

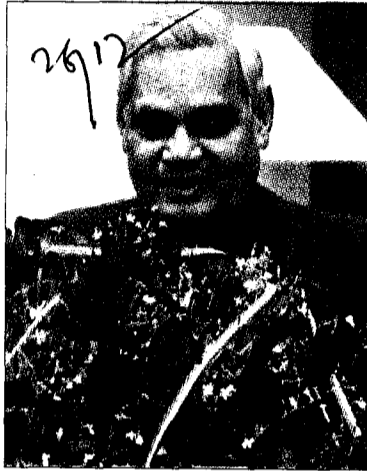
Secularism gets real meaning: PM

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI, Dec. 25. — Secularism is being defined correctly after the Gujarat polls, which has exposed the real face of the concept, the Prime Minister has said.

In an interview to Hindi daily *Dainik Bhaskar* on his 78th birthday today, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee called for channelising the "Gujarat energy". The energy should be used in a balanced manner to help protect the values of life.

Secularism, he said, had always remained a slogan and its meaning and definition were never really debated. In a reference to Mrs Sonia Gandhi launching her election campaign in Gujarat after offering prayers at the Ambaji temple, he said: "We remain hardcore secularists for 364 days a year and we've no objections if on the 365th day



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee receives a bouquet on his 78th birthday. In New Delhi on Wednesday. — AFP

an election campaign is launched after a prayer at a temple."

On reports of corruption in the

judiciary, the Prime Minister said the government was contemplating measures to ensure that the judiciary discharged its functions properly. "We always thought that corruption would never enter the judiciary, but as some reports in this regard are coming to light, government would take necessary steps." If necessary, the Constitution would be amended, he said.

Modi jibe at scribes: Mr Narendra Modi today charged journalists with dividing the society on the basis of caste and religion, a report from Gandhinagar adds. Addressing his first press conference after becoming the chief minister for the second time, he said: "It's my fervent appeal to the media to put a halt to the campaign of dividing the five crore people of Gujarat in minorities or majorities."

26 DEC 2002

THE STATESMAN

'FISCAL DEFICIT OF CENTRE, STATES WORRISOME'

410-1
22/12

Let us push ahead with reforms: PM

By Alok Mukherjee

NEW DELHI, DEC. 21. The National Development Council (NDC) today approved the Tenth Five-Year Plan covering the years 2002-2007, envisaging an eight per cent growth per annum during each of the five years, creation of an additional 50 million jobs, reducing poverty by five per cent during the Plan period, rationalising subsidies and mobilising over Rs. 16,000 crores annually through public sector disinvestment.

At the conclusion of the meeting, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, announced that with some of the reform measures being contentious, he would hold consultations with the Chief Ministers at an early date to build a broad consensus on these issues.

Earlier, in his opening address at the meeting, Mr. Vajpayee placed renewed emphasis on pushing ahead with the economic reforms programme and announced the setting up of four sub-groups of the NDC to work out the modalities to improve governance, implement policies and programmes, bring down barriers to internal trade, create an investor-friendly climate and provide more resources to the panchayati raj institutions.

'No need for scepticism over growth rate'

Mr Vajpayee told the Chief Ministers that there was no need to be sceptical of the Tenth Plan target of eight per cent growth as the economy had shown a great resilience in the face of adversity — domestic and global. "If we remove the many constraints and hurdles in agriculture, industry and services, India's economy will undoubtedly attain a higher growth rate," he said.

The Prime Minister again drew the Chief Ministers' attention to the problem of fiscal deficit at both the Central and State levels, saying the high deficit was crowding out productive investment. He urged the States

to ensure that the value added tax (VAT) system was introduced countrywide from April 1 next year as that would open the door to increased revenues for the States too. He also referred to the document being prepared by the Union Finance Ministry on subsidies which needed to be reformed. "We need to be clear in our minds for what purposes the subsidies are meant, for whom, to what extent and how we can make sure that they reach the poor and are not siphoned off by others," Mr. Vajpayee said.

Emphasising the need for increased public-private partnership in the widest possible range of activities in both physical and social infrastructure to leverage private sector resources and skills of development, he asked the NDC to endorse the norm that once the PPP model contracts were validated, they should be the standard modality for financing projects and schemes in each of these areas.

Mr. Vajpayee warned that "danger lights were flashing because of the slow pace of reforms in the power sector" and called for undertaking thorough reforms and the removal of bottlenecks in the energy-transport-water infrastructure. An action-plan had been prepared for re-engineering all regulatory requirements, whether at the Central, State or municipal levels, involved in the execution of projects. He sought the cooperation of the State Governments in its implementation so that the present inefficiencies and harassment at the business-government interface would disappear.

'Review the jungle of laws'

Linking reforms to the poor, Mr. Vajpayee called for a review of "a jungle of laws, in particular, municipal, police and forest laws," many of which had not been reformed since many decades and rendered the numerous legitimate occupations

of the poor as illegal. He also touched on the problems of urbanisation and the proposed plan to connect major rivers in the country and sought the cooperation of the States in these areas.

Mr. Vajpayee proposed the setting up of four sub-groups of the NDC, one to deal with governance reforms as the "best policies and programmes can flounder on the rocks of poor governance and implementation". The second would consider all barriers to internal trade on merits and decide what would be the most appropriate steps that could be taken.

The third would look into the wide range of controls and restriction from the past which hindered the creation of an investor-friendly climate and work out ways to dismantle such barriers.

The fourth would look into problems faced in transferring functions and resources to the panchayati raj institutions.

States sceptical: Page 8



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, and the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, K.C. Pant, with the Chief Ministers (L to R), Tarun Gogoi (Assam), A.K Antony (Kerala), Ashok Gehlot (Rajasthan), Ajit Jogi (Chhattisgarh), Mufti Mohd Sayeed (Jammu and Kashmir), Mayawati (Uttar Pradesh), N.D. Tiwari (Uttaranchal) and Jayalalithaa (Tamil Nadu), at the 50th National Development Council Meeting in New Delhi on Saturday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

'ALL BITTERNESS SHOULD END WITH POLLS'

Pak. designs will be defeated, says PM

By Manas Dasgupta

VADODARA, DEC. 7. "Unity, peace and religious harmony" was the cornerstone of the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's first election address in the riot-torn Gujarat here this evening.

Regretting the recent communal disturbances in various parts of the State, Mr. Vajpayee said he was happy that the riots had become a thing of the past and said all the bitterness generated in the State should end with the elections to make a fresh beginning towards progress and development.

Except for this oblique reference to the communal riots, the Prime Minister's 30-minute speech was devoid of any reference to the Godhra train carnage or the post-Godhra riots in the State. He insisted that India was wedded to religious tolerance and equality to all which should not be put to test under any circumstances.

Mr. Vajpayee said religion and religious practices were two different things but while there could be "arguments" on religious practices, it should not lead to bitterness that threatens the unity of the country which was the need of the hour to face threats from across the border.

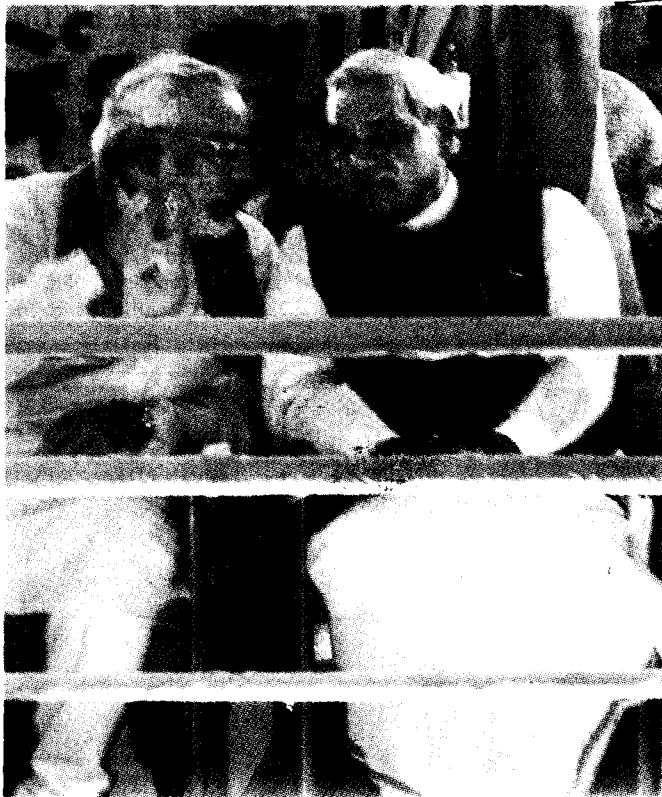
Giving a stern warning to Pakistan that the Centre would not allow it to succeed in its designs to destabilise the country through the subversive elements supported by it, Mr. Vajpayee said those who were trying to endanger the country's freedom and unity would be dealt with severely.

He advised the people to remain "eternally vigilant" against the threat of global terrorism which India could meet only through unity and solidarity among all the people.

Praising the services of the defence forces in guarding the country's borders like "Ram and Lakshman" against the subversive elements from across the border, he asked the people to be aware of such elements and shun all disputes that threaten the unity and integrity of the country.

'We kept our promise'

Referring to the successful completion of the elections in Jammu and Kashmir, he praised the bravery of the people there in participating in the elections



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, at an election rally at the Polo ground in Vadodara on Saturday. — Photo: Rajeev Bhatt

despite the threats of bullets from Pakistan.

Mr. Vajpayee said he was ridiculed when he had announced from the ramparts of the Red Fort on Independence Day the Centre's resolve to hold free and fair elections in Kashmir.

"But we have done what we had promised," he said and added that the election was the first step towards finding a solution to the Kashmir imbroglio.

The Prime Minister said his

Government was committed to building a "modern India" but based on the country's age-old traditions and culture.

In this respect, total cooperation between the Centre and the States would be of the utmost importance, he said, and advocated the same party government at both places.

Referring to the Congress, Mr. Vajpayee said it was "dreaming" of return to power in the State. "You were in power

but you did not do your duty towards the people and should not expect another turn," he said while claiming that the BJP Governments both in the State and at the Centre were executing more pro-people schemes in the last five years than what the Congress Governments had done in the last 50-odd years.

If the Congress Governments had taken up the "garland river" schemes connecting all the major rivers, the problem of droughts and the frequent inter-State river disputes would have been solved long ago. The lack of proper roads was coming in the way of the country's fast development and his Government had taken up the work now.

In a passing reference to the leadership issue after the elections, the Prime Minister said the elected representatives would choose the new leader but quickly added that it would be a "mere formality", apparently supporting the State party's stand that Narendra Modi would continue as the Chief Minister if the BJP retained power.

PTI reports from Jamnagar:

Addressing an election meeting here, Mr. Vajpayee charged the Congress with arriving at agreements with Pakistan after giving up claims over Indian territory when it was in power.

Virtually ruling out talks with Pakistan till it stops sponsoring cross-border terrorism, he said: "What can we talk. When we were talking in Lahore, they were hatching a conspiracy to attack India and stabbed us in the back". Advising the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, to acquaint herself with modern history, Mr. Vajpayee said he failed to understand anyone doing politics at home on the issue of terrorism.

He asked Ms. Gandhi to "stop worrying about his knees and instead concentrate on what is happening in the Congress-ruled States. She will know how strong are my knees when the Lok Sabha elections would come in 2004."

Mr. Modi, who also addressed the meeting, hit out at Ms. Gandhi for referring to the Prime Minister's knees and said she was not even born when Mr. Vajpayee dedicated his life to India.

More reports: Page 8

'I am Modi's advocate'

VADODARA, DEC. 7. Plunging into the campaign trail in Gujarat for the December 12 Assembly elections, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today described himself as an advocate of the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, holding a brief for him.

Addressing an election meeting here, he said, "I don't think one needs to speak after Narendra Bhai's speech. But I am his advocate and it is my duty to hold brief for him."

However, Mr. Vajpayee also mildly rebuked Mr. Modi for leaving the meeting venue before he could speak. "He (Modi) is a candidate and therefore he spoke first. He doesn't want to listen to his advocate. Had he stayed back, I would have given him a good round of arguments." — PTI

Atal fears temple strikes, sets Saarc term

J. P. Prime Minister

Shimla, Dec. 1 (PTI): Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today accused Pakistan of trying to destabilise India's economy through terrorism and said he could consider attending next month's Saarc summit in Islamabad provided the neighbouring country put a halt to cross-border terrorism before the event. "Our neighbour is perturbed with our progress and economic development. Terrorism is being used to destabilise our economy," Vajpayee said.

Referring to the second terrorist attack this year on the Raghunath temple in Jammu, he

said: "More temples can be targeted. We have information in this regard."

Pakistan was trying to disrupt India's progress, but Delhi knows how to deal with it, Vajpayee said. He asserted that the country would not be cowed down by terrorism and the government was determined to increase economic and industrial development and make the country self-reliant in defence. "We have to make ourselves strong."

On the possibility of his attending the Saarc summit, the Prime Minister said: "A thought can be given to it if there is a compl-

ete halt to cross-border terrorism before the dates of the summit. What is the use of going to Pakistan for Saarc meeting when Pakistan is not prepared to talk on any issue except Kashmir?"

The Prime Minister said Kashmir was a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan and not something to be discussed during Saarc meetings. Islamabad did not act on recommendations regarding economic cooperation agreed on in previous Saarc meetings, he added.

Vajpayee said he did not see any change in Islamabad's stand towards India or its Kashmir pol-

icy even after the installation of a new government under Prime Minister Mir Jafarullah Khan Jamali.

He said there had been some decline in terrorist infiltration from Pakistan but the question was by how much, adding there are no differences between the defence and external affairs ministries on the infiltration decline issue.

Vajpayee also asserted that differences within the BJP and the NDA over disinvestment of oil public sector units, BPCL and HPCL, and aluminium major Nalco would not deter his gov-

ernment from pushing ahead with economic reforms.

"Economic reforms are part of NDA election manifesto and minor differences of opinion on certain specific issues would not come in the way of reforms."

The committee set up to review the progress of reforms has completed its task, the Prime Minister said, adding the reforms were on course.

Attacking the Congress for its "double standards", he said the party criticised his government's reforms but pursued the same policy in the states it ruled.

The reforms were started by

the Congress and should be carried forward, Vajpayee said, adding: "Opinion on economic reforms should not be changed with elections."

The Prime Minister claimed there was no shortage of food-grain and prices had not gone up despite the drought in 14 states. This was nothing short of a miracle, he said.

Prices have been kept under control, foreign exchange reserves were buoyant, industrial production has increased and concrete steps are being taken to create employment opportunities, Vajpayee said.

2 DEC 2002

Multiple messages in Atal US sting

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, Nov. 19: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today sought to address domestic concerns over Iraq and express Delhi's disappointment with the US attitude towards Pakistan, saying "no country should try to impose its will" on others.

Vajpayee sent the message from a venue celebrating the birth anniversary of Guru Nanak, pointing out that Baghdad was among the countries the founder of Sikhism had visited.

The Prime Minister took a swipe at Washington's perceived unilateral policy on Iraq by saying that all issues should be sorted out under the auspices of the UN. "We hope no more war takes place in Iraq. All issues should be sorted out through discussions under the auspices of the UN," Vajpayee said.

The Prime Minister added that India was not supportive of the US move to bring about a regime change in Iraq. "People of every nation have a right to rule themselves and choose their own leader. No country should try to impose its will on any other country."

Much of what the Prime Minister said reflects the stated Indian policy on Iraq. But the timing of the comments assumes significance.

Iraqi information minister Saeed al Safah is scheduled to arrive here on Thursday to garner support from India on the war of nerves with the US. Washington is keeping its finger on the trigger, reserving its right to attack, if UN arms inspectors, now in Baghdad, are blocked from making an independent assessment whether Iraq has weapons of mass destruction.

Vajpayee's comments also come close on the heels of a proposal by the Iraqi ambassador in Delhi that India should send observers to monitor the work of the UN arms inspectors. The

proposal had embarrassed the Indian foreign policy establishment, which is not keen to be too closely linked with what the West considers as a "rogue" regime.

Domestic political compulsions, too, could have played a role in Vajpayee's choice of words. Parliament is in session and the Prime Minister could have aimed the comments at the Opposition to blunt expected criticism that the government is going soft on the US.

India will not like to go out of its way to rally behind Saddam Hussein, but it will not give up an opportunity to showcase its independent stand.

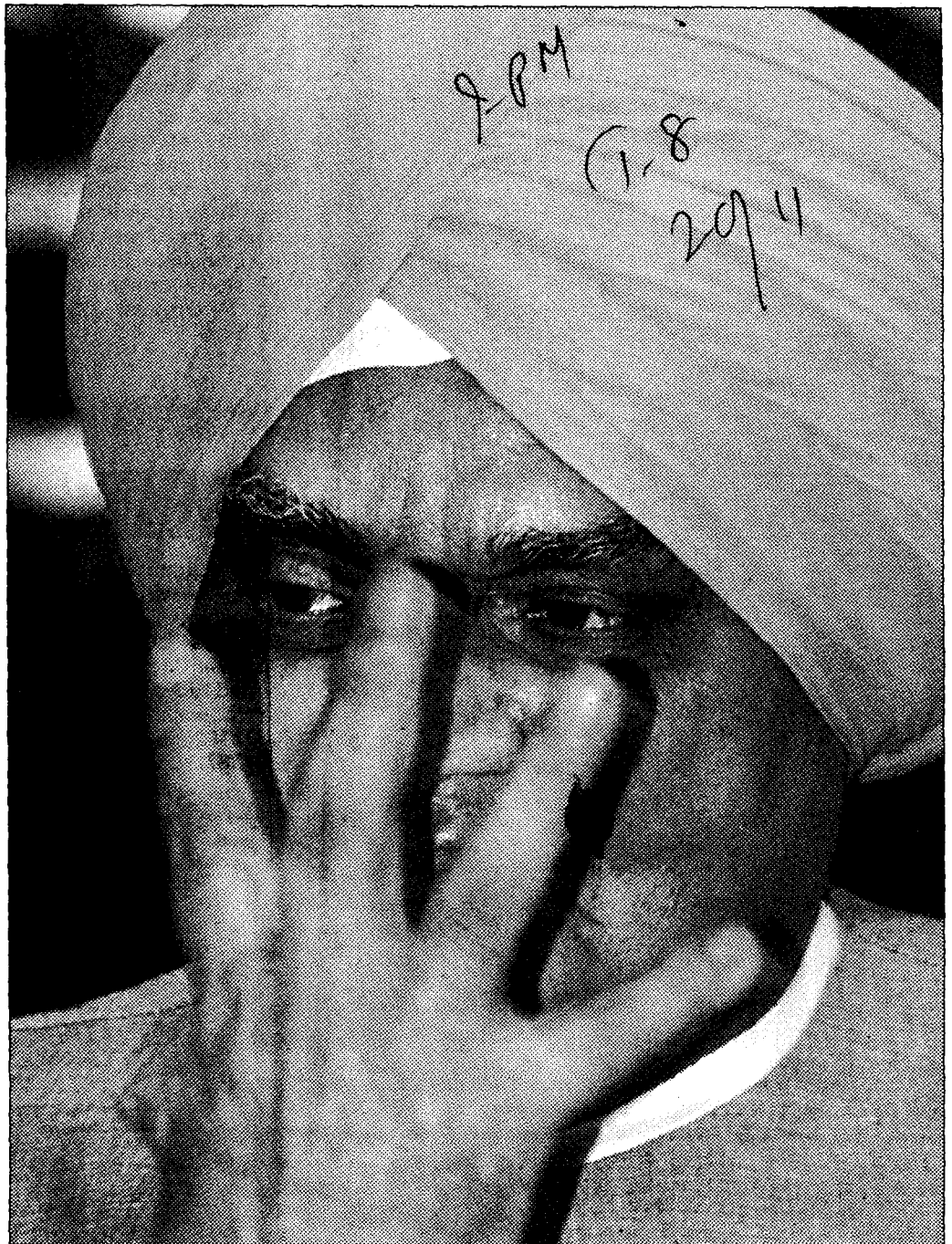
The statement is also an indication of the government's growing disappointment with the US. Delhi feels that the Bush administration has failed to exert adequate pressure on Pakistan to prevent cross-border terrorism and dismantle the terror apparatus it uses at regular intervals against India.

Despite repeated assurances, Washington so far has not pulled up the Pervez Musharraf regime for not living up to its commitment.

On the contrary, realisation is gradually dawning upon the Indian government that Pakistan is now the US' best bet in the global war against terrorism and al Qaida.

The fact that Washington makes the distinction between al Qaida terrorists and the extremists active in Jammu and Kashmir has also not gone down well with India.

But Vajpayee made it clear that India was not supportive of Iraq's clandestine programme to build weapons of mass destruction. "If Iraq has such weapons which endangers humanity, it should give it up on its own," he said. "If terrorism of any form, any colour or any hue, wants to impose itself on anyone else, it will not be allowed to succeed."



Vajpayee wears a turban, as an unidentified guest (not in picture) gestures in front of him during a function at his residence in New Delhi. (AFP)

20 NOV 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

'ADVANI AND I CONTINUE TO WORK TOGETHER'

Pak. emerging as a terrorist state: PM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 25. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said here today that India was committed to extending all assistance to end the scourge of terrorism but regretted that even now the world did not make a distinction between terror and a terrorist state.

Accusing Pakistan of emerging as a terrorist state, Mr. Vajpayee said that Islamabad persisted with its "hypocrisy" of supporting the global fight against terrorism, while continuing to send suicide squads to India for killing innocent people. "Pakistan is fast assuming the role of a terrorist state. But the international community is not ready to differentiate between terror and a terrorist state."

Referring to the crisis in a Moscow theatre, where Chechen rebels are holding hundreds hostage, and the recent attack in Bali, Indonesia as symptoms of the malaise, Mr. Vajpayee said that using terror as a weapon was a challenge to humanity. "We have to destroy this demon. We are fighting... the world has to unite and we are ready to contribute in this struggle."

He was addressing a rally at the Talkatora Indoor Stadium here to celebrate the completion of three years of the National Democratic Alliance Government at the Centre. The rally was attended by a galaxy of NDA leaders.

In his first public speech after his indisposition earlier this week due to a "sore throat," Mr. Vajpayee took credit for the successful conduct of free and fair elections in Jammu and Kashmir.

He listed the Government's achievements and expressed his views on the Gujarat riots and the killing of Dalits in Jhajjar. He



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee (second from left), the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani (extreme left), the Delhi BJP president, Madan Lal Khurana, and the Defence Minister, George Fernandes (extreme right), at a function to mark three years of NDA rule, at the Talkatora stadium in New Delhi on Friday. — Photo: V.V. Krishnan

stressed on the need to use a "decent language" in public life and scoffed at recurring reports of perceived differences between him and the Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani.

With Mr. Advani preferring not to speak, Mr. Vajpayee said

Pakistan rejects charges: Page 11

the media might attribute motives and clarified with the Deputy Prime Minister — seated next to him — if the reason for his silence was indeed paucity of time. "I was asked to speak. I wanted Advani to speak... I hope there will not be a headline tomorrow that Advani did not speak."

On media reports of a tussle between him and Mr. Advani, he said "*baat ka batangad ho raha hai*" (mountains are being made out of molehills). We have worked together and will continue to do so. I ask the press to

be careful."

Predicting that the recent Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir would alter the course of history, he said the cynicism which greeted his promise of holding free and fair elections had been put to rest with Pakistan being silenced. And the Farooq Abdullah Government and his National Conference had played a major role in ushering in the change.

