandhi on Friday sharply criticised the Vajpayee government while launching a frontal attack on Union home minister L. K. Advani on the Ayodhya issue.

Exhibiting an increasing measure of confidence, Ms Gandhi did not mince words while ticking off the government on various issues while speaking on the motion of thanks for the President's address. That the usual number of cat-calls and sarcasm laced comments from the treasury benches have now virtually dwindled indicates the growing regard she has earned. Undoubtedly, the addition of three more states under Congress rule after the recent Assembly elections has boosted her confidence. Though still reading from a prepared text, Ms Gandhi did make extempore comments in between.

Surprisingly, there were no protests even when Ms Gandhi made a direct attack on the BJP and its leaders including Mr Advani

and Mr Murli Manohar Joshi. "Gujarat is a symptom of a deeper malaise afflicting India. That disease is called the politics of hate," she said. "The proponent of such politics sit right in front of me. Some of them are chargesheeted," she added, referring to the cases against the Union home minister.

The Opposition leader's well-rehearsed speech touched on almost all grave issues, beginning



SONIA: BELLIGERENT

with the Gujarat incidents. She recounted sufferings she witnessed when she visited affected areas in Godhra and Ahmedabad. She ridiculed Mr Advani's explanation that deploying army in the state was delayed as it could have affected security on the borders. "Is it not shocking that

a government that makes so much of security did not see it fit to make contingency plans to deal with precisely such a situation," she countered. The Prime Minister, who sat with a stoic expression throughout, was also subjected to direct criticism. Accusing him of being ambiguous on Ayodhya, Ms Gandhi said his stand along with that of the government on March 13 smacked of duplicity.

NORTH EASTERN RAILWAY

Notification of Div...

15 MAR 2002

The Economic Times

Trinamul jittery over Cong move on RS polls

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

KOLKATA, March 9. — The Trinamul leadership is making efforts to make all the party legislators vote for the party candidate for the Rajya Sabha polls. This follows the Trinamul's fear that Congress is trying to create a split in the party and ensure the victory of its candidate through cross-voting.

The Congress is yet to field a candidate as it does not have the numerical strength to win the polls. This explains the Congress high command's reluctance to field a candidate, though state Congress leaders want the same. The PCC leaders are banking on cross-voting from the Trinamul camp. In public, however, they asserted that an appeal would be made to the Trinamul to cast

their residual votes for the Congress candidate.

It was cross-voting from the Congress that had helped Mr Jayanta Bhattacharyya of the Trinamul to win the Rajya Sabha seat. With a view to pre-empting such a move now, majority of the Trinamul MLAs are trying to ensure votes of all the 60 legislators for their candidate. The Trinamul candidate needs to bag 49 votes to notch up a victory, meaning 11 residual first preference votes for the party. Party leaders argued that all the 60 votes should be cast in the Trinamul candidate's favour to pre-empt any sort of risk.

All now depends on Miss Mamata Banerjee who has been authorised by the Trinamul legislature party to select the Rajya Sabha candidate. Miss Banerjee has converted a

meeting of the party at Delhi on Tuesday to finalise the party candidate. It is learnt that Mr Dinesh Trivedi, former Rajya Sabha MP, is likely to be the nominee.

Mr Samir Chakraborty, Congress leader, too, is reportedly lobbying for the post and has already talked to some Trinamul MLAs. Mr Chakraborty is likely to reach Delhi for talks with Miss Banerjee in this regard. If talks turn out to be fruitful, Trinamul may allow a second candidate, much to the disappointment of Trinamul MLAs like Mr Jyotipriya Mallick, Mr Partha Chatterjee and Mr Nirbed Roy. All of them had argued in favour of nominating only one candidate. Mr Tapas Roy said a decision on whether two candidates will be nominated has been left to Miss Banerjee.

THE STATESMAN

10 MAR 2002

Sonia to lead Opposition dharna in Parliament today

By Javed M. Ansari

9/8/02
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NEW DELHI, MARCH 6. The Opposition has decided to step up the heat on the Government over the Gujarat issue. The Leader of the Opposition and Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, will lead a dharna of Opposition MPs in Parliament tomorrow, and on Friday, she will join other senior leaders in an all-party delegation that will visit Ahmedabad.