Daring the Opposition, Mr. Vajpayee said the parties which alleged that the NDA constituents were sticking together for power could come to an understanding in Jammu and Kashmir and Uttar Pradesh.

In an obvious reference to the dispute between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka over the Cauvery issue, Mr. Vajpayee suggested that it would be proper for the parties to sit down and resolve the problem. Had the earlier governments worked on linking the rivers, at least the major

ones, the situation might have been different.

'Gujarat riots should not recur'

Irrespective of political differences, there was no place either for violence or sharp words. There was need for "decorum" and a "civilised language," he said in an apparent reference to the controversial remarks of the VHP leader, Pravin Togadia, against the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi. While the Gujarat riots were not easy to forget, the resolve should be to see that they did not recur. Mr. Vajpayee condemned the killing of Dalits at Jhajjar.

The former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Farooq Abdullah's speech asking the Government not to hold talks with Pakistan till it stopped aiding terrorists, or take Washington as the last word on everything drew maximum applause.

PM unwell, Cabinet meeting put off

10/21
22/10 By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, OCT. 21. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, cancelled for the second consecutive day today all his appointments, including a special Cabinet meet on the Tenth Five-Year Plan, because of his "bad throat."

The official word is that there is nothing wrong with Mr. Vajpayee's health and he is suffering only from a throat infection and has been advised by the doctors to refrain from talking. He is reported to be "clearing files" and attending to other routine prime ministerial chores.

Yesterday, Mr. Vajpayee cut short his stay in Lucknow because of his troublesome throat. That announcement was interpreted as Mr. Vajpayee's way of getting out of a possibly embarrassing press conference where he would have been asked about the BJP dissident MLAs.

But for most the day, the Prime Ministerial aides were at pains to suggest that Mr. Vajpayee was actually down with a bad throat. The cancellations of appointments today confirmed that perhaps after all Mr. Vajpayee was not affecting some kind of political illness.

The special Cabinet meeting on the Tenth-Plan is now tentatively planned for next week. The unexpected postponement should give the Prime Minister a week's time to iron out the increasingly pronounced differ-



ences within the Cabinet over the direction of the disinvestment strategy.

The controversy over disinvestment acquired a new dimension after the Disinvestment Minister, Arun Shourie, disclosed publicly the lobbying done by Shiv Sena functionaries on behalf of a bidder in the sale of a public sector hotel in Mumbai.

Whatever the correctness of Mr. Shourie's charge, NDA partners are believed to be exercised over what is being regarded as a breach of coalition dharma.

Mr. Shourie's "outburst" against the Shiv Sena has not been appreciated by other NDA partners, who do not necessarily disagree with him.

The Prime Minister's "forced silence" may induce other ministerial colleagues to emulate him, said an official.

22/10

22 OCT 2002

Atal shuts up to save throat and face

YOGESH VAJPEVI

Lucknow, Oct. 20: A sore throat or soreness with dissonance in the party or both may have caused Atal Bihari Vajpayee to cut short a visit to his home constituency. But the Prime Minister's abrupt afternoon departure for Delhi today merely fanned the fire of malcontent in Lucknow and provoked questions about his health elsewhere.

Vajpayee cancelled all his

engagements here but one, citing a bad throat and did not even meet party workers. He appeared at the scheduled news conference to be excused: "Mere gale ki halat theek nahin hain. Mujhe salah di gai hai ki main chup rahun (The condition of my throat is not good and I have been advised to maintain silence)." He added that this advice cannot be followed without the newsmen's cooperation.

Silence told many tales, though. One started around the

absence of Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mayavati from the news conference.

Mayavati is under threat from disgruntled BJP legislators and a dozen Independent MLAs who are unhappy at not having found places in the ministry. While the Independents have publicly threatened to walk over to the Opposition, the BJP dissidents are openly demanding that BJP ministers should resign.

Vijay Goel, Vajpayee's aide, however, sought to scotch specu-

lation, saying it is not mandatory for a chief minister to be present at the Prime Minister's news conference. She was expected nonetheless, particularly as her party and the BJP have a coalition going.

Vajpayee's decision not to address the media and party supporters — he was scheduled to meet them — spurred rumours that the "sore throat" had given him the opportunity to, first, avoid potentially embarrassing questions and, second, skirt the

possibility of being forced to come face to face with dissidents.

The rebel group had sought an appointment with the Prime Minister without success and might have confronted him at Shishu Mandir, where he was to have met BJP activists. "We will take our battle to Delhi," Ganga Bhakta Singh, senior BJP leader and former minister, said after more than two dozen BJP legislators met at his residence to chalk out their course of action. The dissidents decided to form a

"Save BJP Committee" and claimed that their number was rising and would soon cross 40.

Although the "sore throat" did not allow Vajpayee to speak, the soreness of the national leadership with the dissident activity was evident in deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani's voice. Speaking in Mumbai, he told the dissidents "to fall in line and not to cross the *Lakshman rekha*".

In Bangalore, NDA convener George Fernandes reacted with curttness to a question about Vaj-

payee's health leading on to the possibility of a change in the leadership of the government.

"I don't know what the press conference cancellation has to do with change of leadership," he said angrily.

The only public ceremony Vajpayee attended was at Ali-ganj, where in response to persistent urging by the media he begged to be excused with a promise to possibly speak at the airport — which he did not — or return to Lucknow shortly.

गुडिन-फ्रिन्ड्स

6/1 11/10

PM calls for 'united' fight against terror

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, OCT 13. The Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, has called upon the international community to lead a united fight against terror, citing the blast in Bali as a chilling 'reminder' of the threat posed by extremists.

It was a common responsibility of all nations to support each other in "ridding the world of this cancer", he said shortly before he left London for home this morning after a week-long European visit.

He wanted world leaders to regard all acts of terrorism as equally dangerous and emphasised that there should be no 'conflicting' views on the issue.

In a pointed reference to what New Delhi regards as the west's inadequate response to Indian concerns over cross-border terrorism, the Prime Minister said: "Unfortunately, the problem is that western countries regard the threat they themselves face from terrorists as more serious. They don't attach the same seriousness to the threat we have to deal with. There are double standards even in measuring terrorism."

Mr. Vajpayee said the Bali violence was "inspired by religious extremists". Later, speaking to a private Indian TV channel, he said it was clear that terrorism was a "global problem".

"There can be no conflicting views on the issue of terrorism or its perception," he said, alluding again to India's unhappiness over western perceptions of terrorism.

14 OCT 2002

Privatisation on track and irreversible: PM

SNS & PTI

LONDON/ NEW DELHI, Oct. 7. — Prime Minister Mr Atal Begari Vajpayee asserted that India's privatisation programme is "on track and irreversible" and reiterated that his commitment to reform is firm. As if on cue, disinvestment secretary Mr Pradip Baijal told The Statesman in New Delhi that Nalco's disinvestment is on, despite continuing protests by coal and mines minister Miss Uma Bharati and from sections of Orissa politicians.

Mr Vajpayee, in an interview to the Financial Times published today, also sought to rebut the impression that the country's economic reforms had been derailed in the wake of controversy regarding the privatisation of the two oil PSUs HPCL and IOC: "That impression is not correct.... As regards disinvestment there is no going back. It is irreversible," he said.

But he conceded that the fractious nature of coalition politics will always affect



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee

the speed of reforms: "My commitment to reform is firm, but we have a coalition of 24 parties. As in all pluralistic societies, the fine-tuning and pace involves the reconciliation of a number of aspirations and needs."

Mr Vajpayee also said he plans measures to lift India's GDP growth from the current five to six per cent to eight per cent or more. "This is achievable provided we accelerate the reform momentum." "We need to control government expenditure, address continuing bottlenecks in

infrastructure and promote employment-friendly labour policies," he said.

On Nalco's divestment, Mr Pradip Baijal said "till the time Cabinet reverses its decision ... there is no question of stopping the process." Sources add that the disinvestment ministry had shortlisted nearly 15 prospective bidders, including Hindalco and Sterlite, which had earlier bought Balco for the strategic sale process.

Advisors for the sale had pre-qualified all but one of the nearly 15 bidders who had submitted an expression of interest (EOI). The rejected party failed to meet the net worth criterion: \$250 million. Global advisors of the sale are learnt to have sent relevant documents to bidders over the weekend, and plant visits by prospective bidders will be over the month end, sources added.

Responding to this, Miss Bharati said: "I had a few points to make which I have made clear to the disinvestment minister and the Prime Minister."

8 OCT 2002

THE STATESMAN

PAK DUAL STAND ON TERROR FLAYED

Vajpayee blasts Musharraf

Nilova Roy Chaudhury
in Nicosia (Cyprus)

Oct. 7. — The Prime Minister today accused Pakistan of double standards in its fight against terror. In an interview to *Politis*, a leading Cypriot daily, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, making his strongest criticism of Pakistan, said: "Pakistan should understand there can be no double standards on terrorism. It cannot fight terrorism in its west and support it in its east. Its membership of the international coalition against terrorism cannot be used as a cover for terrorist activities directed against India."

Making the first Indian prime ministerial visit to this island nation in 19 years, Mr Vajpayee made the most of a traditionally friendly audience to deliver a strong message, indicating that a dialogue with Pakistan, even after the conclusion of the J&K polls, would not happen till cross-border terrorism ended.

According to informed sources, the next course of action in J&K will involve direct talks with elected representatives on the issue of devolution of powers. There will be no talks now with either the Hurriyat or Mr Shabir Shah, who did not participate in the poll process. Troops that are stationed along the border have served a purpose in creating and maintaining pressure on Pakistan to curb terror and there appears to be no

decision on how long they will be there.

Mr Vajpayee's strong message against Pakistani terrorism (shortly before Pak polls) was well received in a country that has been extremely supportive of India's claims to join the UN Security Council as a permanent member.

The Indian high Commissioner, Mr Pavan Verma, said Cyprus, torn between Greek and Turkish aspirations, has traditionally supported India on J&K issue and had condemned the Kargil intrusions and cross-border terrorism.

India, in turn, does not recognise the Turkish republic of northern Cyprus that was created after the Turkish invasion of 1974. Instead, it endorses a unified, bi-zonal federal structure for the country, without the presence of foreign troops.

In a statement, Mr Vajpayee said the visit to Cyprus "continues the tradition of regular exchanges of high-level visits commensurate with our close bilateral ties" with it, dating back to the era of Archbishop Makarios.

Talks with President Mr Glafcos Clerides tomorrow will be followed by the signing of five agreements on information technology, science and technology, posts and telecom, culture and community health services.

Reforms on track: Vajpayee tells
Financial Times, page 4

Terrorism to top Vajpayee's agenda in Cyprus

Nicosia: Prime Minister Atal



A.B. Vajpayee

Behari Vajpayee arrived here on Monday on the first leg of his three-nation tour declaring that India's concerns about terrorism would top the agenda of the talks with the leaders of Cyprus, Denmark and Britain.

Mr Vajpayee, leading a high-level delegation, was received at Larnaca international airport by Cypriot foreign minister Ioannis Kasoulides, Indian high commissioner Pawan K. Verma and other dignitaries.

Before his departure, he told reporters at Delhi that "India's immediate concern on terrorism and the status of global coalition against international terrorism will remain the major themes in my discussion with my interlocutors" in the three countries.

While in Denmark where he will attend the India-EU summit, the Prime Minister said the issue of bringing back the underworld don Abu Salem from Portugal would also be taken up.

Mr Vajpayee, who will be in Cyprus for three days, will hold talks on Tuesday with Cypriot President Glafcos Clerides on a wide range of bilateral, regional and global issues of mutual concern. PTI

8 OCT 2002

THE TIMES OF INDIA

Atal bridge over reforms divide

KA Badarinath and
HS Bartwal
New Delhi, October 5

A COMPROMISE on economic reforms seems to have been reached. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who is pro-reform, tried to address the concerns of the Swadeshi lobby on Saturday, while Defence Minister George Fernandes softened his anti-disinvestment stand.

Vajpayee played down the role of foreign direct investment (FDI) and privatisation at a meeting of the Planning Commission. He said FDI would only supplement domestic resources.

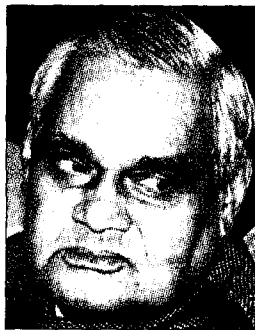
"Let there be no worry in any quarter that we would follow such an FDI policy as would weaken Indian industry or hurt our national interests," Vajpayee said. The Government has lowered its annual FDI targets to \$7.5 billion from \$8 billion in its Tenth Plan document.

Vajpayee also stressed the need to develop agriculture, agro-industries, and the small-scale and cottage industries. He said five crore jobs had to be created in the next five years. This is in consonance with the Swadeshi lobby's emphasis on a labour-intensive development strategy.

The commission approved the Tenth Plan, endorsing an ambitious 8 per cent growth rate. The Prime Minister said this growth would be fuelled by mobilising domestic resources, private savings and reduced Government spending.

Meanwhile, Fernandes seemed to have been persuaded

PATCH-UP NOISES



AB VAJPAYEE

Five crore jobs must be created in the next five years. FDI policy will not be at the cost of the nation's interests

GEORGE FERNANDES

The Prime Minister has favoured my suggestion for a mid-course review of the economic policy. Decision on oil PSUs should be taken immediately

CHANDRABABU NAIDU

Warring ministers sending out the wrong signals and scaring off investors

ed about the need to end the controversy on disinvestment. At a press conference, he said a quick decision needed to be taken on the sale of oil PSUs HPCL and BPCL.

Fernandes emphasised the need to take a decision before the three-month deadline set by the Prime Minister.

The Defence Minister said he was not in favour of dis-

cussing the disinvestment issue in public, but claimed Vajpayee backed his suggestion of a mid-term review of economic reforms. He played down his recent meeting with other anti-reforms ministers.

The quibbling within the alliance had made its most important ally, the Telugu Desam Party, rather jittery. Chandrababu Naidu today said this might scare away foreign investors, crippling India's second generation reforms.

After separate meetings with the PM and Deputy PM, Naidu said he had advised the two to rein in the warring lobbies to prevent any more damage to the country's international standing as an investment destination. "The need for reforms is as great in the PSUs as in the labour, financial and agriculture sectors. Vulnerable sections must be protected with additional benefits, not by stalling reforms. The only option before us is to either follow reforms or perish."

He called for a change in mindset to address the changing economic realities.

But around the same time, another ally, in Mumbai, made it known in no uncertain terms that it would brook no reforms. Shiv Sena leader Uddhav Thackeray threatened in a trade union rally, "If the anti-labour Act is passed by Parliament, we will bring down the Government." With 15 MPs, Sena's sting will not be lost on the coalition Government.

Related report on Page 8

THE HINDUSTAN

6 OCT 2002

'BULLET CANNOT DEFEAT THE BALLOT'

Pakistan must be held accountable: PM

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 30. Describing the recent terrorist attacks as a sign of "our enemy's desperation", the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said today that Pakistan should be held accountable for its continued sponsorship of terrorism in India.

Jammu and Kashmir, where the Assembly elections were being held, "is at a turning point", Mr. Vajpayee said and ex-

pressed the confidence that the border State "will leave the nightmare of militancy behind" and get back peace and normality.

He was speaking at the annual conference of the heads of State police forces, Central police organisations and intelligence agencies here.

He said that while polling in the first two phases in Jammu and Kashmir so far had borne out the Government's commitment of holding free and fair

elections, there was a widespread fear psychosis created by Pakistan-backed terrorist organisations.

"There were killings of candidates and political activists, intimidation of voters, calls for poll boycott. However, the people of Jammu and Kashmir braved all this once again to demonstrate that the bullet cannot defeat the ballot in a democracy," he said.

Asking the security forces and intelligence agencies to go on

doing the "difficult and challenging job" in Jammu and Kashmir of getting the better of militancy, the Prime Minister said the Government would simultaneously intensify its diplomatic initiatives to continue the fight against terrorism.

India would "remind the leading nations of the international coalition against terrorism that they should redeem their pledge to combat and defeat terrorism everywhere, irrespective of the cause it espoused. Which means, that Pakistan should be held accountable for its continued sponsorship of terrorism in India".

'Terrorism is blasphemy'

Asserting that the killing of innocent women, men and children could not be justified on any ground, Mr. Vajpayee said that terrorists were not social or political revolutionaries fired by noble or universal ideals. "It is increasingly recognised that terrorists have no religion; and that they actually commit blasphemy when they commit heinous crimes in the name of religion," he said.

Terrorism had failed to find any place in the conscience of human society. "And what is rejected by society cannot have an enduring life. Those who continue to support it will doubtlessly get isolated from the rest of humanity. It is in this sense that I had remarked that terrorism is breathing its last breath," Mr. Vajpayee said.

The main threat to internal security — cross-border terrorism fuelled by religious extremism — drew its ideological sustenance, organisational patronage and operational support from outside the borders.

Mr. Vajpayee had a word of advice for the men in khaki: they must remain apolitical.

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THE HINDU

1 OCT 2002

'WE HAVE TO FIGHT TERRORISM ON OUR OWN'

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P.M

U.S. pressure on Pak. not working: Vajpayee

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 26. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today came pretty close to conceding that the U.S. pressure on Pakistan to abandon support to terrorism did not seem to be working. Eventually India would have to fight its own war against the menace, he said.

"It seems so," he said, when asked whether pressure from the U.S. and India's own efforts were not working on Pakistan to change its stand with regard to supporting terrorism. "We have to fight terrorism on our own strength."

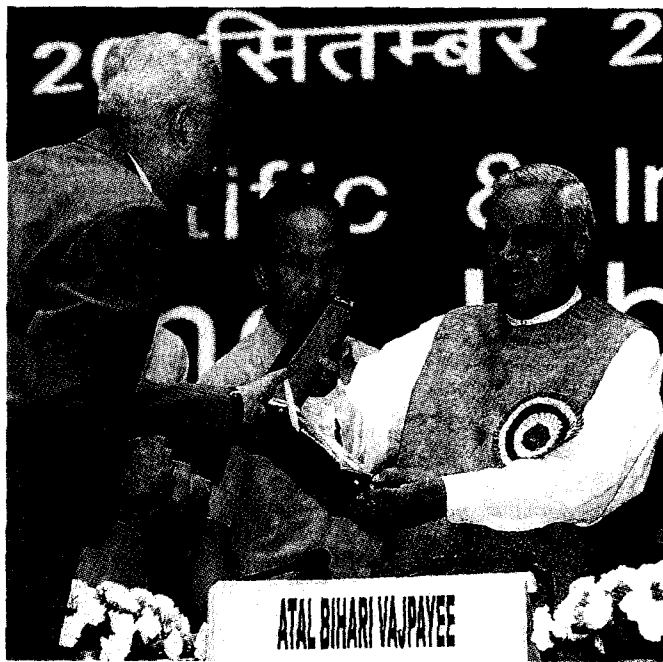
Asked how India would frustrate, terrorists attacks like the one on the temple in Gandhinagar, he said "we can do it. Our men demonstrated it yesterday. The terrorists will not succeed in their designs. India is vigilant and is ready to meet the challenges".

Mr. Vajpayee was briefly interacting with reporters after participating in a function to celebrate the diamond jubilee of the Council of Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR).

War still an option, says I.D. Swami

By Shujaat Bukhari

SRINAGAR, SEPT. 26. The temple siege was the result of "sheer desperation and frustration" on the part of militants and Pakistan as elections were going smooth in Jammu and Kashmir and normality had returned to Gujarat, the Union Minister of State for Home, I.D. Swami, said today.



The CSIR Director-General, R.A. Mashelkar, presenting a memento to the Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, during the presentation of the CSIR scientists awards 2002 in New Delhi on Thursday. —Photo: Rajeev Bhatt

The Minister maintained that India was still trying the diplomatic channels in order to make Pakistan behave but "still all the options were open".

Asked whether the war was also an option, he shot back: "Do you think war is not included in all the options. We have faith in the international coalition and still hope it will rise to the occasion and help in ending cross-border terrorism", said Mr. Swami but added "we are not dependent upon the world as far as our problems are concerned".

Accusing Pakistan of continuing with its plan to create

trouble in India, the Minister told newsmen that the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, had not lived up to his commitments.

The infiltration continued and the activities of militants had gone up after the elections were announced. "They (militants) got frustrated with the enthusiasm people showed in the electoral process".

Mr. Swami disagreed with the view that the attack on the Akshardham temple was a reaction to what happened after Godhra in Gujarat.

The two militants were from across the border. The Tehrik-

e-Kasas is nothing but a cover of the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammad."

Gujarat has a soft border with Pakistan that is why the militants managed to do it there. And Gujarat has a long history of communal violence.

So the enemy will always try to select this place to carry out the nefarious plans.

Pakistan's aim to aid and abet the militants was to destroy India's economy and create a wedge between different communities.

Complimenting the people of Jammu and Kashmir for braving militants' threats and participating in the polls, Mr. Swami said the Government had made it clear to the international community that cross-border terrorism had to end. "To end this we are determined and the willpower and the strength of the people of country is enough to win it," he said.

Dialogue with Kashmiris

"Soon after the electoral process is over, the Centre will initiate a dialogue with the representative government and also with those who did not participate in the elections. They (separatists) stand isolated and exposed," the Minister said.

The development of the State and the grievances of the people —whether political or apolitical —would be discussed.

The Government would consider any proposal from the State on devolution of powers and the BJP-led Government at the Centre had gone ahead with its efforts in that direction.

Sinha rules out talks with Pak.: Page 11

No increase in MSP for paddy

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 26. Brushing aside demands for an increase in the minimum support price for paddy for the kharif season 2002-03, the Union Cabinet today decided to retain it at last year's level as recommended by the Commission for Agricultural Costs and Prices (CACP).

The Cabinet, which met here this evening, also decided to retain the MSP for the

coarse cereals, tur (arhar), cotton and soyabean at last year levels.

The MSP of 'moong' and 'urad' have, however, been raised by Rs. 10 each a quintal from Rs. 1,320 to Rs. 1,330 a quintal, and that of groundnut-in-shell by Rs. 15 a quintal from Rs. 1,340 a quintal to Rs. 1,355 a quintal.

Likewise, the MSP for sunflower seed has been raised by Rs. 10 a quintal, while that for sesamum has been hiked by Rs.50 a

quintal and for nigerseed by Rs. 20 a quintal.

Announcing the Cabinet decision, the Government's spokesperson said the new rates were designed to encourage the farmers to diversify from the normal rice-wheat cropping system and go in for the cultivation of other crops.

They would also help the poor farmers in less-endowed regions as oilseeds and pulses are crops of rainfed areas.

'THERE IS POLITICAL STABILITY IN OUR COUNTRY'

Gujarat events a shame: PM

HD 1
By Amit Baruah 15/9

NEW YORK, SEPT. 14. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has reiterated that the Gujarat riots were not a "good thing." Addressing members of the Indian community at a reception on Friday night, Mr. Vajpayee said that wherever he went, there was a discussion on Gujarat. The Gujaratis themselves said that they indulged in riots every two years, but this was "not good."

"A situation should not be created at home which forces us to bow our heads in shame before others (abroad)," Mr. Vajpayee said. In what was a distinct aside in his otherwise general speech on India and Indians living abroad, he sought to reinforce his "moderate" image in the light of the happenings in Gujarat.

Earlier, Mr. Vajpayee was told by a delegation of the American Federation of Muslims from India (AFMI) that there was need to ensure that India's secular, pluralistic status was not compromised. Attacking the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the AFMI chief, A. Rahman Nakerdar, said the authorities had allowed a "free hand" to killers and looters in Gujarat. "We are disappointed with the Gujarat Government's handling of relief, rehabilitation and compensation for victims of the carnage. The process has been slow and discriminatory... Our aim in seek-

ing this meeting was to request the Prime Minister to ensure the fullest and earliest rehabilitation."

Speaking in Hindi, Mr. Vajpayee was relaxed and dwelt at length on both politics and poetry. He repeatedly said that the "map of India could change" if the work culture adopted by non-resident Indians could be taken back home. Conceding that the poor quality of leadership was a factor that contributed to the poor work ethics in India, he said he never expected to be Prime Minister and certainly did not think that he would keep his job for so long. "*Ab to koi hatane ki baat bhi nahin karta hai*" (no one even talks of removing me now). And the Opposition had been helpful in this regard.

While extolling the achievements of Indians abroad, Mr. Vajpayee expressed concern over the proliferation of Indian organisations and called on the groups to sink their differences and work together.

The Prime Minister said that foreign visitors these days did not ask him questions on the NDA Government's political stability; the reason for this stability was its ability to take as many people as possible along. He complimented the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, for visiting the South Asian neighbours and opening a "new chapter" in foreign relations.

On terrorism, he said the events of Sep-

tember 11 had touched a chord in the people here. But, India had been fighting terrorism for long. "There is a need to understand the real character of terrorism," Mr. Vajpayee said, and referred to the speech of the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, at the United Nations. It was stated that the roots of terrorism had to be examined but there could be no reason for supporting the slaughter of innocents. It appeared as if the world was not "well prepared" to take on the terrorist menace.

Ending his speech with a poem of his, Mr. Vajpayee took a friendly dig at his host and Indian Ambassador to the U.S., Lalit Mansingh, for reciting one of his poems wrong. "The ambassador read my own poem wrong in my presence. It's a warning to me not to write poetry in future."

Talking of Mr. Vajpayee's leadership qualities, Mr. Mansingh said that he was a symbol of the "good and the great" in India. Mr. Sinha attacked Gen. Musharraf saying that India would not be "cowed down" by the threat of cross-border terrorism. "Let no one be in doubt about our will and capacity to combat cross-border terrorism." It was easy for the world to sermonise, but it was India which had to bear the brunt of terrorism.

Earlier, Mr. Vajpayee met many delegations from a cross-section of Indian organisations in the U.S.

1 5 SEP 2002

THE HINDI

Atal points finger at Pak nuke blackmail

S Rajagopalan & Avirook Sen
New York, September 13

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee today accused President Pervez Musharraf of "nuclear blackmail" as he launched into a counter-attack on the Pakistani ruler in his address to the UN General Assembly.

Replying to Musharraf's charge yesterday that South Asia is hostage to one accident, one act of terrorism and one strategic miscalculation by India, Vajpayee said, "In our South Asian region, nuclear blackmail has emerged over the last few months as a new arrow in the quiver of state-sponsored terrorism."

For the US, the message was clear. Vajpayee said India's efforts to stamp out cross-border terrorism has been met with dark threats of a nuclear war, but to succumb to such threats "would mean forgetting the lessons of the September 11 tragedy".

In a speech that was repeatedly revised till the time it was delivered — to counter Musharraf's desperate accusations against India at the same forum yesterday — Vajpayee sent a clear message to Pakistan, the US and the world: India's re-

Sinha heaps scorn

A DAY after President Pervez Musharraf termed the upcoming Jammu and Kashmir elections as "far-cical", External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha dismissed as a "joke" the October 10 general elections in Pakistan. "The ensuing elections in Pakistan is a joke. For a military dictator to comment on elections in another country is a bigger joke," Sinha told reporters in New York on Friday.

PTI, New York

straint in dealing with terrorism can't be seen as a sign of weakness. It would respond with "all the means at its command".

Vajpayee asked the international community how it could "condone Pakistan-directed killings of thousands of innocent civilians" to promote its "bizarre version of self-determination". He said it was time the UN Security Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee went be-

yond compiling information to enforcing compliance of Resolution 1373 by states "known to be sponsoring, sheltering, funding, arming and training terrorists".

While Musharraf hardly looked beyond India in his speech and often sounded shrill, Vajpayee dwelt on Pakistan for about a third of his time and went about his business with wit and dignity — give or take a few personal cracks at the Pakistani President.

He said it would take a feat of "logical acrobatics to believe that the carnage of innocents (in Jammu and Kashmir) is an instrument for freedom and elections are a symbol of deception and repression". And in a late addition to his speech, he mentioned that "General Musharraf has himself admitted that rigging was responsible for his winning the (April) referendum".

"As for the true democracy he intends to establish in Pakistan," the Prime Minister said, "he has rendered it impotent even before the elections are held next month."

Vajpayee dismissed Musharraf's claim that minorities were being persecuted in Gujarat as "patently false and self-serving".

Related report on Page 9

PM likely to ask Bush to rein in Pak

By Chidanand Rajghatta
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New York: Putting Indo-US bilateral ties back on track was the first item on the agenda of the talks between Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and President George Bush scheduled for Thursday.

The priority remains, but the election-related assassination of Jammu and Kashmir minister Mushtaq Ahmed Lone and the spurt in terrorist killings in the strife-torn state will see Mr Vajpayee devoting a good part of the half-hour meeting highlighting Pakistan's continuing role in cross-border terrorism.

Following the news of the latest bloodbath in Kashmir, the gloves were off in New York on Wednesday night as Indian officials accompanying the Prime Minister bluntly and explicitly accused Pakistan of indulging in international terrorism

and charged it with trying to derail the election process in Jammu and Kashmir. Violence in the state has become topical (for talks between Mr Vajpayee and Mr Bush) in the context of the latest killings. "It is a serious development and an indication of the designs of terrorists and their mentors," India's foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal told reporters ahead of the meeting. Mr Sibal minced no words in saying that Pakistan was seriously involved in terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and Afghanistan.

The sharp remarks, ahead of speeches by leaders of Pakistan and India before the UN General Assembly, means the Indo-Pak spat has once again come to the fore despite attempts by New Delhi and Washington to give priority to their bilateral ties. Pakistan President Pervez Musharraf will call on Mr Bush soon after Mr Vajpayee's talks.

The burst of violence in Kashmir

and Gen Musharraf's provocative remarks in Boston and Chicago, including comments about India's arms build-up, appears to have irked the Indian side. Officials clearly expect the US, which has virtually guaranteed that Pakistan will allow the peaceful conduct of elections, to take note of the killings.

Referring to Gen Musharraf's comments that he will seek a proactive denial of hi-tech arms to India, Mr Sibal said India did not think the Pakistani dictator had any dissuasive veto on the defence relations between India and the US. He also opined that Washington might not provide F-16 fighter jets or any arms to a country that is involved in terrorism and has turned South Asia into a nuclear flash point.

Meanwhile, Mr Vajpayee is also expected to convey to Mr Bush India's reservations about Washington's proposed action against Iraq.

The PM has spoken

The big question: will the Gujarat chief minister care to listen to him?

A VOLLEY of words last week proved to be particularly unfortunate. At a public meeting on Tuesday, Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi was at his manipulative and vicious best. Smarting under the Election Commission's order postponing elections in the state, he mounted an odious personal attack on Chief Election Commission J.M. Lyngdoh, implying that it was his Christian background that had caused him to take the decision on the Gujarat polls. Not only was this ugly insinuation an attempt to sully the personal integrity of the CEC, it was also a direct attack on the institution of the EC, upon which the credibility of the Indian democratic process crucially rests. But does Modi, in his concerted scramble to get back to Gandhinagar, even care? He must know that the poll decision was taken unanimously by the three highest functionaries of the Commission — two of whom are not Christians — but does he even bother about such fine points? He must be aware of the crucial role the EC is now required to play in attesting to the credibility of the J&K poll process, but does that stop him from dragging it into the muck? Of course not.

Unfortunately the CEC, instead of treating Modi's verbal absurdities with the contempt they deserve, chose to be provoked by them. In a television interview last Friday, Lyngdoh, even while avoiding naming any particular individ-

ual, damned the entire tribe of politicians in no uncertain terms. While this may be his personal views, he should have realised that in this surcharged atmosphere, such words do him and the institution he heads little credit.

It is in this context that Prime Minister's Vajpayee's observations on Saturday are most welcome. Not only did the prime minister express his distress over this 'undignified' controversy, he pointed out that constitutional authorities must be given the respect that is their due. Lyngdoh, having said his piece, will in all probability now pipe down. But whether Modi will, is the big question. The prime minister was speaking to him directly when he stated that there are constitutional means to deal with differences of opinion, like the one concerning the Gujarat poll dates. But Modi, if we are to go by his particular brand of politics, has really no use for such niceties. Vajpayee would like him to recognise that the maturity of Indian democracy lies in all its institutions. But a man who has attacked several important institutions in the country already, who has questioned the findings of the National Human Rights Commission, who has disregarded the observations of the National Minorities Commission, who has treated the EC with utter contempt, does such a man even know the value of constitutional institutions?

PM's rebuff fails to mollify Modi

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 25. — The Prime Minister's rebuff to the Gujarat chief minister for the latter's diatribe against the Chief Election Commissioner, Mr JM Lyngdoh, seems to have fallen flat on Mr Narendra Modi and the BJP.

According to a report from Ahmedabad, Mr Modi justified his stand asking the Election Commission to hold an early election in Gujarat, though he said that after Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's remark the controversy on the issue should be taken as over. Yet, he spoke of the EC's denying some five crore odd electorates of Gujarat their right to chose a government as early as possible.

The BJP too appears to have not taken Mr Vajpayee's statement with all seriousness if one goes by what Prof VK Malhotra, chief whip of the BJP, had to say on the subject. He said the Prime Minister's statement was addressed to both Mr Lyngdoh and Mr Modi. He defended Mr Modi and said that it didn't behave the CEC to have used derogatory words for those BJP leaders asking for an early Gujarat poll.

The Congress today mounted attack on Mr Modi and the BJP when the party President, Mrs Sonia Gandhi, called upon the

people to throw out the Modi government in the coming elections to end the era of violence and disorder. Launching her party's poll campaign in Rajkot, Mrs Gandhi said Mr Modi had vitiated the atmosphere in the state by creating a condition which was hostile to development and growth. She said people were reluctant to come to Gujarat to invest in industry and trade. She also attacked the chief minister for his insinuations against Mr Lyngdoh.

Former West Bengal chief minister Mr Jyoti Basu refused to take Mr Vajpayee's criticism of Mr Modi. He described the Prime Minister's yesterday's statement as mere 'posturing'. The CPI-M general secretary, Mr Harkishen Singh Surjeet, said the BJP-led government at the Centre would be "thrown out of power". But, he didn't elaborate how the NDA government, which still has a majority in the Lok Sabha, could be dislodged from the power.

Taking the battle into Mr Modi's hometurf, Mrs Gandhi said: "If political leaders incite the people and walk the path of destruction, what inspiration will the new generation draw from the depressive environment that surrounds them." The Congress president visited Morvi near Gandhinagar, where at a

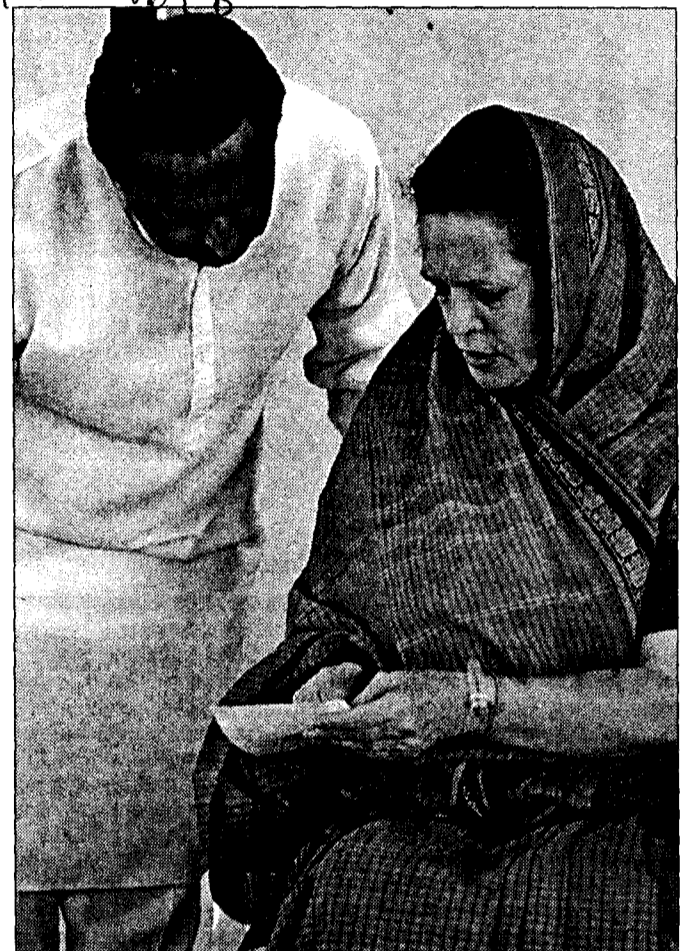
meeting she accused the BJP of trying to drive fissures among the people. "The BJP should behave as the head of a family and keep the family united."

Accusing BJP leaders of "hypocrisy" Mrs Gandhi said: "*Dil mein kuch aur mooh mein kuch aur* (they never mean what they say). The hatred and violence that is permeating Gujarat is all the more depressing as it is the land of Mahatama Gandhi".

Gill on Gujarat polls: Mr KPS Gill, former security advisor to Mr Narendra Modi, today said the law-and-order situation in Gujarat was "conducive" for holding polls, adds PTI from Jaalandhar. "The issue has been politicised by parties, but otherwise the situation is conducive to hold elections in Gujarat."

On the EC's decision to postpone polls in Gujarat, he said: "If elections could be held in Punjab in 1992, why not in Gujarat?"

Scribes hurt: A reporter and photographer of a Kannada daily were allegedly manhandled by police as mediapersons had a tough time covering Mrs Sonia Gandhi's arrival at the airport in Belgaum. A Samyukta Karnataka reporter and photographer were allegedly manhandled and their cameras seized by the police at the parking area, PTI adds from Belgaum.



MODUS OPERANDI? Mrs Sonia Gandhi shares a point or two with party leader Mr Kamal Nath in Ahmedabad on Sunday. — PTI

'NO JUSTIFICATION FOR GUJARAT VIOLENCE'

Flagrant attempts by Pak. to disrupt J&K polls: PM

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, AUG. 15. There have been testing times — the wounds inflicted by terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and the horrific communal violence in Gujarat — but India has always stood the test of a secular nation, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said here today addressing the country from the ramparts of the Red Fort on the 55 anniversary of the Independence Day.

Delivering his fifth consecutive Independence Day address — and he did not fail to take note of this — the Prime Minister gave a fitting response to the caustic references made to Jammu and Kashmir and the Assembly elections there by the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, on Wednesday. "Those who call the forthcoming elections in the State farcical should not give us lectures on democracy. Let them take a look at their own track record."

At the same time, he offered "to take some more steps" in the direction of peace, as he had when he undertook the journey to Lahore and then hosted the Agra summit.

But for this a conducive environment was necessary. Flagrant attempts by Pakistan to provoke the people in Jammu and Kashmir to boycott elections could not create an atmosphere for meaningful talks.

"Our neighbour claims to oppose terrorism at the international level, but adopts double standards in the context of our region. After facing defeat in wars, it has resorted to cross-

border terrorism to grab Kashmir."

But the State was an integral part of India, and would remain so, he asserted. Promising that

PM promises to 'make amends'

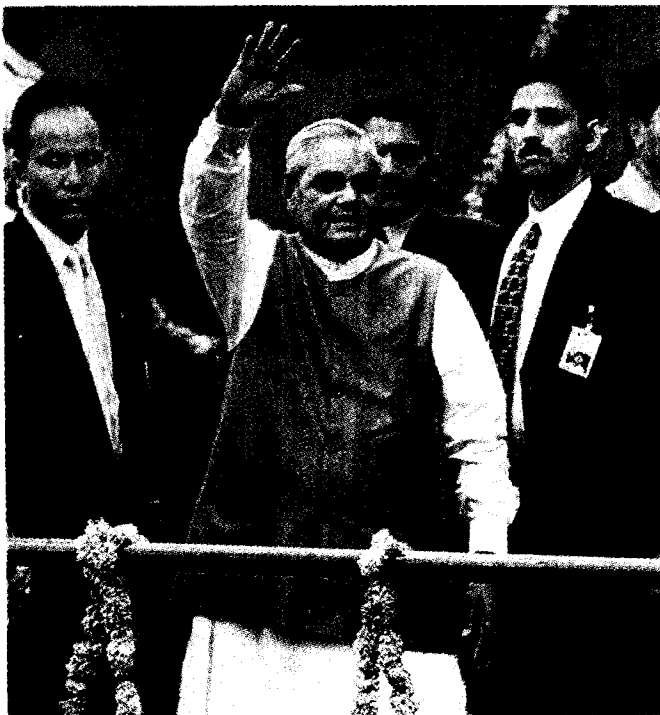
NEW DELHI, AUG. 15.

Promising to make amends for "mistakes of the past", Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee today offered to hold talks with elected representatives and organisations in Jammu and Kashmir on the demand for more powers and called for highest participation in the coming Assembly elections.

In the backdrop of moves to involve the Hurriyat Conference in the election process, Mr. Vajpayee, in his Independence Day address to the nation, said "I wish to assure the people of Jammu and Kashmir that if mistakes have occurred, we shall make amends".

"For this, we shall talk to the elected representatives and organisations. Discussions will also take place on the demand for more powers to the State." — PTI

the Assembly elections would be "fully free and fair" he appealed to voters to exercise their franchise in large numbers to "demolish the propaganda being conducted from across the border."



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, waves to the gathering from the ramparts of the Red Fort after his Independence Day address in New Delhi on Thursday. —

Photo: V. Sudershan

"The world cannot accept the massacre of Amarnath pilgrims or the terrorist attack on Parliament, but equally there can be no place in any civilised society for the kind of communal violence witnessed in Gujarat, no matter what the provocation," he emphasised.

The theme of Kashmir being an integral part of India, that it was not just a "piece of land" but a "test-case of *sarva dharma sambhav* secularism" and that

India was determined to defeat cross-border terrorism, was expounded by Mr. Vajpayee along expected lines.

But on Gujarat, the "line" changed somewhat. No longer did he, even remotely, justify the communal killings but said directly that "peace, communal amity, national unity and integrity" must be maintained "even in the most serious and provocative circumstances".

This is contrary to the stance

of the Government and the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party that the communal violence had been provoked (and, therefore, somewhat justified) by the burning to death of passengers of the Sabarmati Express at Godhra on February 27.

It was perhaps to his own party's Government and the people in Gujarat that he addressed himself when he emphasised that "it was the responsibility of the Government and society alike to provide security and equal opportunities to the minorities".

Significantly, for the leader of a party raking up the 500-year-old temple-mosque controversy in Ayodhya, Mr. Vajpayee's advice to countrymen was: forget the past, look forward to the future (*'Beeti tahi bisar de, aage ki sudh le'*).

The Prime Minister recounted the achievements of the country in food self-sufficiency, information technology and the change from an economy of scarcity to one of surplus, but added there was need for political consensus on all socio-economic issues just as there had been on national security. Growth in many areas had been tardy, but that could be corrected if a billion people decided to achieve their full potential.

His views reflected what the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, said in his address on Wednesday that India should aim at becoming a developed nation by 2020.

Mr. Vajpayee spelt out a number of new initiatives in the areas of water management and conservation, power reforms, food and homes for the poorest and the most-oppressed and the backward classes.

Despite the floods and drought this year, no one would be allowed to die of hunger, he emphasised.

In a multi-party system, the "race for power" was "natural", but it should be within a "*lakshman rekha*" and within the limits of the "nation first" principle.

Speaking against the backdrop of the petrol pump scandal that has shaken the Government, Mr. Vajpayee said it was important to remember that people expected "high conduct" from those who occupied "high offices".

THE HINDU

15 AUG 1997

'LET US GO IT ALONE' PRESSURE ON BJP LEADERSHIP

Consensus needed on development issues: PM

By Neena Vyas 2/8

NEW DELHI, AUG. 3. The growing pressure from within the Bharatiya Janata Party's rank and file to "go it alone" was directly acknowledged by its leadership when the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, announced today that the BJP wanted to get a "clear majority" of its own in the next Lok Sabha elections.

Although the BJP allies in the ruling National Democratic Alliance were invited to the party's national council session at the Talkatora Stadium here — which leaders of many allies attended — the BJP's desire to get a clear majority of its own was articulated strongly, leaving rather vague the fate of the NDA by the time the next Lok Sabha elections are held in 2004. Earlier, the Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani, said that the BJP's progress was on account of its own ideology.

Two senior leaders of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, Madan Das Devi and Mohan Rao Bhagwat, were also present.

Concluding the one-day session, Mr. Vajpayee indicated that some more changes in the



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, at the BJP national council meeting in New Delhi on Saturday. — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

party organisation and the Council of Ministers were in the offing, as "more party-men working in the Government are needed for party work." In short, yet another Cabinet reshuffle could be on the cards.

"Ghoom phir ke baat wahin aa jati hai ki akele cha-

lenge" (every time the same thing is heard, let us go it alone) Mr. Vajpayee said, but not before warning his party-men that running a government was not just a game of numbers. "Even after that (getting a majority), you need to be able to work with other parties," he said, re-

verting time and again to the theme of political consensus.

There was already a consensus on issues of national security, what was needed was a consensus on development issues, he said. "India can and will change its destiny," he told some 1,000 delegates.

His advice to the party workers was neither to overestimate the Opposition, which was "scattered and dissipated," nor underestimate the BJP's strength. The party must be "farsighted," and must not lose sight of the larger good of the country when taking up specific poll issues.

Mr. Advani also made the point that the NDA experiment had not only helped get a majority in Parliament, but had also made the Government at the Centre more representative, and strengthened federalism through the participation of smaller regional parties. When the party expanded its base, the workers must keep up the friendly relations with the allies and regional parties, he said.

Although some people had begun saying that the BJP was ready to go back to its own agenda, especially after the round of electoral defeats in the State Assemblies, "we must continue with the NDA agenda," as the "NDA also strengthens federalism."

Giving a brief account of the BJP's rise from being a "small pressure group" to the "biggest party in the Lok Sabha in 1996" and then as the leader of the ruling alliance, Mr. Advani said that the BJP was a "party with a difference." Its Government now must try to be a "government with a difference," he urged, releasing the Delhi pledge (*Dilli Sankalp*) document, unanimously adopted by the council. The Government was stable, and the "bowlers (Opposition parties) were weak" and if the Government got "out," it would only be because of a "hit wicket" — internal weaknesses alone could bring down the NDA regime, according to Mr. Advani.

Earlier, Venkaiah Naidu's appointment as the new BJP president was ratified unanimously through a show of hands.

Advani expresses 'regret' to Jayalalithaa

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, JULY 28. The Deputy Prime Minister and Union Home Minister, L. K. Advani, today sought to end the unseemly controversy over Chief Ministers not being invited to the swearing-in ceremony of the President by expressing "regret" to the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, and promising to review the entire Table of Precedence for formal government functions.

Ms. Jayalalithaa made public the details of the conversation with Mr. Advani.

In an official press note, the State Government said Mr. Advani called up Ms. Jayalalithaa to "express regret for what had happened (non-issuance of invitation to her for the swearing-in ceremony of the President, A. P. J. Abdul Kalam, on Thursday)."