The Congress put the Gujarat Government on the mat for its "dual standards" on the issue of

ex-gratia payments to the victims of communal violence in the State. "This decision amounts to institutionalising sectarian discrimination" the Congress spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy, said voicing the party's objections to the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi's decision to pay Rs. 2 lakhs as compensation to those killed in the Godhra train carnage and Rs. 1 lakh to the victims of the subsequent communal violence in the State.

The Congress accused Mr. Modi of conniving with criminal gangs responsible for the may-

hem in the State. "He is taking discrimination to new heights," Mr. Reddy said.

Describing the train massacre as reprehensible, he accused the BJP of using the terrible tragedy to sharpen the communal divide to augment the 'Hindutva' vote bank. He targeted the non-BJP secular parties in the NDA saying they were supposed to defend secularism from within. "The statement issued by Jaya Jaitly in favour of the Modi Government shows that they have themselves been communalised," he added.

THE HINDU

7 MAR 2002

Opp parties get cracking on Gujarat, at last

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, March 6

THE OPPOSITION is finally out, tough on its strategy to haul the Central and State governments over the coals on Gujarat and Ayodhya issues.

A week after Godhra and subsequent tragedies hit the State, the parties today demanded the immediate removal of Chief Minister Narendra Modi and the resignation of Home Minister L K Advani for their failure to protect the life and property of the people.

"There will be no respite so long as the Chief Minister and the Union Home Minister are there," CPM's Somnath Chatterjee said after more than a dozen leaders, including those from the Congress, NCP and the SP, met



SOMNATH CHATTERJEE

today to signal their unity and protest over the Gujarat and Ayodhya developments and hammer out a parliamentary strategy.

The leaders will stage a dharna tomorrow in the Parliament



MULAYAM SINGH YADAV

House complex before the two Houses reconvene after a two-day mourning over Speaker G M C Balayogi's death. Leader of Opposition and Congress President Sonja Gandhi will also be there.

Even as echoes of the dharna are expected to reverberate in the Rajya Sabha and Lok Sabha, the Opposition's demand for Modi and Advani's head comes ahead of the all-party visit to the trouble-torn State on Friday. The delegation to include BJP members as well, will visit Godhra and Ahmedabad and talk to the Chief Minister: Sonia, who had written earlier this week to Prime Minister Vajpayee earlier to organise the trip, is likely to be part of the delegation. Inside Parliament, the Opposition would try to drive a wedge in the ruling combine and pressure the Government by pushing for a discussion under Rule 184 that entails a vote. The Opposition meeting was attended among others by Shivraj Patil, P A Sangma and H D Deve Gowda.

VP for speedy solution
FORMER PRIME Minister V P Singh on Wednesday demanded that the VHP be told to build a temple on a 70-acre plot adjacent to the disputed site in Ayodhya.

Singh told reporters en route to Gujarat that the VHP had signed an accord with then Union Home Minister Buta Singh stating that it would follow the court's verdict and give up its stand to build the temple on the disputed site. The VHP should now be held to the accord, he said. Singh welcomed the intervention of the Kanchi Shankaracharya as it was necessary that all sides discuss the issue. *HTC, Mumbai*

9-Physical Security 7/3

HT 6

Arundhati sent to jail for a day, fined



Arundhati Roy arrives at the Supreme Court on Wednesday.

AP PHOTO

LITTERATEUR AND activist Arundhati Roy was given a one-day prison sentence by the Supreme Court on Wednesday for contempt of court.

A Supreme Court Bench comprising Justice G.B. Pattanaik and Justice R.P. Sethi passed the sentence under the Contempt of Courts Act. Roy will also have to pay a fine of Rs 2,000.

If she defaults, she will have to serve a three-month jail sentence. While being taken to jail, Roy said she has not decided to pay the fine.

Wednesday's verdict followed a derogatory affidavit Roy had filed before the apex court in response to a notice issued to her in a contempt case.

The judgement said the court should not take a lenient view since Roy had refused to show any 'repentance or regret or remorse'.

The judgement went on to say: "She wanted to become a champion to the cause of the writers by asserting that persons like her can allege anything they desire and accuse any person or institution without any circumspection, limitation or restraint."

HTC, New Delhi

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

27 MAR 2002

Heart goes out of Atal land

FROM OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Feb. 24: The BJP suffered its worst-ever electoral debacle today in the heartland after it was thrown out of power in Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand and lost Punjab, which it had ruled with the Shiromani Akali Dal.

The Congress continued its conquest of states, winning Punjab and Uttarakhand and seemed set to emerge as the single largest party in Manipur. However, it made little impact in Uttar Pradesh.