"The Chief Minister replied

that it was very gracious of the Deputy Prime Minister to personally convey his regrets to her.

The Chief Minister also told him that the Deputy Prime Minister could certainly not be held responsible for the omission and that it was a lapse at the level of bureaucrats. The Chief Minister thanked the Deputy Prime Minister for his concern in the whole affair," the press note said.

On Friday, Ms. Jayalalithaa had blamed the Union Home Ministry for giving a "curt reply" to the Resident Commissioner of Tamil Nadu that Chief Ministers would not be invited to the ceremony.

Ms. Jayalalithaa's stand that all Chief Ministers should be invited to the swearing-in of the President found support from most political parties in Tamil Nadu, including the opposition DMK.

Advani defends Modi's decision

TIMES NEWS NETWORK & PTI

New Delhi: Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani on Tuesday night rejected in the Lok Sabha the opposition demand for President's rule in Gujarat and the removal of chief minister Narendra Modi even as the BJP's allies opposed early assembly elections in the state.

Replying to a seven-hour debate on the issue of relief and rehabilitation in riot-torn Gujarat, he said the Centre was prepared to consider a proposal to impose President's rule in all states one month before the poll process began and an exception could not be made in the case of Gujarat.

Defending the Modi gov-

ernment's recommendation of early polls, Mr Advani said, "What the Gujarat government has done is within the ambit of the Constitution and political right." Advocating the need for early elections in Gujarat, he said, "in fact, elections will help reduce tensions as people's attention gets diverted towards the poll process".

Even as the opposition in the two houses pressed for Mr Modi's ouster and clamping of central rule in Gujarat, the government faced an embarrassment when NDA allies TDP, Trinamul Congress and JD(U) said the situation in the state was not conducive for polls and elections could not be an overriding priority.

...COUNCILORS OF THE HINDU NATIONAL LITERATURE

Time US calls Pak a terrorist state: Advani

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 16 JULY

NEW Delhi's unease with the West over its ambivalence towards Islamabad came out in the open on Tuesday when deputy prime minister L.K. Advani said it was time that the US declared Pakistan a terrorist state. The deputy prime minister made this observation while responding to an adjournment motion moved in the Lok Sabha to discuss last Saturday's Jammu massacre. Later, the House rejected the motion, moved by Congress's deputy leader Shivraj Patil, by a voice vote.

Mr. Advani, during his intervention, maintained that the international community including the US was "not doing enough" to force Pakistan to stop terrorism. He said Islamabad will not be able to bear sanctions that would follow once that country is brought on the list of terrorist



Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, deputy prime minister L.K. Advani, HRD minister M.M. Joshi and finance minister Jaswant Singh at the BJP parliamentary committee meeting in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

states. However, he quoted a US leader as having told him recently that "India is exaggerating the US 'clout'".

Referring to Washington's attitude towards Pakistan, Mr. Advani said the US "sees Gen Musharraf to be its best bet and that it may not agree with our assessment (about Islamabad aiding and abetting terrorism against India)". Recalling that Musharraf had changed his Agra stand at last month's Agra Summit in July last year had termed the violence in Kashmir as part of 'freedom struggle', he said the Pakistani military ruler was forced to call the December 13 attack on Parliament, the May Kaluchak massacre and the July 13 Jammu attack as acts of terrorism.

This was due to India's diplomatic efforts to sensitise the world community about Pakistan-backed terrorism, he said, adding that General Musharraf had changed his Agra stand at last month's Agra Summit in July last year had termed the violence in Kashmir as part of 'freedom struggle', he said the Pakistani military ruler was forced to call the December 13 attack on Parliament, the May Kaluchak massacre and the July 13 Jammu attack as acts of terrorism.

is an integral part of India and will remain so. "Pakistan has not reconciled to the fact that J&K despite being a Muslim-majority state is a part of India", he said, adding it was under the India Accession Act that the Maharaja of J&K chose to remain with India and this was accepted by then National Conference leader Sheikh Abdullah and the Constituent Assembly.

Mr. Advani announced that BJP general secretary and former law minister Arun Jaitley would be the Centre's pointman to discuss with the J&K government and political parties the issue of devolution of greater powers to the state. "This exercise will begin immediately," he said adding J&K was a special state and the government had no objection to giving it more powers.

Mr. Advani, however, said the Centre had rejected the J&K Assembly resolution seeking greater autonomy as it meant

restoration of pre-1953 status which would lead to the people being deprived of the rights that they got under the Constitution after 1953. He also rejected the RSS demand for trifurcation of J&K into Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh regions, saying the state was one entity even though it has different cultures.

On ISI activities in India, Advani said various agencies had succeeded in unearthing and destroying 154 modules bulk of which were found in Delhi followed by Maharashtra, UP and West Bengal.

Before walking out, Mr. Patil said the Opposition was terribly disappointed with the response of Mr. Advani who, he charged, had failed to outline the government's policy to fight terrorism. The Congress leader also rejected allegations by National Conference leader Omar Abdullah that the party was trying to politicise the July 13 killings.

Of Deputy Prime Ministers

By Ajay K. Mehra

THE ELEVATION of Lal Krishna Advani as the Deputy Prime Minister is significant not only for the BJP, the NDA and the polity, but also for the emerging party politics in the country. The Cabinet reshuffle that followed, adds additional political subtext to it. An appointment to the post, which is not mentioned in the Constitution, for only the seventh time in 55 years since Independence comes soon after the controversy surrounding the *Time* article on the Prime Minister's health.

Sardar Patel became the first Deputy Prime Minister, even before the Constitution of India was framed. His appointment with the vital portfolios of Home and States signified equal stature of the top two leaders. Yet, statutory sanction for this post was never an issue in the Constituent Assembly, which obviously reflected an unstated political consensus of its political nature then and in future. No wonder then that Morarji Desai was the next to be offered the post, in 1967 to mollify him and blunt his opposition to Indira Gandhi. Morarji Desai himself as Prime Minister in 1979 was compelled by politics to appoint two Deputies — Mr. Charan Singh and Mr. Jagjivan Ram. However, this postponed the end of the Janata Government only by a year. Then Charan Singh made Y. B. Chavan his Deputy Prime Minister as a price for his support.

Devi Lal has the distinction of twice being Deputy Prime Minister, again under curious political circumstances. After the 1989 elections, he first aligned with V.P. Singh to short-circuit Chandra Shekhar's prime ministerial claims; this made him the sixth Deputy Prime Minister. However, as his family members' volatile politics eclipsed his Cabinet berth, he later aligned with Mr. Chandra Shekhar. Naturally, he was anointed Deputy Prime Minister once again when Mr. Chandra Shekhar formed the Government with outside support from the Congress.

Thus, three interlinked political circumstances have created Deputy Prime Ministers — near-equal political stature of two political leaders, as in the case of Patel and Nehru; to obviate political competition by accommodation, as in the case of Morarji Desai, Charan Singh, Jagjivan Ram and Devi Lal; and the compulsions of coalition politics, as in the case of Charan Singh, Jagjivan Ram and Devi Lal. Succession has never been a factor. The Sardar and Morarji

Neither the post of Deputy Prime Minister nor the number two position in the Cabinet necessarily guarantees ascent to the prime ministerial chair.

Desai were older than Nehru and Indira Gandhi respectively. And, two Deputy Prime Ministers in one Cabinet could never be an effective succession formula! Chavan and Devi Lal owed their positions to special coalitional circumstances with inherent political uncertainty.

Obviously, Mr. Advani's appointment does not fall into any of these categories. Though he was number two in the Cabinet, he was not appointed Deputy Prime Minister under the earlier Vajpayee Governments. Though the BJP owed its rise to Mr. Advani's contentious rise in 1989, Atal Behari Vajpayee was considered the natural choice to lead the BJP Government. The rath yatra and tough stance on the Ayodhya issue gave Mr. Advani a halo in Hindutva circles that described him as potential Prime Minister during 1988-89. However, when the crunch came, Mr. Advani himself had to announce, as he is doing now, that Mr. Vajpayee is the undisputed leader of the BJP.

Now, apparently, succession appears to be a prominent, if not the predominant, motive. Though Mr. Advani appears to be the most obvious BJP, and possibly NDA, choice should Mr. Vajpayee step down to

day, his elevation as Deputy Prime Minister does not in anyway guarantee it any more than his being the number two in the Cabinet. It is a moot question whether others in contention will accept him as their natural leader when the crunch comes. It is important to note that none of the Deputy Prime Ministers in India could succeed their Prime Minister. Desai became the Premier leading a different political outfit under changed political circumstances

and the controversial reports about Mr. Vajpayee's indifferent health followed by his statement that Mr. Advani would have to share greater responsibility. The cabinet reshuffle following Mr. Advani's elevation too points to the party's political imperatives having prevailed over everything else.

Two messages have been sought to be conveyed strongly. First, there is no rift between Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani. Second, with Mr. Advani sharing 'greater' responsibility, with pro-Hindutva persons in command at crucial places and the BJP having strengthened itself vis-a-vis the NDA allies, the 'Hindu' vote bank should feel reassured.

Therefore, the elevation of Mr. Advani as Deputy Prime Minister signifies his political ascent vis-a-vis Mr. Vajpayee. It may not necessarily mean Mr. Vajpayee's political eclipse, because he is still a 'useful' mascot to please the moderate and 'sitting-on-the-fence' voters. Moreover, despite his occasional assertions, Mr. Vajpayee has never shown the proclivity to rise above or go contrary to the Sangh Parivar. Naturally, the Sangh Parivar has no problem in dealing with him. The Vajpayee-Advani hiatus, despite denials, appears real, though it never had the potential to boil over because of the duo's prudence and Mr. Vajpayee's eventual submission to the demands of the 'Parivar'. Moreover, despite the duo's attempts to project themselves like the Nehru-Patel duumvirate, the Nehru-Patel synergy despite strong differences has never been visible between Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani.

The post of Deputy Prime Minister has traditionally been used as part of political accommodation; therefore the BJP cannot be faulted in using this time-tested device at this crucial juncture of its history. However, the Tony Blair Government in UK has demonstrated recently that this office can be institutionalised as a constitutional tool for good governance.

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INDIA

A Prime Minister and his deputy

By Harish Khare

Things will get messier unless Mr. Vajpayee feels sufficiently tired and allows himself to be stampeded out of office in six months or so.

A POLITICAL reporter's job carries with it an occupational hazard: you can read the tea leaves wrong. Professional analysts do occasionally make inferences which turn out to be wrong. The other day this writer, too, made an awfully incorrect judgment and reported that the stratagem to elevate Lal Krishna Advani as Deputy Prime Minister had died a premature death. Within 48 hours the dispatch was proven wrong, and there was the communicate from Rashtrapati Bhavan anointing Mr. Advani as Deputy Prime Minister. Also proved flawed was the judgment that no Prime Minister, and certainly not Atal Behari Vajpayee, would countenance an arrangement that created a perception of diluted authority and power.

Nonetheless, Mr. Vajpayee gave in. Why? As H.Y. Sharda Prasad, a man who knows a thing or two about Prime Ministers and their relationships with Ministers, noted "in politics nothing happens without a reason, good or bad". The official hype is aimed at consolidating the general inclination that the Prime Minister has merely formalised an informal place Mr. Advani has had all these years in the scheme of things. But as Mr. Sharda Prasad points out, "if a person accepted by the world as a wife for all practical purposes is suddenly proclaimed as a legally wedded wife, there must be a purpose".

What is the Advani-as-Deputy-Prime-Minister purpose? Mr. Advani himself has offered an explanation: that Mr. Vajpayee did what he did because the Prime Minister wanted to dispel the misimpression that there were differences between the two. For a political leader of considerable intelligence this explanation is reeking with conceit. What is worse, Mr. Advani wants us to believe that he came to know of the Prime Minister's "desire" only a few days before the shotgun wedding was solemnised.

Why, then, the elevation? And, why now, because no rhyme or reason is obvious? Did the *Time* maga-

zine report about the Prime Minister's indifferent health provoke the power grab or was that report part of a carefully executed plan? And, since nothing of consequence happens in New Delhi's power arrangements without some kind of involvement of this or that corporate interest, it is legitimate to ask whether there was any kind of corporate pro-activism in behalf of Mr. Advani? Was the Deputy Prime Minister's decision to attend a corporate funeral in Mumbai a belated corrective gesture?

Answers to most of these questions would not be immediately available. But the question that needs to be addressed right away is: what is the nature of the Prime Minister's authority after the latest "reshuffle", including the consecration of Mr. Advani's role? Does it stand eroded or does it stand enhanced, with an appropriately propitiated Mr. Advani playing the role of a loyal deputy? In fact, the favourite game in the capital these days is to try to figure out what new authority or role, if any, the Deputy Prime Minister would manage to secure for himself or would be conceded to him? Would Mr. Advani succeed in his four-year-old struggle to prise loose the Department of Personnel (read: the Central Bureau of Investigation) from the Prime Minister's control? Will he be able to put in a bureaucratic sleight of hand that would deprive the Prime Minister's Office of any say in Kashmir affairs? In somewhat unseemly haste Mr. Advani himself has gone on record asking the Cabinet Secretary to look for precedents about additional authority for a Deputy Prime Minister.

On the face it, Mr. Vajpayee has lost quite a bit of ground. The key to the prime ministerial authority in a Cabinet system of Government rests on the Prime Minister's ability to hire

and fire his colleagues; or, as Harold Wilson once put it, "the captain of the team is entitled to place the field". In the latest round, Mr. Vajpayee ceded the captain's right. No doubt a wise and prudent Prime Minister invariably consults senior party and Government colleagues while making or unmaking his Cabinet; Nehru did it, so did Indira Gandhi. A Prime Minister in a coalition arrangement has even less elbow room. Yet, the very elaborate, formalised discussions Mr. Vajpayee found himself having with the "panchayat" — Mr. Advani, Jaswant Singh, George Fernandes and Pramod Mahajan — on the Cabinet expansion advertised to the whole world a discernible dilution in the Prime Minister's sway over his own regime. The only consideration shown to Mr. Vajpayee was Mr. Mahajan telling the television cameras that the names of the incoming and outgoing Ministers could be announced only by the Prime Minister. Now, if the reduced prime ministerial authority over the Cabinet is to be juxtaposed with the advent of a Deputy Prime Minister, can a reasonable inference of a rival power centre be drawn? We have the RSS doublespeak that Mr. Advani's anointment has not created two power centres. That, of course, is strictly for the birds. No one shares power with someone else unless the other guy is in a position to extract it. Indeed, Mr. Advani's cronies have aggressively suggested that their man would not be satisfied with an ornamental salutation, and that he was entitled to a greater say.

In fact, no one should grudge Mr. Advani his elevation if it leads to a greater purposefulness at the core of India's governing arrangement. It would help India's friends and foes alike if there was no ambiguity about New Delhi's priorities and personnel.

The country could celebrate if there is a unity of mind and purpose between Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani, something more than merely a state of resigned tolerance and uncomfortable accommodation.

It will be helpful, for example, for the strategists in Islamabad or the jihadi mischief-maker in Muzaffarabad to determine whether Mr. Vajpayee has become convinced of the correctness of Mr. Advani's presumed hawkish approach at home or abroad. The corporate crooks and other chisellers would also want to know whether the Advani crowd will now stop trying to take over the PMO, a project that has never been abandoned since the aborted attempt in the wake of the Tehelka expose in March/April 2001. Or inversely, it cannot be a bad idea at all if the country were to be told that from now onward it is the "Advani line" that would prevail; clarity is any day preferable to prolonged confusion.

The trouble is the Deputy Prime Minister's insistence that nothing has changed between him and the Prime Minister. Mr. Advani has not cited any higher or nobler reason for his new nomenclature except expressing a satisfaction that the rumour-mongers of a rift between him and Mr. Vajpayee have been put in their place. It may be that the only purpose behind the Deputy Prime Minister ploy is to present the NDA crowd with a *fait accompli* when the time comes to make a post-Vajpayee choice. That is something still to be sorted out between the NDA and the electorate. But for now, there is no hint from the Deputy Prime Minister of a new approach, no suggestion of new priorities, no whisper about a different agenda as to what the NDA Government should attempt in the second half of its innings.

A power grab without a larger, nobler, collective purpose invariably invites retaliation. Things will get messier unless Mr. Vajpayee feels sufficiently tired and allows himself to be stampeded out of office in the next six months or so.

OFF HINDI

10 JUL 2002

Deputy's Destiny

With Lal Krishna Advani taking over as deputy prime minister (DPM), it is inevitable that he would be compared with his predecessors in the same office, starting with his role model Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel. Patel and Nehru shared a relationship that at least in parts resembles the one between Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr Advani. Both were near equal in stature though, like Mr Vajpayee, Nehru was vastly more popular. In public, the twosome was a picture of cordiality and yet there was much speculation around the true nature of the relationship, no doubt on account of Patel's distinctive style of functioning and his known differences with the prime minister on key issues. Significantly, Patel, the older of the two, was not regarded as a successor to Nehru. None of the DPMs who followed Patel succeeded his prime minister — not Morarji Desai, not Jagjivan Ram, not Charan Singh, not Y B Chavan, not Devi Lal. Morarji Desai and Charan Singh did go all the way to the top, but only after defecting to another party. In short, the DPM has almost never been a designated heir, the incumbent owing his position more to factional politics. Morarji Desai was accommodated as DPM to blunt his opposition to Indira Gandhi. The same was true of others. In fact, by the time it was Devi Lal's turn to be kicked upstairs, the phenomenon of dissenter-turned-DPM had become something of a joke.

History, then, is seemingly not on Mr Advani's side. However, history is also replete with instances of men defying the odds to get where they did. In the case of Mr Advani, there might be another reason not to emphasise overmuch the precedence of history. It was, after all, Mr Advani who helped the BJP take centre stage. The party had been languishing on the extremities of power politics, when Mr Advani stormed his Ram rath into the Hindi heartland, spreading the message of Hindutva. The astute use of Ram, a religious figure, for cynical political ends raised the BJP's profile and won for it the loyalty of a sizeable constituency of supporters. And finally, it was courtesy Mr Advani that Mr Vajpayee became the prime ministerial candidate of the BJP. However, as the cliché goes, the wheel has probably come full circle. With the BJP emphatically returning to its Hindutva roots, perhaps it is Mr Vajpayee's destiny that he returns the favour to his deputy.

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Godspeed, Deputy Prime Minister!

41/12
THERE is an overwhelming sense of relief that at long last, the country has a Deputy Prime Minister, so designated formally. If Atal Behari Vajpayee had made the announcement when his government was sworn in two-and-a-half years ago, it would have been assumed that Lal Kishan Advani's stature demanded the recognition, like Sardar Patel before him. It cannot be too strongly emphasised that this did not happen. That this should happen now must have consequences. Vajpayee had continued to rely on his own PMO following Indira Gandhi's example, also followed by Rajiv with malice aforethought and then mindlessly by his successors, except perhaps for Narasimha Rao who did nothing without detailed planning and careful execution. He was so cautious that it is said of him that when someone wished him a happy new year on 1st January he presumed as the year had only just begun! The point survives that the PMO was conceived as an instrument for the delivery of the Prime Minister's wishes, occasional assistance when required and to function as a dirty tricks department when called upon, although it has been known to initiate dirty tricks, suo motu, on the presumption that the Prime Minister wished it or as a refuge for family and

friends of the boss. In recent times the latter functions have been predominant. Evidence is available in the shape of the unseemly haste in issuing the Press Note opening the door to foreign investment in the print media, so much so that to date the necessary guidelines have not been issued. If the PMO wishes to take decisions in an unfettered manner, bureaucrats ought to know that the exercise of unguided power is, per se, unconstitutional.

Even at its most generous interpretation, the PMO is said to assist the Prime Minister in the discharge of his manifold responsibilities. If Advani's appointment is to have any meaning, it must also be to assist the Prime Minister. And it needs to be meaningful assistance, not cursory consultations. The scheme of good governance both require that such close assistance cannot be loosely spread otherwise there is serious risk of different perceptions, leading to the kind of confusion and lack of a sense of direction that have been so distressingly evident these many weeks and months. In other words the reshuffle needs to be meaningful. To be meaningful, two points

must be noted. The office of Deputy Prime Minister must be fleshed out; it cannot remain an idle decoration. Otherwise the whole purpose of the exercise will be lost and there will set in the disillusion of failed expectations. Also, continued existence of an all-powerful PMO is incompatible with the office of Deputy Prime Minister. Undoubtedly Pramod Mahajan, Brajesh Mishra and Ranjan Bhattacharyya will be bitterly dis-

appointed, as logically, many decision-making functions must now be diverted to the Deputy Prime Minister. In fact it would be a net gain to good governance if all matters related to national security, for instance, were to be transferred to Advani in his new incarnation. And he is well-qualified to shoulder the responsibility. Advani's position cannot be merely to replace the PMO. He will be expected to act in the absence of the Prime Minister for any reason and this is a further argument for winding up the PMO, which these past many years has wrought havoc on the premise that it is accountable to no one but the Prime Minister. If the reshuffle, which is still woefully incomplete is to have any meaning it must involve, at the threshold, bidding a not

caveat CRIRANI

very affectionate farewell to the aberration invented by Indira Gandhi for carrying out her dark wishes at one remove.

That the reshuffle has not been announced at one go and we are still speculating what Arun Jaitley and so many others will be asked to do is an indication of the habit so studiously encouraged of asking each one what he would like to do. Granted the complications of coalition politics, it is still difficult to see why the principle is not inculcated in all concerned that public office is an opportunity to serve not an opportunity to calculate which ministry gives greater opportunity to grab and pollute.

We have arrived at a stage in our affairs when the country is sick to the back teeth by the spectacle of politicians jockeying for position, putting their own claims in contention and not allowing a decision until it is in a form that is acceptable to the claimants. A new shape needs to be given to government. The PMO should be sacked and the Prime Minister and his no-nonsense Deputy should sit down and complete the exercise. This will not satisfy everybody but at the end of the day the country will accept that there is a time for discussion and a time for action. Good luck and Godspeed, Mr Deputy Prime Minister!

MONDAY, JULY 1, 2002

ADVANI'S ASCENT

AS THE PRIME Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, prepares to refashion his Council of Ministers, the focus of attention has been directed less on which members of the pack will be shuffled and more on the elevation of one of them. The idea of formally designating L. K. Advani as Deputy Prime Minister has been sold by the BJP as a proposal first mooted by the Defence Minister, George Fernandes. But the real pressure on the Prime Minister to accord his hardline Home Minister (who is already regarded informally as Mr. Vajpayee's number two) a *de jure* status has come from within — from a section of the BJP. This is hardly surprising. Mr. Advani's elevation after all is related more to the exigencies of politics and less to the demands of administration. It is an important element in what seems more and more like a calculated and aggressive game plan of the BJP as it prepares — in the wake of a succession of serious and embarrassing electoral reverses at the State Assembly level — for the general election in 2004.

Read along with a clutch of other recent signals emanating from the Sangh Parivar, Mr. Advani's elevation points firmly to a BJP that is returning to its ideological roots, that is moving disturbingly to occupy its original plank of unabashed right-wing Hindutva. The appointment of the former Bajrang Dal leader, Vinay Katiyar, as the BJP's president in Uttar Pradesh, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's sudden declaration that it is no longer bound by its promise to abide by the court verdict on Ayodhya, the continued defence of Narendra Modi and the hardening and unapologetic tone in the remarks being uttered in connection with the carnage in Gujarat and the proposed RSS-blessed organisational revamp of the BJP (ostensibly to give it a more

youthful and energetic look) are some examples of this disturbing drift. The staunch advocate of Hindutva who led the controversial rath yatra to Ayodhya was probably always the natural successor to Mr. Vajpayee. But his formal appointment as deputy premier has only reinforced the impression that the BJP is preparing to reveal its real face as it quietly slips off its moderate mask.

The office of a Deputy Prime Minister is not a constitutional one. Being appointed to the post is akin to receiving a promotion with no extra powers and this is exactly the purpose it has served in the past. Political leaders such as Charan Singh and Devi Lal were slotted as deputy premiers because it was a relatively convenient and painless way of recognising their importance and political strength, and as a salve to egos bruised by a failure to make it to the top spot. No such compulsions exist in the present scenario, Mr. Advani's elevation being neither a result of the dynamic of coalition politics nor the consequence of a clash of political egos. It has nothing to do with political accommodation, being intended much more like a strident and unambiguous political statement (to those within the Sangh Parivar fold and those without) about where the BJP is heading and what it wants to become. This is why Mr. Advani's appointment as Deputy Prime Minister should worry the constituents of the National Democratic Alliance much more than it apparently has. While the Prime Minister in any Westminster-style democracy reserves the unfettered right to choose his own Cabinet, Mr. Advani's elevation should not be viewed in isolation but against the much wider context of the BJP's hardening ideological posture and its cynical ploy to exploit religious sentiment for electoral gain.

THE HINDU

1 JUL 2002

WILL SINHA, JASWANT SWAP PLACES?

Advani elevated as Deputy Prime Minister

9-PM
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20/6

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JUNE 29. The Union Home Minister, Lal Kishen Advani, was today elevated as the Deputy Prime Minister. A Rashtrapati Bhavan press communique, issued late in the evening, read: "The President of India, as advised by the Prime Minister, has directed that Shri Lal Kishen Advani, Home Minister, will be designated as Deputy Prime Minister. He will continue to look after the Ministry of Home Affairs."

The redesignation marks the beginning of a new phase in the four-year-old National Democratic Alliance experiment, signalling the beginning of the end of the Vajpayee innings and the consecration of Mr. Advani as the power behind the prime ministerial throne. The expecta-

tion was that the redesignation would come about simultaneously with other changes — arrivals and departures — in the Union Council of Ministers, scheduled for July 1. However, the unexpected announcement indicates the intensity of pressure Mr. Vajpayee found himself under.

The Advani redesignation coincides with the staffing of the Bharatiya Janata Party with known "Advani acolytes." Perhaps, the BJP leadership has served notice on the allies that they better prepare themselves for the Advani era by the time of the next Lok Sabha elections.

For most of the day, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, remained preoccupied with his proposed "comprehensive" Cabinet expansion, scheduled for Monday. Apart from a

search for a new Finance Minister, his exertions centred on finding replacements for those Cabinet colleagues who may be leaving to take up organisational assignments in the BJP.

Mr. Vajpayee had comprehensive consultations with his senior colleagues and aides, including Mr. Advani, the External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, and the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister, Brajesh Mishra.

The final word is still not said on a possible replacement for the Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha. The air is thick with speculations about a "swap" between Mr. Sinha and Mr. Singh. In case Mr. Singh does become Finance Minister, he would also be expected to have with him the crucial department of

"Company Affairs." Mr. Vajpayee would have to find replacements for the possible departures from his Cabinet of the Rural Development Minister, Venkaiah Naidu, the Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, and the Urban Affairs Minister, Ananth Kumar.

It appears that Ravi Shanker Prasad, Minister of State for Coal, may be shifted to the Ministry of Law (with independent charge).

The almost certain arrivals include the outgoing BJP president, Jana Krishnamurthi, the former Gujarat Chief Minister, Keshubhai Patel, the actor, Shatrughan Sinha, and the Trinamool Congress leader, Mamata Banerjee. It is reported that Ms. Banerjee is still being persuaded to settle for a portfolio other than the Railways.



Ms. Shiela, sister of L.K. Advani, offering sweets to him on Saturday soon after he was made the Deputy Prime Minister. — Photo: V. Sudershan

'My position formalised'

NEW DELHI, JUNE 29. The newly-appointed Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, today said his new assignment only formalised the role and responsibilities he was already handling in the Government. "Earlier, too, when the Prime Minister was not available people and Cabinet colleagues used to approach me," he told UNI. The present appointment would not change his job profile.

"I have been doing similar kind of work before but now the responsibility and accountability is a lot more. In the eyes of the public and my Cabinet colleagues, however, my responsibilities have increased."

He said he was grateful to the Prime Minister and NDA allies for having bestowed on him the new responsibility.

Mr. Advani said the Prime Minister had discussed with him the issue of Deputy Prime Ministership on Thursday. "But when my colleague George Fernandes talked and took suggestions from other members of NDA and when it was brought to my notice, I got the impression that some steps are being taken." "The trust reposed in me by the Prime Minister and partners of the NDA has increased my determination and I only pray to the Almighty that I am able to discharge my responsibilities as per expectations."

THE HINDU

30 JUN 2002

SOME MINISTERS TO BE DRAFTED FOR PARTY WORK

Deputy PM post under consideration: PM

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PM

By J.P. Shukla

LUCKNOW, JUNE 28. The appointment of a Deputy Prime Minister is under the active consideration of the National Democratic Alliance, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said here today.

Addressing a press conference, Mr. Vajpayee said there would be a large-scale remodelling of the Cabinet with Ministers from several partners of the NDA, including the Trinamool Congress and the PMK, to be inducted besides representatives of his own party.

Some of the BJP Ministers who had expressed their desire to work for the organisation would be dropped, he said.

Mr. Vajpayee said the NDA Government had completed two-and-a-half years in office and now the time had come to take stock of its performance.

'Learning lessons'

The alliance had learnt its lessons from the results of elections to various State



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mayawati, at a press conference in Lucknow on Friday. — Photo: Subir Roy

Assemblies. The Cabinet reshuffle was part of an exercise to improve the relations of the Government

with the people, bring more efficiency in the system and make the administration more sensitive to the people's

problems.

While new faces belonging to the BJP would be included into the Cabinet, some others who could play a more meaningful role in the organisation would be suitably positioned. However, the Bahujan Samaj Party, a partner in the BJP in Uttar Pradesh, would have no representation in the Cabinet as it was not part of the NDA, he said.

'No war with Pak.'

Mr. Vajpayee reiterated that India wanted to discuss every issue, including Kashmir, with Pakistan. But cross-border terrorism should come to an end first.

He accepted that the situation on the border with Pakistan had eased but the Army would not be withdrawn from the front immediately.

There was, however, no question of India going to war with Pakistan. India, he said, considered the developments arising out of the Maoists' terrorist activities in Nepal as an internal matter.

The issue was discussed with the King of Nepal during his visit and it had been made amply clear that India wanted peace in the neighbouring country. India would not allow its territory to be used for terrorist activities in Nepal.

Mr. Vajpayee advised both the BSP and the BJP in Uttar Pradesh to observe coalition "dharma". Both should learn from their past experience and ensure the success of the coalition.

'Will help U.P.'

He denied that differences had affected the relations between the two parties from the beginning. He said he had received a memorandum from the U.P. Chief Minister, Mayawati, about the financial problems of the State. The Centre would try to assist the State.

'Never changed agenda on Ayodhya'

LUCKNOW, JUNE 28. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said today that it was the considered opinion of the Bharatiya Janata Party that the Ayodhya tangle be resolved through negotiations or a court verdict.

Asked by newsmen if the appointment of Vinay Katiyar as president of the Uttar Pradesh BJP meant that his party had brought Ayodhya back on the party's agenda, the Prime Minister shot back, "when had the BJP given up the issue?"

"We have never changed our agenda and want the issue solved either by mutual discussions, and if not, then by court." Mr.

Vajpayee declined to comment on the Kanchi Shankaracharya, Jayendra Saraswati's statement that he (the Prime Minister) had no time to settle the Ayodhya issue.

When his attention was drawn to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's recent decision not to obey the court order in the Ayodhya tangle, he said the BJP had already cleared its viewpoint on the issue.

On the reported statements by the VHP against Muslims in Gujarat, he said it should not make such statements. — UNI

President's rule an option in J&K: Vajpayee

By Our Special Correspondent

LUCKNOW, JUNE 28. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said here today various proposals were under the consideration of the Government to hold free and fair elections in Jammu and Kashmir. President's rule was also part of them.

Answering questions from presspersons, Mr. Vajpayee said the Government was prepared to have talks with the leaders of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference leaders of Kashmir, if they so agreed. In the past, they had refused to negotiate.

His Government had no reservations in talking with them provided they were unconditional. However, the APHC had refused to talk to the Centre's interlocutor, K.C. Pant.

They can't do it, says Farooq

By Shujaat Bukhari

SRINAGAR, JUNE 28. The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Farooq Abdullah, has challenged New Delhi's authority to impose President's rule in the

State and said it could not be done under any circumstances.

Reacting to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's statement that President's rule was one of the options for ensuring free and fair elections in the State, Dr. Abdullah said that "there is no such option that the State can be put under President's rule" It cannot be done under any circumstances unless the law and order machinery has broken down. Using Article 356 was not easy. There was no indication that "we will go for President's rule."

The suggestion for President's rule could come only from State Government and there was no authority in Delhi to do so. Under what law can they do it? What mechanism they (the Centre) have? It is for Farooq Abdullah to decide and none else. We will talk to the Prime Minister about this," he said.

A visibly angry Chief Minister asked whether the Centre would impose President's rule in Gujarat.

"Let them (the Centre) decide about Gujarat first and leave the policy of treating our State dif-

ferently. We have won the elections and will complete the term in office, why do they doubt us now?"

Referring to the demand by some parties for imposing President's rule, Dr. Abdullah said, "Mufti Saheb has demanded this and said he would not contest elections under our government, because he is afraid of election. He took part in the elections when I was not in power and lost."

Earlier, Dr. Abdullah presided over a Cabinet meeting and discussed completion of two major power projects. He handed over charge to his senior Minister, Mohiuddin Shah, as he will be leaving for a two-week trip to London.

PTI reports from New Delhi: Mr. Vajpayee tonight spoke to Mr. Abdullah and clarified his remarks about imposition of President's rule in the State. He said that the Centre was committed to ensuring free and fair elections and the suggestion of imposition of President's rule was one of the options.

Sources said that Dr. Abdullah was satisfied with Mr. Vajpayee's clarification.

29 JUN 2002

Infiltration is still on: PM

By Sridhar Krishnaswami

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WASHINGTON, JUNE 23. The Prime Minister, A.B. Vajpayee, has said that there has been no change in Pakistan's policy as far as cross-border terrorism is concerned. "Every day we are getting reports that infiltration (by militants into Kashmir) continues unabated," Mr. Vajpayee has said in an interview to the American news magazine *Newsweek*. In the interview, which has appeared in the latest issue of the magazine, the Prime Minister made the point that while New Delhi was prepared to deal with the Pakistan President, Gen. Pervez Musharraf, it was cautious; and that a new beginning with Pakistan could be made if Islamabad implemented all the assurances.

"We are prepared to deal with him (Gen. Musharraf) as he is, but we are cautious this time. Our past experience is not very encouraging", Mr. Vajpayee said. Asked if it was just a "pause" between crises, he said, "If Pakistan implements all the assurances given to us, then a new beginning can be made".

'Osama is alive'

Mr. Vajpayee said the leadership of the Al-Qaeda "may be" in Pakistan. Osama bin Laden was alive and Islamabad knew where he was. "Not every movement, but broadly speaking, they (Pakistanis) know where the rest of the Al-Qaeda and the Taliban are."

(According to a PTI report, asked what should be the role of the U.S. in the future on the Kashmir issue, Mr. Vajpayee told *Newsweek*, "that of a facilitator". On whether the U.S. emerged as a third party to help in settling the issue, he emphatically said "no" and added "that is why I said facilitator not a mediator.")

The magazine carried an interview with Gen. Musharraf in the same issue, in which he denied giving an "assurance" to the United States of permanently ending cross-border terrorism. At a time when the U.S. is talking about permanently ending infiltration across the Line of Control, the Pakistan President made the point that his "assurance" was linked to a response from India on a discussion about Kashmir. "I've told President Bush nothing is happening across the Line of

Control. This is the assurance I've given. I'm not going to give you an assurance that for years, nothing will happen. We have to have a response from India, a discussion about Kashmir."

"If you want a guarantee of peace in this region, there are three ways: 1. Denuclearise South Asia; 2. Ensure a conventional deterrence so that war never takes place in the sub-continent; 3. Find a solution to the Kashmir problem", Gen. Musharraf said. He maintained that during the recent visit of the Deputy Secretary of State, Richard Armitage, there was no discussion on dismantling training camps in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir. "No, we didn't talk about it", the General said.

"First of all, I don't call it cross-border terrorism. There is a freedom struggle going on in Kashmir. What I said is that there is no movement across the Line of Control", the Pakistani leader responded when asked whether he told Mr. Armitage that cross-border terrorism would be stopped and training camps would be shut down.

He said that if the Indian army had opted for surgical strikes against terrorist camps in Pakistani-controlled Kashmir, Pakistan would have responded. "We would have taught them a lesson. This is not a small country; this is not Afghanistan." Gen. Musharraf also ruled out accepting the LoC as a border. "This is just not possible. If the Line of Control is to be the border, what have we fought these two wars for, 1965 and 1971?" he remarked. Asked who attacked the American Consulate in Karachi, he said one possibility was the Al-Qaeda, but then the other could be the Indian intelligence agency, RAW.

"RAW does a lot of anti-Pakistan activity within Pakistan. So many bomb blasts have been taking place. Who is brewing this? Obviously they are RAW-inspired. They (Indians) don't like us getting close to the U.S. They thought that after September 11, Pakistan would be declared a terrorist state." Responding to Mr. Vajpayee's statement that Pakistan knew where the rest of the Al-Qaeda and Taliban militants were, Gen. Musharraf said, "That is how they keep maligning us. If they (militants) are hiding somewhere, we are trying to locate them...Whether Al-Qaeda is within our borders or in the tribal areas or in the cities, we will not allow it here," he said.

THE HINDU

7/4/2007

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Warn countries sponsoring terror: PM

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ALMATY, JUNE 3. Amid tense standoff on the border with Pakistan, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said the first summit of the 16-nation Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building measures in Asia (CICA) was the ideal forum for sending out a warning to the countries sponsoring terrorism.

Asserting that no corner in the world was safe from terrorism, he said the CICA summit should come out with a stern warning to nations sponsoring terrorism. Without naming Pakistan, Mr. Vajpayee said "India is continuously fighting against terrorism

sponsored by one nation".

In his speech at a luncheon hosted by the Kazakh President, Nursultan Nazarbayev, here today, he said the purpose of terrorism was to weaken the society and its cultural fabric. The day-long conference tomorrow should issue a strong warning to the countries which sponsored terrorism, he said. With both Mr. Vajpayee and the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, present here, India made it clear that it would not be persuaded by other countries to open a dialogue with Pakistan till cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir

was stopped.

On the other hand, Gen. Musharraf said he was prepared 'unconditionally' to hold talks with Mr. Vajpayee during the summit. "I don't have any conditions (for a meeting)," he told a news conference after a meeting with Mr. Nazarbayev. On the prospects of a Russian mediation, Gen. Musharraf said the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, was "in a very important position to play a definitive role in mediation between India and Pakistan." — UNI, PTI, AFP

More reports on Page 11

04 JUN 2002

THE HINDU

MUSHARRAF APPEALS FOR TALKS

PM will not meet Pervez

Nilova Roy Chaudhury
in Almaty (Kazakhstan)

June 2. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee will not meet President Pervez Musharraf to “defuse tensions” during the first ever CICA summit in the Kazakh capital.

President Musharraf, on the other hand, today insisted that Pakistan would not start a war with India over Kashmir and reiterated his appeal to Mr Vajpayee for peace talks, adds AP from Dushanbe. “Pakistan won’t start a war. We support solving the conflict through peaceful means,” Gen. Musharraf told reporters in the Tajik capital during a stopover on his way to the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building measures in Asia. “I’m ready to meet anywhere and at any level. I’d like the talks to be one-on-one, but if he (Mr Vajpayee) doesn’t want to, I won’t insist.”

He was optimistic about President Vladimir Putin’s offer to mediate in talks this week between the leaders on the sidelines of the Kazakhstan summit to bring the two nations back from the brink of war. “I think President Putin can persuade India to join dialogue,” Gen. Musharraf said.

Senior Indian officials said even a meeting between government representatives from India and Pakistan at the summit had been ruled out. This is because “any meeting would be construed

as relenting”. And India would agree to relent, by de-escalating pressure along the border, only when it sees “credible action” on the ground.

There are some signs that infiltration across the LoC is decreasing. But officials said intercepts indicated “confused signals” had been sent to infiltrators — some asking them to stop disruptive operations and others telling them to lie low till the pressure comes down probably by the time of the monsoons, as per their estimate.

Pak hurdle to Vajpayee flight

ALMATY, June 2. — The distance between New Delhi and Almaty is about 3,000 km. But since flights over Pakistan were called off after 13 December, Mr Vajpayee’s special flight (Air-India’s *Krishan Deva Raya* 747-200) had to fly 6,153 km from Delhi via Ahmedabad — over the Arabian Sea, across Muscat, Dubai, Iran, Askhabad and Tashkent — to Almaty. The flight took 7 hours and 20 minutes. — SNS

Indian officials feel there is tremendous international pressure on Gen. Musharraf resulting in the conflicting messages emanating from different levels of Pakistani officialdom. The General’s latest statement dismissing nuclear conflict is being seen as the most accurate reflection of the kind of pressure he is under. Apparently, following the international opprobrium the Pakistani delegate to the UN attracted with his statement on the country not hesitating to use the nuclear option against India, Pakistani officials called CNN and offered a “live” interview with their President, “clarifying” their country’s stand on the matter.

But India is in no mood to relent on the basis of mere words. Neither would it agree to Pakistan’s suggestion to place international monitors along the LoC and the International Border to check infiltration levels, officials said.

Turn to page 6

THE STATESMAN

03 JUN 2002

'IT IS TIME FOR INDIA TO ACT'

We should have responded after December 13: PM

By Kanwar Yogendra

MANALI (H.P.), MAY 26. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today regretted that India had not given an immediate and fitting response to Pakistan after the terrorist attack on Parliament last December 13 to effectively stop the game of blood-letting being played through the proxy war ("Jis din Parliament par hamla hua, usi din suchmooch mein Bharat ki or se unhen uttar milna chahiye tha, lekin duniya ki awaz uthi...hum khoonon ka khel band karna chahte hain".)

International opinion, which had strongly criticised the Parliament attack, had suggested India should be patient and that similar incidents would not be repeated, Mr. Vajpayee said. But that proved to be wrong, terrorist attacks continued, and after the recent massacre by terrorists in Kaluchak, India wants "to put an end to the game of blood-letting."

The Prime Minister was speaking at the foundation-stone laying ceremony for a 9-km-long, Rs-1,300 cr tunnel under the 13,500-foot high Rohtang Pass which when completed would provide an all-season road connection between Leh and Manali which remain cut off for most of the year. The project was not only intended to speed up development in the region but was also a long-felt security need, he said. Development and security were interconnected, one could not take place at the expense of the other, he emphasised.

Fernandes briefs PM

The Defence Minister, George Fernandes, who was also present at the function, briefed the Prime Minister during the day on the latest security scenario in relation to the build-up at the border.

The burden of Mr. Vajpayee's address was that India had paid heed to international opinion earlier. It had resisted the temptation to retaliate despite grave



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, laying the foundation of the Rohtang Pass tunnel at Bahang near Manali on Sunday. The Defence Minister, George Fernandes, (extreme right) and the Himachal Pradesh Chief Minister, P.K. Dhumal, (centre) look on. — PTI

provocation; it had been through the Kargil misadventure by Pakistan, and now its patience had run out. Clearly, international pressure on Pakistan to deliver on the promise to end cross-border terrorism against India had not worked.

And now it was time for India to act, for our people to be "ready to make sacrifices". The

world should understand that there was a limit to our patience ("antarrashtriya jagat is baat ko samjhe ki Bharat ke sahan karne ki bhi seema hai"...). The signal from the Prime Minister was that India's aim was clear and well-focussed — victory over terrorism — and for this it was ready to make the necessary sacrifices, ready to face the challenge.

PTI, UNI report:

The National Security Adviser, Brajesh Mishra, who attended a meeting of the Atomic Energy Commission at Kalpakam near Chennai on Saturday, met Mr. Vajpayee here today.

Mr. Mishra, who arrived this afternoon, gave a detailed briefing to the Prime Minister, according to the Prime Minister's Office sources.

PM may cut short visit

Mr. Vajpayee is likely to cut short his sojourn in Manali and return to Delhi due to the prevailing security situation and simmering tension on the border. The Cabinet Committee on Security will meet to take stock

of the situation as soon as he returns to Delhi. The Prime Minister was scheduled to stay here till May 29.

5 killed in shelling

By Our Correspondent

SRINAGAR, MAY 26. Five civilians were killed and 10 injured in the Ranbir Singh Pura sector of Jammu region last night when Pakistani troops resorted to heavy firing on the areas near the International Border.

Police sources said there was mortar shelling in Korotanna and Begga areas and that the injured included two infants and a woman. The condition of three is said to be serious.

Reports of heavy shelling have also come from other parts of the International Border. The Ramgarh sector and Hiranagar witnessed heavy shelling last night, resulting in en masse migration from some of the areas.

There was shelling in Jhanagar, Laam and Kari Karmarra along the Line of Control.

Hoax call

NEW DELHI, MAY 26. An anonymous telephone call that gun shots were heard at the Parliament House complex tonight prompted a security alert in the VVIP area by the Delhi Police.

"The call was received by the Police Control Room saying the firing was taking place at Parliament House," the DCP of New Delhi area M.K. Meena told PTI.

Senior police officials, including Mr. Meena, rushed to the spot and found no such incident taking place. — PTI

27 MAY 2002

THE HINDU

I share your anguish, PM tells Valley people

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
SRINAGAR, MAY 23

Following is the text of Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's statement distributed at a press conference here today:

I AM pleased to meet mediapersons at the end of my three-day visit to Jammu and Kashmir. I had stated in Parliament that I would visit J-K after the end of the Budget session. At the time I didn't know that two incidents would cast a ring of shock, sorrow and outrage around my visit.

My visit began on May 21 when I visited a Military Hospital in Jammu to meet survivors of the gruesome terrorist attack at Kaluchak on May 14. This attack, first on a Himachal Road Transport bus and later on an Army camp, was carried out by terrorists based and trained in Pakistan.

The fact that many of those killed in the carnage were children and women shows the barbaric nature of Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism.

On the very day of my arrival came the tragic news of the assassination of Shri Abdul Gani Lone, a respected political figure of J-K. There is no doubt that Lone was gunned down by the enemies of peace because of his courageous voice against gun culture, a voice that was beginning to get more and more influential. I join all the peace loving people of J-K in mourning the death of this great son of Kashmir and spirited champion of Kashmiriyat.

The terrorist attack at Kaluchak was

designed to demoralise the people of India and our security forces. Similarly, the dastardly assassination of Lone was designed to demoralise and silence the forces of peace, normalcy and democratic dialogue in Jammu and Kashmir.

The same sinister design was also evident from the terrorist attacks on J-K Legislative Assembly in Srinagar on October 1 and on the Indian Parliament on December 13. These acts of violence are a part of the 20-year-long campaign of terrorism, extremism and subversion in J-K and in other parts of India, planned, aided and abetted from across the border.