Uttar Pradesh produced a mandate that was as fractured as that in 1996. The real beneficiary of the anti-BJP mood was the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP), which notched its best-ever tally. But the Samajwadi Party, billed by pollsters to be within striking distance of power, failed to hit the mark. Though the Samajwadi has emerged as the single largest party, it appeared unlikely to touch the half-way point of 202 even with the support of two groups of potential allies — the Congress, and Independents and smaller parties.

Even the Lok Sabha and Assembly bypoll results failed to cheer the BJP. Barring Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi who won Rajkot II, the BJP lost the other two Assembly seats in the state — going to polls next year — to the Congress. The Samajwadi retained the Mirzapur Lok Sabha seat that fell vacant on the death of Phoolan Devi. Phoolan's sister, Muddi Devi, fielded by the Rashtriya Kranti Party, finished fifth.

The ADMK leader, J. Jayalalitha, expectedly won the Andipatti seat virtually uncontested on her birthday. Madhav Rao Scindia's son, Jyotiraditya, made a spectacular debut in electoral politics by retaining his father's Guna seat with a

record margin. Former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda, who was out on a limb after his defeat from Hassan, bounced back from Kanakpura.

The three incumbent chief ministers, Rajnath Singh, Parkash Singh Badal and B.S. Koshiyari, put in their papers once defeat was imminent. But, even as the trends were emerging, political activity around Uttar Pradesh got under way in the capital.

The BJP brass and its alliance leaders, Ajit Singh and Sharad Yadav, met over a brief stock-taking session at Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's residence. Sources said the leaders were too "shell-shocked" to discuss the prospect of government formation in conjunction with the BSP, which was an ally on two earlier occasions.

Even as the BJP appeared to be split on whether or not take a stab at power again with Mayavati, a view was emerging that the Samajwadi and the Congress had to be stopped from cobbling together a government.

The BJP's earlier designs to split the BSP — regarded by many leaders as the most "vulnerable" — died with Mayavati getting so many seats. But the party was apprehensive of the Samajwadi poaching on her Muslim legislators.

The Congress faced the same dilemma as the BJP because it had also propped up the Samajwadi twice at substantial loss to its own base. The Congress Working Committee has called a meeting to take a decision.

His tally not up to the expected mark, Samajwadi leader Mu-

QUOTE

We accept the people's verdict

JANA KRISHNAMURTHI

layam Singh, who jettisoned the People's Front in the election, is now looking at leaders of the reincarnation of the third force to ensure he assumes power in Lucknow. The Front is scheduled to hold a meeting with CPM general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet again revelling in his role of kingmaker.

With the crucial budget session starting tomorrow, a meeting of the NDA has also been called to size up the fallout of the rout and devise defence mechanisms to face an Opposition onslaught.

Though the Congress and the Samajwadi slugged it out on the Uttar Pradesh battlefield, the Opposition has closed ranks on floor coordination. It appeared set to put the government on the mat on key issues like the coffin scam and Ayodhya.

Although the BJP and the NDA officially maintained that the elections were not a referendum on the Vajpayee government, privately there was an admission within the BJP that the Uttar Pradesh defeat might make it "susceptible" to allies' pressure as well that of the more rabid elements within the Sangh parivar.