We will not let Pakistan carry on with this proxy war against India any longer. As I

said in my address to our brave jawans at Kupwara yesterday, India has accepted the challenge thrown by our neighbour and we are preparing ourselves for a decisive victory against the enemy.

My presence at today's meeting of the Unified Command in Srinagar, along with our Home Minister and Defence Minister, is also intended to convey the message of India's resolve and readiness.

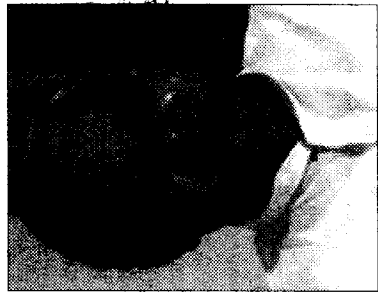
Both in Jammu and in Srinagar, I met a large number of delegations belonging to various political parties and social organisations. They also included representatives of Kashmiri pandits and border migrants. There was a ringing common theme in what all of them said to me — that is, the people of J-K want peace and normalcy to return at the earliest. Militancy has no future in the state because it has only brought suffering and pain to the people, irrespective of their religion or region.

What was also common in the repre-

sentations made by all the delegations was their eager welcome of the forthcoming elections to the J-K Legislative Assembly and their demand for free and fair polling. My government has already said — and I reiterate today — that we are committed to holding free and fair elections in the state.

Governor Shri Girish Chandra Saxena and Chief Minister Shri Farooq Abdullah have apprised me of the various requirements of the state. In response to what I have heard from the state government and the various delegations, I am pleased to announce a package for J-K covering many development and security issues. The package has a specific focus on generation of employment opportunities for the youth of the state.

I have a message for the people of J-K: Your pain and anguish is mine too. It is shared by all the people of India. We are with you in your sorrow and we will be with you in your joy.



Text of PM's speech

War Is Being Thrust On Us And We Will Emerge Victorious, Says Atal

PM tells troops to gear up for war

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 22 MAY

THERE WAS no let-up in the tension with Pakistan on Wednesday with Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee speaking to the troops close to the border, exhorting them to be ready to fight and win a war that was being thrust upon them.

Mr Vajpayee travelled to Kupwara in the Valley to declare that India was not only prepared to fight a war if it became necessary, but was determined to win it on its own. "India is forced to fight a war thrust on it and we will emerge victorious. Let there be



TIME FOR RHETORIC: Vajpayee with Abdullah in Srinagar. — Reuters

no doubt about it," the Prime Minister told a gathering of cheering jawans according to agency reports.

He signalled his government's exasperation with Pakistan's response to Indian demands cutting off support to cross-border terrorism, also showed impatience with the West's refusal to take the Musharraf regime to task for continuing terrorist violence in Jammu & Kashmir.

Much of what Mr Vajpayee said on Wednesday was a reiteration of the hard-hitting response he had unveiled in the wake of the December 13 attack on Parliament.

But Wednesday's speech acquires significance both because of its timing and the venue — a congregation of battle-ready troops at the border, seething with anger over the recent killing of their family members by terrorists. Mr Vajpayee was speaking within 24 hours of the killing of the moderate Hurriyat leader, Abdul Ghani Lone, by terrorists in Srinagar.

And even as he spoke, the government was busy gearing up for war. The Army commissioned more special trains to rush troops to Jammu and Kashmir and the health ministry began deliberations on ways to counter the threat of biological weapons in the next conflict with Pakistan, while the Navy moved warships from Eastern Command to Western Command which is going to be in the thick of action if the prospect of war comes true.

Mr Vajpayee will hold discussions with the members of the unified security command in Srinagar on Thursday before wrapping up his two-day agenda.

Forces are ready to face any threat, says George

Kupwara
22 MAY

D E F E N C E
minister George Fernandes on Wednesday asked the country's troops to be prepared to meet any chal-



George

lenge to combat Pakistan-backed cross border terrorism.

"Our armed forces should be prepared to meet any challenge," Mr Fernandes said addressing troops at the Siachen Glacier and two forward posts in Kupwara district.

The defence minister visited Siachen Glacier before joining Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, who is on a three-day visit to the state and later went to two forward posts in the frontier district of Kupwara for an on-the-spot assessment of the operational preparedness of the army. — PTI



BACK TO BUSINESS: Jawans board a Jammu-bound train in Ahmedabad on Wednesday, at the end of their assignment in Gujarat. — Reuters

5 Pakistani soldiers killed, 13 others injured in J&K

Jammu
22 MAY

AT least five Pakistani soldiers were killed in retaliatory firing and shelling, while one person and 12 others were injured on the Indian side in Jammu and Kashmir since Tuesday evening, official sources said here on Wednesday. Pakistani troops resorted to heavy firing and shelling on forward posts and some civilian areas of Poonch district from 1630 hours to 2230 hours on Tuesday, forcing Indian troops to retaliate. In the retaliation, several Pakistani bunkers were damaged and at least five of their soldiers killed across the Line of Control (LoC). — PTI

Straw coming to calm frayed Asian nerves

Indrani Bagchi
NEW DELHI 22 MAY

AS the British foreign secretary Jack Straw prepares to make yet another trip to South Asia to calm tensions between India and Pakistan, there seems to be a growing scepticism about General Pervez Musharraf's ability to deliver on infiltration and terrorism.

While this has increased the perception of the possibility of war between the two countries, it has also led to the stringency of the message that senior western leaders are delivering to Pakistan. The fact that not only India but western nations too continue to be the targets of the jihadis will be stressed by Mr Straw next week.

On Wednesday, the British government took the extreme step of recalling most of its diplomats from Pakistan and closing down the visa office in Lahore after specific threats of suicide attacks came to light.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister



JACK: THE LAST STRAW

Atal Bihari Vajpayee shot off letters to US President George Bush, Russian President Vladimir Putin and British Prime Minister Tony Blair giving a clear view of the Indian situation, and how a democratic country was constrained by popular opinion to take action against perpetrators of terrorism. In Washington, defence secretary Yogendra Narain met US defence secretary Donald Rumsfeld and briefed him on the infiltration and terrorism.

Mr Straw will be bringing with

him a message similar to the one he delivered here in January, that "there is a pressing need for an end to terrorism, a lowering of tension, and then dialogue."

That terrorism from Pakistan needs to stop before India can de-escalate on the border or even contemplate dialogue will be emphasised to the Pakistani leadership. "There is a pressing need for an end to terrorism," Mr Straw said. However, he will request India for more time for the international community to act on Pakistan. According to western diplomatic sources, an identical message was delivered on Wednesday by EU commissioner for external relations Chris Patten to Pakistan. The same message will be delivered by US deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage when he comes to the region on June 7.

There is a general belief in key capitals that since Mr Musharraf took the radical step of taking his country away from its relation with the Taliban in September he could do the same regarding terrorism in Kashmir.

President nominee in PM court

FROM OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, May 11: The National Democratic Alliance today authorised Atal Bihari Vajpayee to take a decision on who the next President would be and whether he will be the unanimous choice or elected.

The decision paves the way for the Prime Minister to begin one-to-one consultations with allies and, if necessary, with the Opposition.

The NDA co-ordination committee met at Vajpayee's residence this morning and adopted a resolution. "The NDA authorises the honourable Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to take a decision about ensuring (the) presidential election,"

the resolution said.

"The NDA requests the Prime Minister to discuss the issue with the NDA partners and thereafter with parties like the Telugu Desam Party and (the) Bahujan Samaj Party who are supporting the NDA from outside followed by consultations with the Opposition parties before coming to a final decision."

Defence minister and alliance convener George Fernandes, who briefed reporters after the one-hour meeting, said no names were mentioned. No strategy was discussed either, apart from adopting the resolution, he added.

Sources close to Vajpayee said he asked the allies to forward their preferences directly to him or convey it through an-

other source. BJP sources, however, said the party is determined to push through its own candidate and is not too keen on a consensus nominee where the Opposition would also have a say.

"With the Desam and the BSP we have a majority and we don't want to fritter away the advantage of numbers by caving in to the Opposition's choice," said a BJP leader.

Keeping in mind the numerical importance of the Desam and the BSP, BJP leaders in Andhra Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh have been told not to say or do anything that might annoy the two allies until the presidential polls are over. This is one reason why the resolution made it a point to mention the two parties.

Desam chief Chandrababu Naidu, however, declined to spell out his stand. "I will do it at the appropriate time," he told reporters.

Naidu is believed to be keen on Vice-President Krishan Kant, a former Andhra Governor, but NDA sources said he would go along with the BJP to repair his relations with its leaders after the acrimony over Gujarat chief minister Narendra Modi.

The BJP has floated the name of Maharashtra Governor P.C. Alexander as its first choice in the hope that the Congress would eventually accept him.

Alexander, sources said, also has the backing of Maharashtra parties like the Nationalist Congress Party and the Republican Party of India.

THE TELEGRAPH

1 MAY 2002

PMO on Atal face-salvage mission

FROM RADHIKA
RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, May 7: The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has gone on a publicity overdrive to restore Atal Bihari Vajpayee's "liberal and secular image", which has taken a beating after Gujarat and Goa.

A glossy brochure, titled Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the Communal Violence in Gujarat, was released today by the Directorate of Advertising and Visual Publicity.

It chronicled the statements and speeches made by Vajpayee after the Godhra attack, including a televised appeal to the nation, and reproduced excerpts of his interaction with the press on the Gujarat violence.

Triggered by the flak heaped on India from around the world and from some of the BJP's own converts, the compilation also contained some statements on Ayodhya.

The introduction said: "The developments in Gujarat have provoked a serious debate within the country and also attracted much international attention. It is hoped that this compilation of the Prime Minister's pronouncements will serve as useful reference material for all.

"Prime Minister Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee spoke for the entire nation by calling these incidents (Godhra and thereafter) 'a blot on India'. He has commented on these tragic developments on several occasions in the past two months."

The write-up said Vajpayee's observations on Gujarat and Ayodhya were put together "because they were taking place simultaneously and also because the Prime Minister's comments on this subject form an integral part of his views on secularism".

Sources close to Vajpayee said the booklet was necessary because his statements on secularism had been "misquoted and misinterpreted frequently".

The cover showed the Prime Minister, mike in hand, speaking "from his heart" at Ahmedabad's Shah Alam relief camp on April 4. The accompanying quote was appropriate: "There are times in the life of a nation when everybody is put to a test. The Gujarat disturbances have



Atal Bihari Vajpayee with Sonia Gandhi at the Parliament library opening on Tuesday. Picture by Jagdish Yadav

created such a situation today. I am confident that we will overcome the current crisis in the same way as we have successfully done on several occasions in the past."

Vajpayee was quoted as saying that even as communal violence ravaged Gujarat, there were cases of Hindus and Muslims protecting each other.

"The night is dark. But many tiny lamps are burning in different places. They will show us the way and help us reach our destination," was one of the statements quoted to prove that Vajpayee's secular face was for real. "If India is not secular, then India is not India at all," was

another.

Some other extracts follow:

"I appeal to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad that they postpone their movement (Ram temple) and cooperate with the government in maintaining peace and brotherhood in the country." (In conversation with the press at Hyderabad House, New Delhi);

"I would also like to tell the Leader of the Opposition that it is not proper to use the word 'genocide' in relation to Gujarat.... This word is used when a community or nation is exterminated. In Gujarat, both Hindus as well as Muslims have died.... Try to understand its connota-

tions. This word can be used (against India) in international fora." (Excerpt from reply to the debate on the motion of thanks for the President's address in the Lok Sabha);

"When Swami Vivekananda speaks of Hindutva, nobody can call him a communalist. But there are speakers and commentators who give such interpretations of Hindutva that, after listening to them, one feels that if this is Hindutva, then it is better to stay away from it." (At the release of K.R. Malkani's book, *India First*, in New Delhi on March 27.)

Vajpayee's image-makers felt that putting his views on secu-

larism in perspective was necessary not only to "correct" the "misconceptions" in diplomatic circles as to dispel the doubts that had crept into the minds of the BJP's "liberal" constituency.

The new converts to the BJP, who were squeamish about the party's association with the Babri Masjid demolition and its support for "causes" like the anti-cow slaughter campaign, had shed their misgivings after Vajpayee was projected as the BJP's counter to Hindutva. Sources admitted that the legitimacy conferred by liberals gave the party the extra push that it needed to be acceptable to some of its present allies.

CONG IS DAYDREAMING, SAYS PM

Atal backs Sinha, says govt will serve full term

Our Delhi Bureau
NEW DELHI 27 APRIL

PUTTING AT rest speculation on the fate of Yashwant Sinha, the Prime Minister, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, on Saturday categorically asked everybody to "believe in India and also in our finance minister."

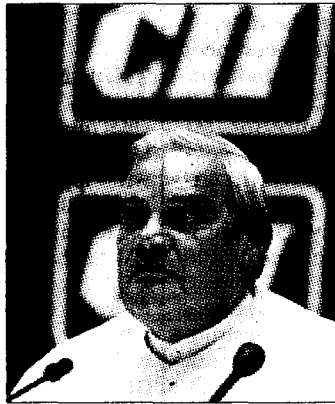
He was addressing the CII annual conference on Saturday and his remarks come at a time when the finance minister has been subject to a great deal of criticism both within his party and outside.

The Prime Minister also mounted a scathing attack on the Congress President, Ms Sonia Gandhi, by commenting that "it does not make business sense to count one's chickens before they are hatched."

He was referring to the remarks made by the leader of the Opposition on Friday wherein she speculated about the impending change in the political winds reflected in the break from the normal practice of invit-

ing the Prime Minister for the opening ceremony.

"If invitations to inaugurate or conclude conferences could make them speculate about an impending change in the direction of the political winds, then



Atal Behari Vajpayee. — AP

I must say such people seem to think that chambers of commerce and industry have more powers to make and unmake governments than the people of India," he said at the annual session of CII.

He assured the gathering that "our government cannot

be derailed. It is stable. It is here to stay. And it is here to stay for its full term. You will continue to do business with us and we will continue to do business with you."

The PM said when the people of the country elect their Parliament, they expect it to run for five years. Those who have people's mandate to govern are expected to discharge their responsibility well, he said.

■ Plan panel may fund BSNL's interconnectivity: Page 2

Politics hijacks industry speech

ENS ECONOMIC BUREAU
NEW DELHI | APRIL 27

IF THE industry captains were looking for a great economic vision statement from the Prime Minister at the conclusion of CII's annual conference here today, there was none. What A.B. Vajpayee gave was an address taking on Opposition leader Sonia Gandhi, who spoke at the inaugural session yesterday.

Trying to outdo Sonia with his own brand of rhetoric, Vajpayee said: "If invitations to inaugurate or conclude conferences could make them speculate about an impending change in the direction of political winds, then they must think that the Chambers of Commerce and Industry have more powers

to make and unmake governments than the people of India."

Vajpayee's speech today was meant for the front benchers and evoked clapping from his audiences, especially his digs at Congress president Sonia Gandhi. And there were several potshots at the CII, the largest industry association, for its invitation to the Opposition

PM AT CII

leader to inaugurate the conference instead of the norm of inviting the PM. "It does not make business sense to count one's chickens before they are hatched," Vajpayee said.

Obviously rattled by the PM's sharp remarks on the controversy over inauguration of its annual session by Sonia Gandhi,

CII's outgoing president tried to allay rising tempera-

tures by saying "there was no inaugural session of the conference," and that the present conference was similar to the one in December where the PM had a made an appearance in the concluding session. But his attempts were at best feeble.

He also eventually said "pranam" to the PM, saying: "There can be no bigger privilege than

to have the Prime minister of India Atal Behari Vajpayee for this special session."

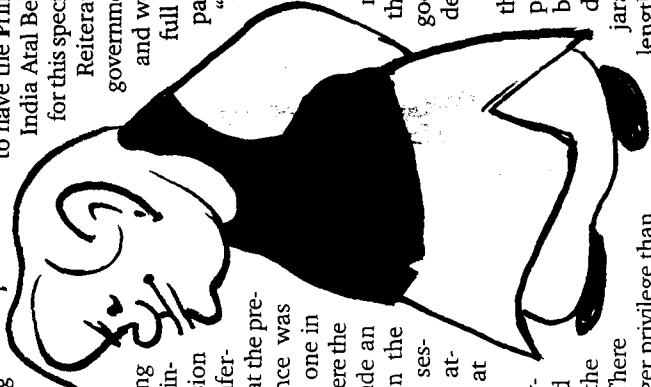
Reiterating that his government was stable and would serve its full term, Vajpayee said:

"Destabilising governments have neither helped the cause of business, nor have they done any good to our democracy."

In a speech that had more politics than business, he dwelt on Gujarat at great length, calling it a

"blot on India". But he reminded there were atrocities in Godhara and then "elsewhere" in Gujarat. He said: "Let no one belittle the crime that has been perpetrated in Gujarat — either in Godhara or elsewhere." Vajpayee also attacked Sonia Gandhi for her remarks on Gujarat and secularism and almost blamed the Opposition for its "shrill and divisive campaign" which "encourages outsiders to start giving us sermons".

After covering Sonia Gandhi, Gujarat and the upsetting of protocol by CII, Vajpayee finally turned to economic issues. And after rollbacks from Yashwant Sinha were formalised yesterday, there were warm words for the Finance Minister. Vajpayee said: "Believe in India, believe also in our Finance Minister."



Reprinted here is the English text of the speech, delivered in Hindi, by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee at a public meeting in Goa on April 12

I was in Cambodia just recently. It is the Kamboj state of the past, where magnificent temples that kissed the sky were built in the 10th and the 11th centuries. It had Hindu states ruled by Hindu kings. There were others too among the citizens, but there was justice towards all. Sometimes the kings also used to fight among themselves. The wheel of victory and defeat rolled on. But during their centuries' long history there isn't a single instance of a Hindu king destroying temples or breaking idols when he attacked another Hindu king. The kings who were victorious used to build a new temple. If Vishnu was being worshipped there earlier, later Shiva began to be worshipped. If Shiva was being worshipped at one time, then other deities began to be worshipped later. Nevertheless, no king destroyed a temple or damaged the deities' idols at the time of attacking another king.

This is our culture. This is our outlook, which treats all faiths equally. Yet, accusations are being hurled today that secularism is under threat. Who are these people accusing us? What is the meaning of secularism for these people? India was secular even when Muslims hadn't come here and Christians hadn't set foot on this soil. It is not as if India became secular after they came. They came with their own modes of worship and they too were given a place of honour and respect. They had the freedom to worship God as per

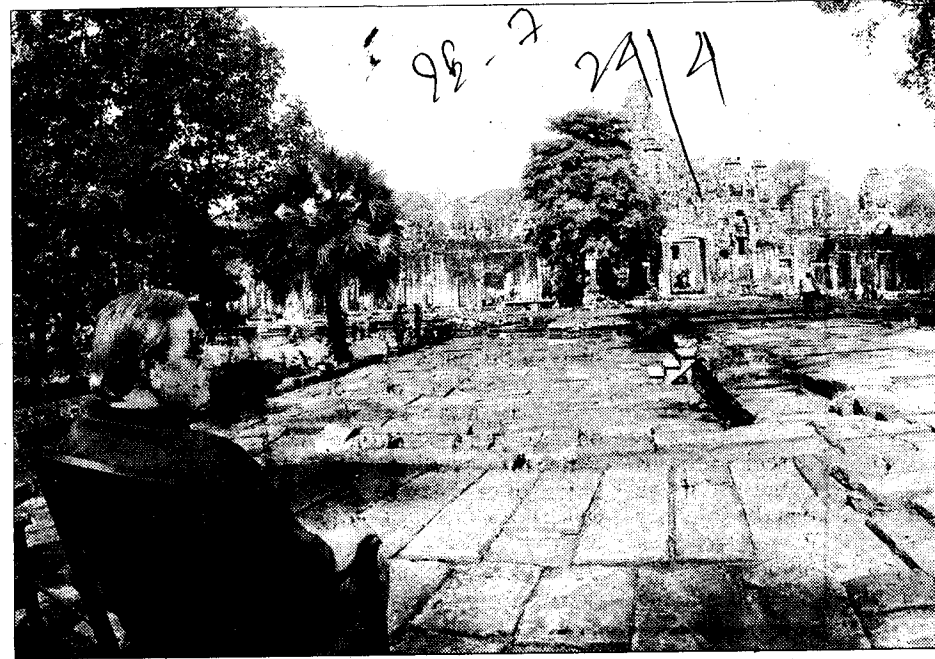
FOR THE RECORD

their wish and inclination. No one thought of converting them with force, because this is not practised in our religion; and in our culture, there is no use for it.

Today the 100 crore people of India are engaged in creating their future on the basis of their own culture. Sometimes, minor incidents do take place here and there; sometimes these take the form of major incidents. But if you go to the root of these incidents, you will find intolerance, you'll find them to be a manifestation of growing intolerance.

What happened in Gujarat? If a conspir-

'Who are these people accusing us, India was secular before Muslims, Christians came here'



Muslims and Christians had the freedom to worship God as per their wish and inclination. No one thought of converting them with force, because this is not practised in our religion; in our culture

acy had not been hatched to burn alive the innocent passengers of the Sabarmati Express, then the subsequent tragedy in Gujarat could have been averted. But this did not happen. People were torched alive. Who were those culprits? The Government is investigating into this. Intelligence agencies are collecting all the information. But we should not forget how the tragedy of Gujarat started. The subsequent developments were no doubt condemnable, but who lit the fire? How did the fire spread? Ours is a multi-religious country, a multi-lingual country, we have many different modes of worship. We believe in peaceful and harmonious co-existence. We believe in equal respect for all faiths. Let no one challenge India's secularism. I have read somewhere in newspapers that the Congress Party has decided not to try to topple my Government. Shall I thank them for this? Or shall I say that the "Grapes are sour"? How will the Government fall? Once they did topple it, but they couldn't form one themselves. Then a fresh mandate from the people was called for, and the people once again gave us an opportunity to serve them.

The same is happening in Malaysia. Wherever such Muslims live, they tend not to live in co-existence with others, not to mingle with others; and instead of propagating their ideas in a peaceful manner, they want to spread their faith by resorting to terror and threats. The world has become alert to this danger.

As far as we are concerned, we have been fighting against terrorism for the past 20 years. Terrorists have tried to grab Jammu and Kashmir through violence, but we have countered them. Jammu and Kashmir is an integral part of India, and will forever remain so. No other country's dream will ever come true. Now other nations in the world have started to realize what a great mistake they did by neglecting terrorism. Now they are waking up, and are organising themselves. They are putting together an international consensus against terrorism.

We tell them through our own example that a large number of non-Hindus live in our country, but there has never been religious persecution here. We have never discriminated between "our people" and "aliens". The modes of worship may differ, but God is one. Only the paths to reach Him and realize Him can be different. It is for this reason that India's prestige is growing, India's reputation is rising. I have also had an occasion to visit many other countries. Everywhere Muslims live in large numbers. And the rulers in those countries are worried lest those Muslims embrace extremism. We told them that they should educate people on the true tenets of Islam, that they should teach science in madrasas, and that they should also teach other subjects in madrasas. Islam too should be taught, but emphasize that people should live together and that that it is necessary to accept that faith cannot be propagated on the strength of the sword.

OUR Government has completed two-and-a-half years. We have tried to change the face of our country. In a country, which once had a scarcity of foodgrains, which used to import foodgrains to feed its people, in that very same country we have created a situation wherein, thanks to our toiling kisans, a day has come when we ex-

port foodgrains to other countries and feed the stomachs of their citizens.

We have large foreign exchange reserves. We are progressing in science and technology. Our young men and women are excelling in global competition. Even in the midst of an economic recession, India is progressing, India is marching ahead. When taxes are imposed in the budget, it is bound to create some difficulties, but in turn, we are fulfilling many needs of our people. We have taken up such works and projects that were never touched in the past. We want to create world-class national highways of four lanes that link the North to the South and the East to the West, and on which there can be obstruction-free traffic. Work has already begun on this massive National Highway Development Project covering 13,000 kilometers. We will spend 60,000 crore rupees on this project. We want to build a network of good roads all over the country.

WE have also prepared programmes and projects for the development of Goa. There is a proposal to link Goa to the Goden Quadrilateral part of the National Highway Development Project. I wish to assure you that we shall do everything possible to implement this proposal. For this, the National Highway No. 17 will be widened to four lanes. We shall see to it that this proposal goes ahead.

When I had come here last time, I had spoken about improving the sewerage system along the coastal belt of Goa. Beach tourism is adversely affected by this. It is very necessary that the sewerage system is improved along the coastal belt if we want that tourists come here. Nature has made Goa very beautiful. It has a sea coast. Goa is an enchanting place. Tourists wish to come here in large numbers. However, we need to create better facilities for them. The State Government is making efforts in this direction. I wish to assure the State Government that wherever Central assistance is needed, we shall provide such assistance in required quantity.

Goa is also paying attention to the development of roads. We are trying to

build roads to connect all the unconnected villages. Goa does not have unconnected villages and hilly regions, but it has a large, well-spread out area. It is necessary to link it with good roads and to make communication smooth. The problem of water is growing in North Goa. Pollution too is becoming a serious problem. If any project to tackle these problems comes before the Government, we shall provide assistance to them and contribute to their completion. Goa will once again pass through a trial. The Goa Government acted on its own to dissolve itself. This showed that those who were running the Government in Goa had no lust for power. When they realized that the atmosphere had got polluted, that party-hopping had started, and that they were not in a position to serve the people, then our friends dissolved the Legislative Assembly in Goa.

Now a new Assembly will be elected. It will be elected with your votes. It will be elected with your choice. You elect such a new Government that will be stable, that will be free of corruption, and that will open up new avenues for Goa's progress. The forthcoming election will give you an opportunity to do so. If necessary, we in Delhi shall mobilize resources for your development. At the very least, we shall certainly send you our best wishes.

Several non-Hindus live in our country but there has never been religious persecution. We have never discriminated between "our people" and "aliens". That's why India's reputation is rising

Is the mask off?

YEM Vajpayee is swayamsevak, then PM SIA

More than two years ago an RSS ideologue, Govindacharya had let slip a truth that no one was ready to believe. He had called Atal Behari Vajpayee the liberal "mask" of the BJP. To hide the real hardcore Hindutva beliefs and agenda. It is donned every time the BJP wishes to distance itself from the fascist excesses of its sister organisations like the VHP and Bajrang Dal. No one wanted to believe this of the suave, liberal, poetry-penning Vajpayee and so to avoid embarrassment, Govindacharya was banished into oblivion by both media and the BJP. Today his words ring true.

Only days after the Prime Minister visited Gujarat where he admonished Chief Minister Narendra Modi for embarrassing the country and told him to practise *Rajdharma*, Vajpayee did a volte face, gave Modi a clean chit and justified the anti-Muslim pogrom as a reaction to the Godhra carnage. Were his famous oratorical skills so good that he could tailor every speech to suit his audience? At the BJP's just-concluded national executive in Goa, Atal Behari Vajpayee proved that he is a swayamsevak first and a Prime Minister next. Not satisfied with excusing the massacres, he launched a sweeping attack on minorities, particularly Muslims. Following the RSS resolution in Bangalore faithfully, the Prime Minister virtually asked Muslims to behave and called them *jihadis* and "terrorists". In one fell swoop Vajpayee also seemed to set the stage for misuse of Pota against Muslims — because after all they are suspected terrorists. Vajpayee was sadly out of tune with his duties as Prime Minister of a secular India. His subsequent clarification that he said nothing against Islam is begging the question as he did not target Islam, but the reputation of 150 million Muslim citizens of the country.

The recent electoral setbacks and the opinion polls conducted in Gujarat, which show popular support for Modi after the massacres, are obviously the barometers because of which the BJP has decided to change its image. The "soft" responsible party in power has been forsaken for the "hardline" face. BJP is getting ready for both the Assembly and Lok Sabha elections, and it has convinced itself that the Hindutva card is the only one it can use. It blames the poll debacles in UP and Delhi on its having diluted its ideological agenda and put controversial issues like Ayodhya on the backburner. Gujarat has shown the BJP that their traditional voter will stand by them if they stick to Hindutva, and they can gain maximum electoral benefits only if they polarise the electorate along religious lines. The allies are on notice that the BJP identity will not be sacrificed to run the NDA. The mask is off. Nothing will be the same again.

Someone called Vajpayee once said: we never fish for votes in blood

■ Perhaps the Prime Minister forgot in Goa that to mark 50th I-Day, he wrote he was 'proud' to lose in '84 as Cong win was tainted with 'butchery' of innocents

MANOJ MITTA
NEW DELHI, APRIL 16

GIVEN the Prime Minister's flip-flops and the hectic pace he's keeping over the last fortnight—Shah Alam to Singapore to Goa—chances are he wouldn't recall a piece he wrote five years ago.

For, if he did, he and his party would have thought twice, thrice, maybe several times, before advising Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi to go in for polls just days after 900 have been killed and over a lakh are still in refugee camps.

Because Vajpayee's piece, written for *Frontline* magazine in August 1997 to mark 50 years of India's independence, is a strident and eloquent attack on the

Congress for doing what he and his party approved of in Goa.

The coincidence is startling—as is the contrast.

Referring to the 1984 Lok Sabha election, held within two months of the massacre of 3,000 Sikhs in Delhi in "retaliation" to Indira Gandhi's assassination, Vajpayee wrote: "Yes, we lost to the Congress. But there are no regrets because our defeat was honourable while the Congress's thumping victory was tainted by the blood of innocent men, women and children."

And then he pats himself and his colleagues on the back, writing he's "proud" to recall that the party "refused to exploit shamelessly the insanity that had gripped India in the immediate aftermath of Indira



THE FACES: With Parliament paralysed on Monday, the Prime Minister speaks at an annual tourism conference in New Delhi. PTI

Gandhi's assassination. We see his observations against stood by our cherished principle of unity—*ekta*."

These words aren't the only ones that have a contemporary resonance. "I can still vividly recall the Congress's election campaign of that year in which every Sikh was portrayed as a dangerous anti-national to be watched out for," Vajpayee wrote. In much the same way his critics

Temple by the armed forces, Indira Gandhi's assassination by her own Sikh bodyguards and the subsequent butchery during the anti-Sikh riots had unleashed a momentary madness that was harnessed by the Congress to create a 'sympathy wave'."

Expressing confidence that it would be "the BJP's noble task to lead gently this great, ancient nation into the next century," Vajpayee said: "India will enter the next millennium with its head held high...confident of its future as a leading member of the comity of nations."

Cut to 10 days ago when he wondered aloud with what face would he go abroad. Maybe on that, too, he has a slightly different view after the Goa weekend

ONCE UPON A TIME: 'BJP refused to exploit shamelessly the insanity that had gripped India (after) Indira Gandhi's assassination... the Cong campaign in which every Sikh was portrayed as a dangerous anti-national'

who was then party chief, said he did not regret it because "neither I nor my colleagues were prepared to pay the price for success in these polls."

"The terrorist killings in Punjab, the storming of the Golden

'READY TO HELP BALASINGHAM'

Vajpayee rules out lifting ban on LTTE

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 11. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has rejected the request of the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Velupillai Prabhakaran, for lifting the ban on his organisation. "Aisa koi irada nahin hai" (there is no such intention), he said in response to questions after his return here from his five-day visit to Singapore and Cambodia.

Responding to another question, Mr. Vajpayee said the Government had not received any request from the LTTE ideologue, Anton Balasingham, for transit through India to attend peace talks with the Sri Lankan authorities in Thailand.

'India not for involvement in talks'

Amit Baruah earlier reported from Bangkok:

Mr. Vajpayee said India would consider sympathetically a proposal — now pending with India — for facilitating medical treatment for Mr. Balasingham.

Addressing a press conference on board the plane at the Bangkok airport after arriving from Siem Reap in Cambodia en route to New Delhi, the Prime Minister made it clear that India did not wish to get involved in the proposed peace talks between the Tigers and the Sri Lankan Government.

There was only one proposal before the Government and that related



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, coming out of the Angkor Wat temple during his official visit to Siem Reap, north-west of Phnom Penh, in Cambodia, on Thursday. — PTI

to helping with the treatment of Mr. Balasingham. "If he wants such help, we will consider the case sympathetically....," he said.

Responding to a query on Mr. Prabhakaran's remarks at a press conference on Wednesday, Mr. Vajpayee categorically ruled out India's

involvement in the proposed talks between the LTTE and Colombo.

"We don't want to intervene in it." (Mr. Prabhakaran said yesterday that India's participation in the peace process was "crucial" and that without its support and sympathy the ethnic problem

in the island country could not be solved).

On the demand from some constituents of the ruling National Democratic Alliance that the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, be removed from office, he said the issue would be discussed during the Bharatiya Janata Party's national executive in Goa beginning tomorrow.

"Kuch bhi kehne se pehle, mein apne sathiyon se salah lena pasand karoonga" (before saying anything, I would like to consult my colleagues), Mr. Vajpayee said adding that he did not get a chance to do so in the last few days because of his visit to Singapore and Cambodia. He would think about Gujarat after returning home.

Asked how he felt half-way through his term in office, he said: "Aadhi rat beet gayee, aadhi baki hai" (half the night has passed, half remains).

And on his plans to "control" the Vishwa Hindu Parishad and the Bajrang Dal, which continued to pull him down, Mr. Vajpayee said "Woh hamari problem hai, woh chhod dijiye hamare upar" (that is our problem, leave it to us).

In response to another query, the Prime Minister admitted that the election results had not been according to the BJP's expectations.

On the claim that the Centre's policies were behind the electoral reverses, he said they would learn from the verdict and run the party and the Government better.

THE HINDU

PM's comments not aimed at Modi: BJP

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, APRIL 5. The Prime Minister's comments in Gujarat on Thursday that he was in no position to show his face when he travels abroad tomorrow and his advice to the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, to follow the 'Raj Dharma' are being read by the Bharatiya Janata Party not as disapproval of the Chief Minister and his Government, but as an expression of his feeling of total disapproval of the orgy of violence that has been bleeding Gujarat in the last 36 days.

What does the BJP read in those comments? When this question was put to Maya Singh and Sunil Shastri, BJP general secretaries, they said the Prime Minister had certainly conveyed his view that the events had affected the country's image adversely, but the party did not see these as a "disapproval" of the Modi Government.

Mr. Shastri said: The Army was out patrolling the streets, the police were told to quell the riots, in police firing 100 people died (presumably from among the riotous mobs), and finally the maximum killings took place in the State in the first 48 to 72 hours, after which there have been localised incidents.

The party is not at all convinced that the very fact the Godhra outrage took place and was followed up with a blood-bath of some 700 or more members of the minority community — which even the Prime Minister noted had been done in the most ghastly and brutish manner — should be reason enough for Mr. Modi, to be asked to go. The BJP continues to believe that within 72 hours, the situation

was brought under control.

The demand for Mr. Modi's sacking, made during the Prime Minister's visit to the refugee camps in Gujarat could have been organised by the Congress and Samajwadi Party supporters, Mr. Shastri said.

Lucknow meet may set the tone for tie-up

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 5. The executive committee meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Party's Uttar Pradesh unit tomorrow in Lucknow is expected to set the tone for the tying up of a political arrangement between the BJP and the Bahujan Samaj Party. In fact, some party leaders here are hinting that the finalisation of the deal may take place as early as next week and the "coronation" in Lucknow could happen immediately after the BJP's national executive committee meeting is wound up in Goa on April 14.

Over the last week or ten days, several BJP leaders from U.P. have met the Prime Minister separately — Om Prakash Singh, Ram Prakash Tripathi (whose name is being mentioned for the post of Speaker of the Assembly), Lalji Tandon and Kalraj Mishra, the State unit president.

All of them have also met the party president, Jana Krishnamurthi, to present their case in favour of a tie-up with the BSP.

There is a view in the party that finally the Prime Minister's wish will count, and indications are that he may be inclined to see a government in U.P., even if it means that Mayawati has to take the lead role and the BJP has to carry the tail.

THE HINDU

PMO tells intelligence agencies to crack down on hawala operations

By Pratyush Kanth
Times News Network

NEW DELHI: At a recent top-level meeting of central intelligence officials, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) has reportedly asked the Intelligence Bureau (IB) to make a detailed report on hawala transactions in India and the "route" adopted by hawala operators.

According to a source in the IB, the Bureau is now coordinating with agencies like the Central Economic Intelligence Bureau, the Central Bureau of Investigation, the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, the Enforcement Directorate, the Narcotics Control Bureau, the Customs, the Income-Tax department and few other agencies of the finance ministry to "track and crack down on the hawala operators in the country".

The PMO directive came after the Jammu and Kashmir police arrested Yasin Mallik, the chief of Jammu and Kashmir Liberation

Front, for allegedly receiving \$1 lakh in cash from Kathmandu. Interpol has been telling us that hawala has become a significant economic crime in South Asia and since operations span several countries it has not always been easy to unravel this crime," said the source.

IB sources said initial investigations had revealed close links of hawala operations in India with countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, the UAE, Hong Kong and some states in western Europe. The IB has informed senior home ministry and PMO officials that to combat this menace, "it is important for all the countries concerned to cooperate in the investigations". It has also suggested the CBI should be asked to keep the Interpol informed about the links of hawala operators in India with money launderers in other countries on a regular basis.

IB sources said the intelligence agencies of the finance ministry had felt that banking and financial

institutions should maintain their records for more than five years and keep a constant watch on all transaction of over \$10,000 so that a tab could be kept on large-scale and illegal outflows of money.

Hawala operations in India had increased sharply in the last few years in the wake of economic liberalisation, IB sources said. Most hawala operations have been routed through Dubai, Pakistan, Nepal and some countries in western Europe. Hawala operations have been liberally used to illegally transfer money for kickbacks and pay-offs, drug trafficking, gold smuggling and over-invoicing of imports and under-invoicing of exports.

"The role of customs officials is also being monitored closely because through imports and exports huge amounts of black money are converted into legal money and duty-drawbacks are claimed to cover up hawala operations," an IB official said.

PM outraged over Sonia speech

SP 27/3

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 26. — The Prime Minister's counter-attacks against the leader of the Opposition overshadowed the passage of Poto in the joint session.

Mr Vajpayee was angry perhaps as never before on the floor of the Legislature. His intervention in the marathon debate focussed not on the objections to the Bill but on rejecting the charges Mrs Sonia Gandhi had levelled against him.

The Prime Minister felt she should apologise for intemperate language.

And to emphasise that her remarks were not off-the-cuff and made in the heat of the moment, he referred to them as part of her written speech.

Both Mr Vajpayee's tone and language were in sharp contrast to his usual good-humoured conduct as he took Mrs Gandhi to task for what he termed as "an objectionable speech for which she should apologise".

While initiating the debate on the Opposition's behalf, Mrs Gandhi said: "The Prime Minister as head of this government has to decide (if) his primary duty is to protect the welfare of

the people or succumb to internal pressures of the BJP and sister organisations."

Mr Vajpayee took strong exception to this and said she was casting aspersions on his integrity. The Prime Minister quoted another paragraph of her speech in which she said: "Will he (the Prime Minister) be submissive to the internal pressures of his party and its sister organisations? Will he be submissive and weak in his leadership or will he uphold the prestige of the high office he holds?"

Turn to page 6

(Continued from page 1)

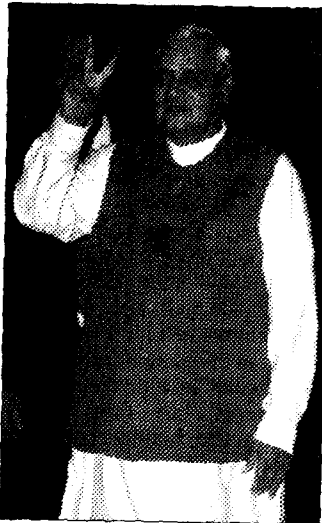
Reacting sharply, Mr Vajpayee said: "I am the Prime Minister despite opposition of the Congress ... and I am the Prime Minister not at the mercy of the Congress. Mrs Gandhi should understand this." He went on: "What does she mean by saying all this in a prepared statement which appeared to have been carefully drafted to malign me and question my integrity?"

The provocation for Mr Vajpayee had come from the last paragraph of Mrs Gandhi's speech which was quoted in full by him. Mrs Gandhi had said: "... before we deal with bonafides of the government ... there is, I am afraid, neither moral integrity nor sincerity of purpose among those trying to force this law on the nation".

All hell broke loose as Congress members got on their feet and rushed to the podium asking the Prime Minister to take back his words. Pandemonium ensued and Mr Vajpayee had to stop speaking.

Some Congress members demanded Mrs Gandhi be allowed to intervene to defend herself. She was being persuaded to hit back, but

OUTRAGE:



Mr Vajpayee flashes the victory sign while leaving Parliament House on Tuesday night. — AFP

appeared reluctant to engage Mr Vajpayee in an impromptu debate. Mr Arjun Singh deputised for her.

At this, BJP members shouted, "we will not allow Mr Singh to intervene, let Mrs Gandhi come to the podium". They advanced towards Mr Singh, who by then

was at the microphone.

Mr Santosh Mohan Dev of the Congress stood guard for Mr Singh, gesticulating like a boxer. Mr Chandra Shekhar tried to mediate, and spoke in hushed tones first to Mr Singh, then to Deputy Speaker Mr PM Sayeed, and finally to Mr Vajpayee.

After some time, Mr Arjun Singh was allowed to speak. He kept his statement brief and sober: "I didn't expect Mr Vajpayee to speak in this fashion ... and use such words for the leader of the Opposition."

The Prime Minister replied promptly: "Well, if anyone has objections to my style of speech, it is too late for me to change. In so far as the use of foul words is concerned, I would appeal to the Chair to expunge anything I've uttered about Mrs Gandhi if it's unparliamentary."

The Prime Minister dismissed the charge that he was acting under pressure, be it the Sangh Parivar or foreign countries or multinationals.

Mrs Gandhi cast aspersion on the summoning of the joint session, saying "I fear the very dignity that should be associated with such an event is being damaged by the insidious purpose behind our sitting today".

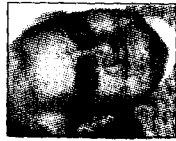
THE STATESMAN

27 MAR 2002

End this violence, PM tells Gujarat

Country's security under threat, no talks with Pakistan possible, says Vajpayee

DHARMENDRA RATAUL
SHIMLA, MARCH 24



DESCRIBING the Godhra train attack as "most unfortunate" and the subsequent attacks by mobs across the state "regrettable", Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee today called for an end to the violence in Gujarat which, he said, had tarnished the country's image.

Addressing a public rally here today to mark four years in office of the Prem Kumar Dhumal government, he said the culprits in the Godhra incident had been arrested and would be dealt with according to the law. "The inquiry commission constituted to investigate the bloody happenings would submit a report at the earliest and the culprits would be brought to book," he declared.

The PM said his government did not discriminate on the basis of religion and all citizens were treated alike and enjoyed equal rights.

Referring to Pakistan, Vajpayee asserted that India was always willing to normalise relations with that country, provided it prepared the ground for a dialogue by giving due regard to the Shimla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration. It must also stop harbouring terrorism from across the border, he said. The



A member of the Kargil's Operation Vijay skit, which was staged before the PM's arrival. Swadesh Talwar

present policies and activities of Pakistan were not conducive for talks, he added.

In an apparent response to President Pervez Musharraf's offer for talks, Vajpayee said the unabated incidents of firing on the border, the attacks on Parliament and the Jammu and Kashmir assembly showed clearly that Pakistan was yet to adopt the policy of peaceful co-existence.

Declaring that India was strong enough to guard its borders, Vajpayee said both internal and external security of the country were under threat with terrorism taking new dimensions.

"All, including those who earlier condemned our nuclear programme, now appreciate that nuclear testing would prove to be an effective deterrent for the country's security," the PM said. The world community had recog-

nised India's concern over the issue of terrorism and even exerted pressure on Pakistan to curtail it, he said.

On Ayodhya, the Prime Minister said the world had been watching the situation but everything passed off peacefully, much to the dismay of their political rivals who had raised a hue and cry. "Shila daan shanti se hua," (shila daan was held peacefully), he said.

'ABIDE BY SHIMLA, LAHORE PACTS'

Pak. must respond to global call to end terrorism: PM

By Our Correspondent

SHIMLA, MARCH 24. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said Pakistan should "abide by world opinion which has been globally formed against terrorism". Reminding Islamabad about the historic Shimla Agreement and the Lahore Declaration, he said, "India was always ready for talks, but there should be a similar response from the other side."

Addressing a huge gathering here today to mark the completion of four years of the Dhumal Government, Mr. Vajpayee said that every youth should remember the year 1972 when a defeated Pakistan signed the Shimla Agreement and India had then captured more than 90,000 Pakistani prisoners of war, and the majority population of Bangladesh was not ready to go with Pakistan. "When Pakistan was not able to retain its own province (Bangladesh), how could it ensure the well-being of Kashmir", he asked, and asserted that Pakistan would never be allowed to gain control over Kashmir.

Mr. Vajpayee said Pakistan only believed in signing agreements, but never followed them. Right now there were no signs of peace proposals from across the border. The Kargil war, the attacks on the Indian Parliament and the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly, and everyday firing on the border are evidence of Pakistan's designs. India had been giving appropriate answers to Islamabad's nefarious designs.

Defending his Government's stand on the nuclear tests, the Prime Minister said though they had been conducted against world opinion, they had made the country secure. One of his Government's major achievements was having made the country totally independent and self-reliant as regards its security needs. The Government should not be remembered by its number of years in office, but by its good performance and decisions.

Mr. Vajpayee also announced



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and the Chief Minister of Himachal Pradesh, Prem Kumar Dhumal (right), in Shimla on Sunday. — AP

the formation of a trans-Himalayan development authority of which Himachal Pradesh and other border States would be a part. Elaborate plans to preserve the ecology of the Himalayas would be drawn up.

Work on the Rohtang tunnel would start from April 1. This would connect Ladakh region by road round the year. The Rs. 800-crore project would not only help development works in the tribal region, but also serve the national security needs of this area.

PTI reports:

Border forces to stay

Mr. Vajpayee said there would be no scaling down of India's military mobilisation on the border as Pakistani spies

were indulging in sabotage in the country and cross-border terrorism was continuing.

"India cannot take any chances with external and internal security as Pakistani spies are indulging in sabotage, cross-border terrorism is continuing and there is no respite in firing along the border."

Such actions did not indicate that Pakistan was interested in peace, he said.

Economic growth

Mr. Vajpayee said the Government intended to double economic growth from its present 5.4 per cent, but mobilising funds for development had become a challenge.

Expressing concern over mounting Government expen-

diture, he said a large chunk of money was being consumed in payment of salaries and pensions, and mobilising funds for development had become a challenge. Some taxes had been proposed in the budget for 2002-03 but care had been taken that these did not hit the common man.

He said the present growth rate was 5.4 per cent and the Government wanted to double it, but to achieve this expenditure should be curbed and available funds utilised judiciously. He said employment had been generated in the information technology sector, new records established in the field of space science and the number of below poverty line (BPL) families had decreased.