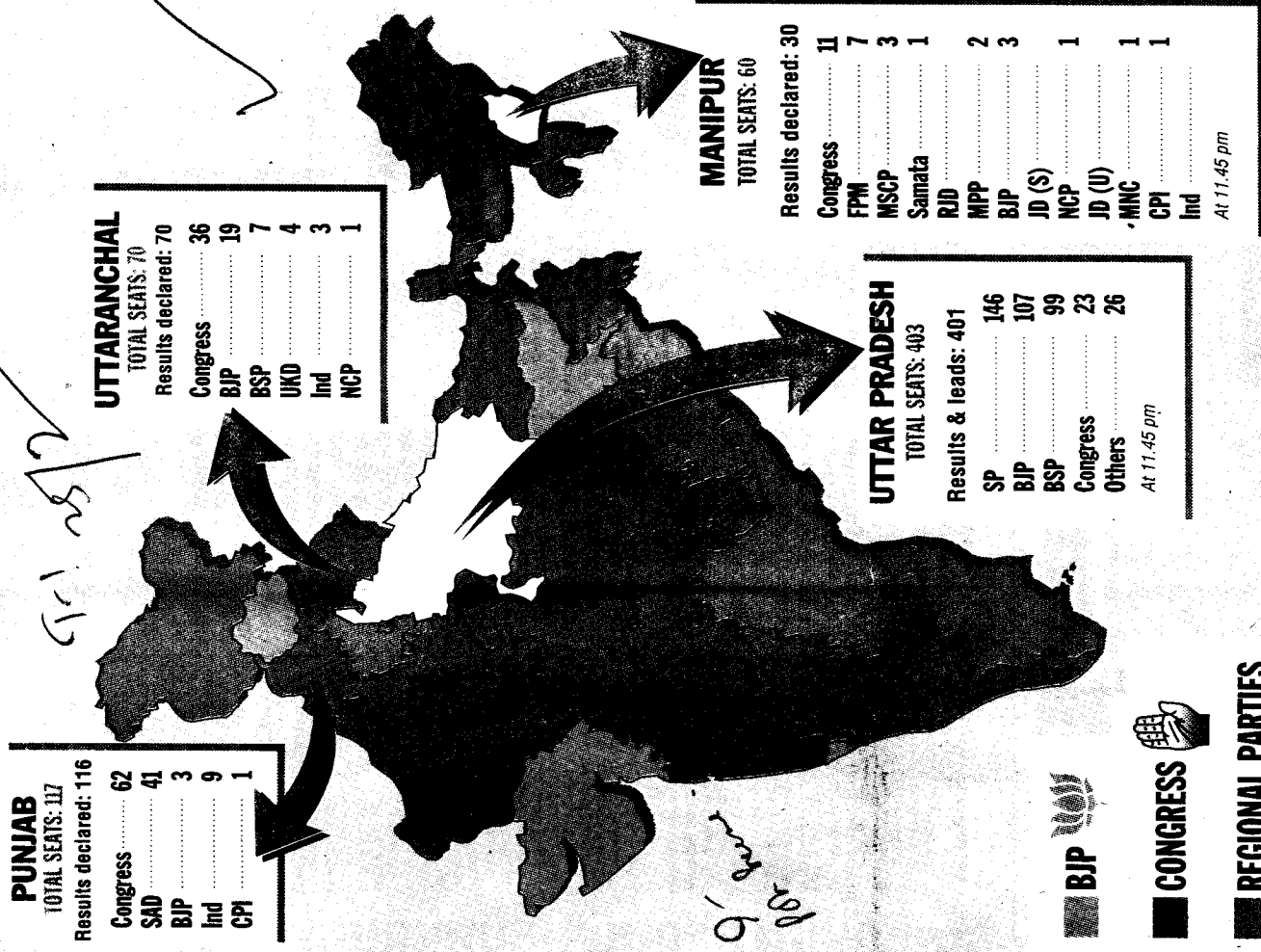
Taking advantage of the political uncertainty, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has begun mobilising its kar sevaks in Ayodhya to start construction of the Ram temple from March 15.

Given these fears, a dominant view in the ruling coalition was that the BJP should forego its long-term political interests and prop up Mayavati or force her to back a BJP-led government.

All eyes are on Governor Vishnukant Shastri who indicated he would hear out all the parties staking claim to forming the government and perhaps give them a chance to present their numbers.

"We want to see on what grounds they base their claim to form the government. I will hear all of them," Shastri said.

INDIA'S CHANGING COLOURS



Graphic: RAJ

To sup or not with Mayavati

FROM RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Feb. 24: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee will meet Uttar Pradesh leaders Rajnath Singh, Kairaj Mishra and Lalji Tandon tomorrow morning to be briefed about their assessment on whether the BJP should sit in the Opposition or have an alliance with the Bahujan Samaj Party.

Later in the day, the BJP's apex decision-making body — its parliamentary board — will meet to take a final view. It is expected to authorise the Prime Minister to have the last word. But sources said the BJP continued to be split on the issue of going in for an alliance with BSP leader Mayavati again.

In the past, whenever a decision was taken, just the views of a section of state leaders, Vajpayee and Murali Manohar Joshi counted. But this time, it is learnt that MPs from the state have vociferously opposed an alliance, saying it would wipe out the BJP in the state in the next Lok Sabha polls.

However, of the three leaders conferring with Vajpayee tomorrow, two — Mishra and Tandon — are staunch advocates of Mayavati. This may eventually tilt the leadership's opinion in her favour.

Mayavati reached the capital this evening amid rumours that she had sought an appointment with the Prime Minister. However, sources close to Vajpayee did not confirm such a request.

Rajnath was reportedly of the view that the BJP should sit in the Opposition for a while.

The party feels that although the Samajwadi-Congress duo will fall short of the halfway mark even with the support of Independents and smaller parties, the combine could poach on a section of the BSP's legislators.

A dominant view within the BJP was that Mayavati should be cajoled into propping up a government led by the party and allowed to name a BJP chief minister of her choice. But it was tempered with the realisation that such an idea might push her Muslim legislators into the Samajwadi's arms.

The "prevent Samajwadi-Congress" school of thought found a supporter in Uma Bharti. Asked if the BJP would align with the BSP, she said: "We should do everything to ensure people of the state do not feel insecure."

Muslim votes: Opp slams PM

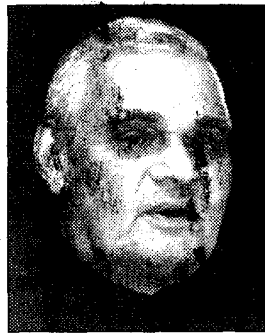
PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 20

PRIME Minister A.B. Vajpayee's remark that the BJP can win polls even without Muslim support came under fire from Opposition parties who described them as "unbecoming" of a head of government.

Terming Vajpayee's remarks "highly objectionable", the Congress said that they were an "attempt to divide people and polarise voters on communal lines".

"By making such a statement, the Prime Minister is indirectly pandering to communal instincts of the other community. This tactic cannot be permitted to be adopted by Prime Minister of the largest democracy," party spokesman S. Jaipal Reddy told reporters here. Samajwadi Party chief Mulayam Singh Yadav said that Vajpayee's statement was "dangerous and intended to divide the country".

In a letter faxed to President K.R. Naraynan demanding Vajpayee's dismissal, Yadav said the Prime Minister's remarks were intended to divide the country. "By making such a statement publicly, he violated the model code of conduct," he said. Mulayam has faxed the letter to the Election Commission. In another letter to BJP chief Jana Krishnamurthy, he urged him to take



note of the Prime Minister's dangerous statement and elect a new leader of the party in Parliament.

"The statement is reflective of Vajpayee's fascist mentality and unbecoming of his position," he told reporters later. Former prime minister V.P. Singh said that Vajpayee's remark was in

"bad taste" and "unbecoming" of the head of the government. Vajpayee "appears to have forgotten that he is not just a political leader, but also the PM of the country," Singh said in Lucknow.

INDIAN EXPRESS

Mulayam-Sonia rift widens

9-
P.S. Sema
By Our Special Correspondent H9 |

NEW DELHI, FEB. 16 Cracks in the secular camp opened a bit wider today when the Samajwadi Party leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, told the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi to "keep quiet" or he would see to it that she was "exposed". He was responding to the charge levelled by Ms. Gandhi a few days earlier that it was Mr. Yadav's refusal to support a Congress Government in 1999 that had helped the BJP stage a comeback.

Mr. Yadav's rather sharp reaction, in a chat with a television reporter, is a reflection of the bitterness that has been generated in the Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections. Leaders of the Samajwadi Party resent the Congress suggestion that because of Mr. Yadav's presumed antipathy to Ms. Gandhi, an alternative Government could not be formed in 1999 after the Vajpayee Government was voted out by one vote.

Today Mr. Yadav put the onus on Ms. Gandhi. He argued that it was a considered Samajwadi policy to be either in Government or the opposi-

tion. "Last time we were ready to be part of a coalition Government. But Sonia Gandhi wanted to form the Government alone," he said.

In her election speeches in the last few days, Ms. Gandhi has raked up the Samajwadi's "betrayal". Both the Congress and the SP are now competing for the minorities' vote, and the resurrection of the 1999 controversy is the Congress way of weaning the Muslim voter away from the Samajwadi influence.

The Congress leadership has been particularly keen on making the point that there would be no patch-up between the Congress and the SP after the election; its calculation is that any suggestion that the two would come together to form the Government could simply persuade the Muslims to vote en masse for the SP, thereby leaving the Congress stranded in a no-man's land.

The Samajwadis are also under a similar compulsion. Mr. Yadav was categorical today in denying the possibility of a post-election understanding: "there was no talks from our side, neither is there any possibility of talks with Congress. We do not want anybody's support."

THE HINDU

17 FEB 2002