THE HINDU

25 MAR 2002

PM condemns Orissa vandalism

Statesman News Service

67- 19/3
NEW DELHI, March 18. — A visibly upset Prime Minister today strongly condemned in the Rajya Sabha the attack on the Orissa Assembly. "I would rather die than be associated with such elements." He was responding to observations that the vandals had raised slogans in his name before attacking the Assembly. VHP and Bajrang Dal activists had reportedly shouted "Atal Behari Vajpayee zindabad" before the incident.

The Prime Minister did not name the VHP and Bajrang Dal whose cadres were behind the attack. He criticised the "forces that attack temples of democracy" but stopped short of comparing them to the terrorists who attacked Parliament on 13 December. "It was a shameful incident. Parliament is the temple of democracy. State Assemblies may be called small temples. Any attack on the Assemblies is to be condemned," he said.

Mr Hansraj Bhardwaj (Cong) interrupted Mr Vajpayee and told him that his own men, and not the Congress, were trying to destabilise him.

Mr Vajpayee seemed unhappy with the role of newspapers. The source of information and the intention of the newspapers' proprietors have to be ascertained, he said. In the Lok Sabha, Mr L K Advani said he was ashamed of the incident and assured the House that the guilty would be punished.

Mr Navin Patnaik announced the formation of a House committee headed by the Speaker to probe the attack on the Assembly, SNS adds from Bhubaneswar.

THE STATESMAN

19 MAR 2002

A-G did his duty: PM

SR/15/3
Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 14. — Seeking to allay fears of violence breaking out in Ayodhya tomorrow, the Prime Minister today told Parliament that there was no reason to find fault with the Attorney-General for explaining to the Supreme Court the government's position on the symbolic puja.

In a statement in both Houses, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said: "It is the constitutional duty of the Attorney-General to interpret a law or a judgment of the court when asked by the court to do so. This is what the Attorney-General did when asked by the Supreme Court if a symbolic puja on the undisputed acquired land in Ayodhya was permissible."

"The Attor-

ney-General submitted that even if the puja was not prohibited by any previous judgment or order of the Supreme Court, the same could be permitted only under well-defined conditions and strict restrictions which by way of illustration he indicated for the court's consideration. He further stressed that if any further safeguards and restrictions were considered necessary, the same

could be imposed by the court," he said. "The court made it clear that its order was an interim one and was subject to further orders which may be passed in the pending writ petitions."

The Prime Minister assured the Lok Sabha that adequate measures have been taken to maintain law and order in Ayodhya and to ensure that the 13 March order of the Supreme Court is adhered to.

SC clarification

NEW DELHI, March 14. — Today's Supreme Court (coram. Kirpal, Pattanaik, Khare, JJ) suo motu clarification — puja is banned everywhere on the 67.703 acres of land in Ayodhya and not only on the two revenue plots — may lead to an application for another clarification: whether puja should be stopped in all the temples, including the makeshift one, on the acquired land. Sources said that an application in this regard may be filed tomorrow morning. — SNS

Details on page 6

Editorial: Wise and justified Order! page 4

THE STATESMAN

15 MAR 2002

Transitional phase: PM ^{ST-1}

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, March 12. — The Prime Minister today sought to reassure the nation that the storm would blow over but cautioned that people should be alert to conspiracies within and outside India.

Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee was addressing a function organised by the Arya Samaj at his Race Course Road residence this morning.

Referring to the violence in Gujarat and fears of more trouble in Ayodhya later this week, he described recent developments as a "transitional phase".

The country indeed was passing through a difficult time but it was not as bad as some feared.

"Sometimes people think that everything is going topsy-turvy and feel that everything is coming to an end. But there is no reason to believe that," he said.

The country has faced such situations before and emerged out of it, the Prime Minister added.

Mr Vajpayee defended the Gujarat government's handling of the riots, arguing that

this was the first time that the state government had been able to control the riots in 72 hours.

He did not, however, go into the details, saying "the truth will come out" through the inquiry that has been ordered.

The Prime Minister said: "It is necessary that whatever problems we have, efforts should be made to resolve them peacefully through talks".

The borders were protected and the country was moving ahead despite economic problems. "But there are conspiracies within and outside the country and we should be alert to face them," he said.

Mr Vajpayee said Pakistan, which had tried to isolate India, now finds itself "isolated" internationally. All over the world, terrorism has replaced Kashmir as a topic of discussion.

He iterated that there was no question of resumption of talks until cross-border terrorism was tackled.

Though New Delhi wanted friendly ties with Islamabad, the environment must be conducive for talks.

The Prime Minister complimented the in-

formation and broadcasting minister, Mrs Sushma Swaraj, for effectively projecting India's stand.

Referring to her visit to Pakistan recently to attend the Saarc information ministers' conference, he said a Pakistani journalist, interviewing her on TV, had tried to corner her but she handled the questions very well and put forward India's position efficiently and effectively.

Dwelling on the recent Assembly elections, the Prime Minister said the results had exposed the shortcomings of the BJP and its allies. He hoped the parties would go in for introspection.

"People have punished us for our mistakes and expect us to learn and remove these shortcomings," Mr Vajpayee said. "The results went against us but we accept the verdict of the people."

Though there are some drawbacks in the present electoral system, this is the way through which people can express their feelings, the Prime Minister added.

Photograph on page 6
Allies sulk but won't quit NDA,
page 6

12 MAR 2002

12 MAR 2002

Centre will not permit defiance of SC: Vajpayee

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee on Monday affirmed the Centre's determination not to allow temple activists to do anything that might be construed as defiance of the supreme court in the context of the Ayodhya dispute. Responding to members' concerns about the proposed puja by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) on March 15, Mr Vajpayee told the Lok Sabha that the government was keeping a watch on the situation. "We will not allow anything to happen without hearing the court's verdict," he said.

In the Rajya Sabha, leader of the House Jaswant Singh was categorical—the government would strictly go by what the supreme court ordered at its sitting scheduled for Wednesday. Whatever the apex court said would have to be followed, he said.

Mr Vajpayee said 41 companies (each comprising 80 men) of the Central Reserve Police Force had been sent to Ayodhya. The state government had deployed another 27 companies of the Provincial Armed Constabulary, besides the state police, he said. "The state is

under President's rule..it is my responsibility to maintain law and order," he said.

Termining the Ayodhya issue both complicated and serious, Mr Vajpayee said the government had already sought legal opinion on the issues involved. He favoured a solution either through negotiations or a judicial pronouncement.

He said the government had made efforts to expedite the judicial process.

The Prime Minister intervened in the debate after former prime minister H.D. Deve Gowda and Samajwadi Party leader Mulayam Singh Yadav raised the issue and said the situation in Ayodhya had taken a serious turn because of the VHP's activities and the assembly of its supporters. Mr Vajpayee disagreed with the Samajwadi Party leader's view that Ayodhya

was burning and described the situation in the temple town as quiet.

Mr Vajpayee's remark that he hoped the court ruling would help find a final solution to the Ayodhya tangle evoked strong protests from the opposition. Left members objected to his observation, saying this could be a way of influencing the judiciary.

PM seeks RSS help

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: The Prime Minister on Monday reportedly drafted the help of defence minister George Fernandes and BJP president K. Jana Krishna-murthy in speaking to



A.B. Vajpayee

RSS leaders Madan Das Devi and Mohan Bhagwat to see if they could persuade the VHP Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas leaders to postpone the March 15 bhoomi puja by a few months.

The move comes in the wake of the insistence by Nyas chairman Ramchandra Paramhans and other VHP leaders that regardless of the supreme court ruling on March 13, they will go ahead with the bhoomi puja.

Keen to revive talks, Centre tries to turn Sankaracharya around

PMO keeps board line alive

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI *gndr PM*



A paramilitary jawan guards pillars in Ayodhya. (Reuters)

New Delhi, March 11: The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board and the government have kept a channel of communication open to explore the possibility of reviving the Ayodhya negotiations.

Officials of the Prime Minister's Office sounded a "responsive" board yesterday soon after the formal rejection of the Kanchi Sankaracharya's formula.

Efforts are also on to bring the Sankaracharya back into the picture. The seer had distanced himself from the issue yesterday, but the PMO is hopeful of persuading him to pick up the thread. If the PMO succeeds, the Sankaracharya may return to Delhi on Thursday.

Members of the minority board struck a positive note but said much would depend on the Supreme Court ruling on Wednesday. If the court issues an appeal to leaders of both the communities to revive efforts for a consensus, it

17 *M3*
would make it easier for the board to return to the talks table.

The board is still in favour of an out-of-court settlement based on the spirit of "justice" and "give and take". "We are still open to the idea of negotiations. We have two conditions. There should be a sincere effort to resolve the issue, instead of politically-motivated moves, and there should be a conducive atmosphere to carry out such a settlement," board spokesman Qasim Rasool Ilyas told The Telegraph.

Ilyas, editor of the prestigious Urdu journal *Afkar-e-Milli*, said it was up to the Centre to take the initiative of resuming the dialogue to resolve the Ayodhya tangle. "We are an aggrieved party. We have been getting feelers who are always keen to know what we are offering. The question that I want to ask (is): What are we (Muslims) going to get from the government and the VHP?" Ilyas asked.

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THE TELEGRAPH

12 MAR 2002

PMO keeps board line alive

► FROM PAGE 1

How could an inter-faith dialogue succeed when one side was making all sorts of threats and setting deadlines, he asked.

Another key member of the board, Manzoor Alam, too, sounded optimistic about the prospects of new talks, but said the ball was now in the government's court. "It is for the government to decide how it intends to resolve the issue. The board has never said no to a dialogue," said Alam, who runs the Centre for Objective Studies.

He said the problem before the Muslim leadership was that there were too many different voices, making it difficult to maintain focus on key issues.

Some board members said in private the talks could have made more headway if the Sankaracharya had not gone public with the formula. The proposal received a further setback when the Vishwa Hindu Parishad leadership started speaking in different voices.

Moreover, the papers that the Sankaracharya had promised did not reach the board till Saturday afternoon. There was no revised temple plan or map of the disputed and acquired areas.

Some board members were so upset with the government that they wanted to call off the Sunday meeting. But they were eventually persuaded not to take such an extreme step.

Another school of thought said the board meeting had become redundant after the Prime Minister's statement that the government would go by the court's verdict on the *bhoomi puja*.

But office-bearers said the board went ahead with the Sunday meeting as it did not want to be seen as rigid or lukewarm to the idea of negotiations.

A petition was filed in the Supreme Court today by Anis Suhrawardy, president of a lawyers' forum, seeking the constitution of a body of eminent people that would oversee simultaneous construction of a temple at the disputed site and a mosque in and around the disputed area in Ayodhya.

Suhrawardy said the Ayodhya issue was affecting the secular fabric of the country and, hence, it was necessary to move the court to restrain the government from subjecting itself to the pressure of either the VHP or the Babri Masjid Action Committee.

He said a committee represented by both the communities should undertake the construction of both the Ram mandir and a masjid in Ayodhya. The petition is likely to be taken up for hearing on March 13 along with another seeking army deployment around the disputed site.

The board has decided to move the Supreme Court on March 13 when Mohd. Aslam Bhure's petition seeking army deployment would come up for hearing. "We had decided to move the court much before (the) talks began. Our legal department is ready and we move ahead on March 13," said a source in the board.

THE TELEGRAPH

12 MAR 2002

12 MAR 2002

UTTAR PRADESH WANTS ARMY PUT ON 'ALERT'

Govt. will abide by SC directive on 'puja': PM

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, MARCH 9. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today made it clear that the proposed "symbolic puja" by the Vishwa Hindu Parishad on March 15 at Ayodhya would be allowed to take place only if there were no objections from the Supreme Court. He told a delegation of Muslim clerics this evening that "the Government will do as per the directions of the Supreme Court which is hearing the matter on March 13."

There has been considerable criticism from within the ruling NDA and the Opposition that the Vajpayee Government would be departing from its commitment — and its legal obligation — of maintaining the status quo, should it permit the VHP to perform a symbolic 'puja.' This permission is part of a "formula" worked out by the Kanchi Sankaracharya, under which the Ramjanabhoomi Trust has undertaken to accept the judicial verdict in the Ayodhya dispute. The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board is scheduled to take a view on the "formula" tomorrow.

Kanchi Acharya's written proposal

NEW DELHI, MARCH 9. In a significant move, the Sankaracharya of Kanchi, Jayendra Saraswati, today sent to the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board a written proposal for solving the Ayodhya tangle ahead of its crucial executive committee meeting here tomorrow. "We have received this evening a written proposal from the seer urging us to allow the Ram Janabhoomi trust to construct the temple on the undisputed land in lieu of their agreeing to abide by the court verdict on the disputed site," the board spokesman, S.Q.R. Ilyas, told PTI. He said that according to the proposal, the VHP would build a boundary wall around the disputed site where the Babri Masjid stood before its demolition, prior to beginning the temple construction work.



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, with a delegation of the All-India Organisation of Imams in New Delhi on Saturday. — AFP

Mr. Vajpayee's remarks came on the eve of the crucial meeting of the Muslim Personal Law Board. Addressing the concerns about the Government's approach, Mr. Vajpayee made it clear that whatever directions the Supreme Court issued would have to be respected "by all." He also said the court could endorse the "symbolic puja" proposal while stipulating that such permission in no way would prejudice the legal case of any of the litigants.

This is the first time the Prime Minister has made his views known on the current developments in the Ayodhya dispute. Noting that the Supreme Court would be hearing a petition on March 13, he observed "if the court says one does not have a right to perform the puja or the place is such which cannot be touched, then a new episode will begin." These remarks are addressed as much to the Muslim community as to his own increasingly restive NDA allies.

In a related development, the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, revealed that the Uttar Pradesh Government had requested Army deployment in Ayodhya to deal with any unpredictable situation. "In the past few days, we have been getting telephonic requests from Faizabad district administration but since last night the requests have become intense," Mr. Fernandes told a seminar.

The idea perhaps was to convey that the Centre was being watchful about the law and or-

der situation. However, later in the evening, the Uttar Pradesh Governor, Vishnu Kant Shastri, told mediapersons in Lucknow that he had only requested that the Army be put on "alert." Whatever the confusion, it was learnt from responsible sources that the Army would be on a "stand-by."

PTI reports:

Terming the change in the VHP's stand on the disputed site as a "big development," Mr. Vajpayee urged the Muslim community to appreciate its significance. "Earlier, they were saying they do not recognise the role of the judiciary in this dispute. Now they have changed their position in this matter. This has created a positive atmosphere." There were two ways to resolve the issue. "Either we should sit down and hammer out a solution through talks or go to court and knock its door... the issue which we cannot resolve should be entrusted to the court and its verdict adhered to," he said.

Opposition blasts 'puja' move

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 9. All the main Opposition parties, the Congress, the CPI(M) and the CPI, today deplored the Government's decision to permit 'puja' at Ayodhya near the disputed site and the lifting of restrictions on kar sevaks. "The status quo cannot be tampered with and even a symbolic ceremony should not be held without the court's permission," the Congress spokesman, S. Jaipal Reddy, said.

The party said that nothing should be done to disturb the status quo, and the proposed puja on the land acquired by the

Government would be "illegal and impermissible". Court permission for the ceremony would have to come before March 15 or else it should not be gone through.

The CPI and the CPI(M) also condemned the Government's move to allow a symbolic 'bhoomi puja' on undisputed land and warned that it would have "serious and adverse repercussions on national unity".

The CPI(M) politburo said the Centre had surrendered to the VHP by agreeing to allow the puja and transfer the acquired land for temple construction. "This is a clear violation of the Supreme Court verdict to maintain the status quo and the as-

surance given in the President's address."

Describing the "so-called deal" between the Government and the VHP/Ram Janabhoomi Nyas through the mediation of the Sankaracharya of Kanchi, the CPI saw it as "nothing but a surrender before them".

"To term the function as 'symbolic' is to throw dust in the people's eyes since the presence of tens of thousands of kar sevaks cannot be kept 'symbolic', the party said. Referring to the assurance given by the VHP/Ram Janabhoomi Nyas, the party said it could not be trusted as the assurances in 1992 were broken without batting an eyelid.

PM hints at rollback of I DC prices

10 MAR 2002

THE HINDU

Atal banks on board in temple gamble

FROM SEEMA GUHA

New Delhi, March 6: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee is relying heavily on the All India Muslim Personal Law Board to sell Kanchi Sankaracharya Jayendra Saraswathi's proposal to the community.

The Sankaracharya is trying to get a written assurance from the VHP that it would honour the court verdict on who owned the disputed site in Ayodhya. In return, the "undisputed" area will be handed over to the outfit.

The tacit undertaking will be that the area where the Babri Masjid stood would remain untouched, so that a mosque could be built there in the future.

It is a make-or-break gamble for Vajpayee, who is struggling to hammer out a deal which would not just defuse the March 15 crisis but also work out a solution to end the impasse.

Though the VHP today said it would never give an undertaking in writing, the Prime Minis-

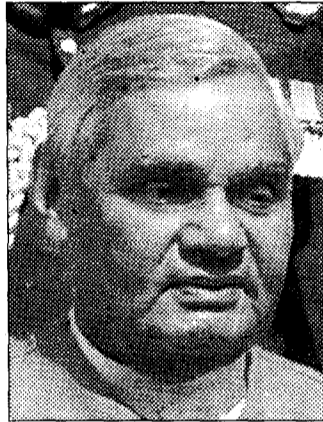
ter's Office is unfazed. Sources close to Vajpayee said the outfit is trying to extract the most out of the situation.

"Such snags are to be expected in this kind of sensitive negotiations. But we will keep chipping away at a permanent solution so that the nation can put this issue behind it," a senior official explained.

Officials said Vajpayee is using his wide network of contacts to keep channels of communication open to both Hindus and Muslims.

The signal that the PMO has received from Muslims is that the majority opinion was for an amicable settlement of the dispute, which has brought nothing but suffering to the community.

The Muslim law board is meeting on Sunday to give its verdict on the Kanchi seer's proposal. Though officials foresee the usual carping by certain leaders, the government, for the moment, appears to have put all its bets on the law board.



AB Vajpayee

Both Vajpayee and his aides realise that the entire exercise could fall through and there would be numerous hurdles on the way, but the government has no choice but to appear optimistic as it works on both the VHP and the Muslim board to thrash out a compromise.

"We are confident that if

9 - Prime - Minister
members of the Muslim Personal Law Board agree to a compromise, a final solution to the Ayodhya dispute can be worked out," a senior government official said.

The Vajpayee government is confident that if a settlement is acceptable to the majority of Muslims, political parties would think twice before opposing the move.

"So long as our National Democratic Alliance partners see eye to eye with the government on working out a settlement, we are not worried about the rest," said an official. He emphasised that the Prime Minister would not be able to go ahead with his peace plan without the NDA's backing.

However, there are doubts among sections within the government on whether the law board can deliver, especially as the VHP is unlikely to agree to the rebuilding of the mosque.

"The Muslim Personal Law Board can work out a deal only if

the VHP is also ready to compromise. But going by past precedent, they are unlikely to consider allowing the rebuilding of a mosque near the temple. So what will the Personal Law Board sell to the community," a senior official pointed out.

Since the Godhra train carnage, some VHP leaders have publicly derided the Prime Minister, saying there was no point in his party leading the coalition if the BJP ideology is not respected. If Vajpayee cannot manage, he should quit, is their common refrain.

But others feel the outfit is not on a strong wicket and will finally have to avoid a confrontation with the government. They said the VHP would not have hesitated to force a confrontation if it was confident that the BJP would better its representation in Parliament.

Even the Sangh parivar realises that the party may not be in a position to form a government next time.

THE TELEGRAPH

- 7 MAR 2002

Vajpayee not to attend CHOGM meet

NEW DELHI, FEB. 27. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, tonight cancelled his visit to Australia, where he was to attend the Commonwealth summit.

9-PM
A spokesman of the Prime Minister's Office said that Mr. Vajpayee has asked the External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh, to lead the Indian delegation at the summit beginning in Canberra on March 2.

202 HD-1
The cancellation came in the backdrop of tension building up in Ayodhya following the VHP's threat to go ahead with temple construction at the disputed site there and the attack on the train in Godhra, Gujarat, which killed 57 people, including several "Ram sevaks" returning from Ayodhya.

Details of Mr. Jaswant's visit are being worked out.
— PTI

THE HINDU

27 FEB 1997

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 22, 2002

9:25 PM
10-10 22/2

SECTARIAN MUSINGS

THE PRIME MINISTER, Atal Behari Vajpayee's assertion at an election meeting in Varanasi that the BJP could do without the Muslim vote is clearly yet another instance of his sectarian inclinations. In essence, it compares with Mr. Vajpayee's 'candid' speech at Staten Island during his September 2000 visit to the United States wherein he proudly reaffirmed the 'swayamsevak' core of his personality and declared, without mincing words, that it was the lack of an absolute majority of its own in Parliament which stood in the way of the BJP pushing the RSS' agenda. In the same league was his patently partisan projection, earlier, of the Ram Janmabhoomi campaign as a "national movement". There appears to be a definite pattern and purpose behind Mr. Vajpayee's nostalgic forays into the exclusivist Hindutva ideology and his subsequent nominal retractions under pressure from the BJP's partners in the ruling coalition who shared discomfort with such Hindu chauvinist musings.

The fact that the Prime Minister made the remark in question while campaigning for his party nominees in the current Uttar Pradesh Assembly elections — an occasion that admits of a certain degree of deviance and laxity — does not in any way detract from the dangerous implications it has for the country's integrity and its secular and pluralist framework. The sort of latitude available to party cadres and leaders in the lower echelons is a luxury that cannot certainly be claimed by those occupying responsible positions of authority who, for that very reason, have to be extremely circumspect in their utterances, apart from setting for themselves higher standards of decency and decorum in electioneering. It was hardly a week ago that Mr. Vajpayee found himself caught on the wrong foot following a controversial reference to Sonia Gandhi's "foreign origin". What he has said at Varanasi about the BJP not depending on the Muslim vote for its

victory in the Uttar Pradesh polls is much more serious, meriting sterner rebuke than indicated by reactions such as "in bad taste" and "unbecoming of a Prime Minister". And it would be naive to see that observation as nothing but a subjective assessment or a strategic posturing or just as a factual statement reflecting the electoral arithmetic insofar as it related to strength of various religious communities in the State.

The disturbing dimensions of Mr. Vajpayee's stated position on 'Muslim vote' — a vogue term in electoral politics that postulates voting en bloc on religious lines by the minority community — stand out clearly when viewed against the NDA regime's perceived ambivalence, if not equivocation, over the Ayodhya issue. Consider the facts. The Vishwa Hindu Parishad and its 'sant parivar' as part of their well-orchestrated campaign to build the Ram temple at the disputed site want the 'undisputed' portions of the Government-acquired land to be handed back — notwithstanding the judicial injunctions — for them to commence the construction on the appointed day (March 15). The Government, instead of rejecting the plea, promises to "examine" it, but the temple protagonists are in no mood to wait. Not only has the VHP been pushing ahead with its programme as scheduled — it is all set to start moving the carved stone pillars to the site from March 15 — but has thrown an open challenge to the established governmental authority by holding out the threat of a "Hindu backlash", should anyone dare "oppose" the start of the construction. Above all is the vigorous mobilisation under way of one million 'Ram Bhakts' and the trishul-wielding brigade who would be converging on Ayodhya shortly. Now, set against the Government's apparent lack of alacrity (in its response to the potentially explosive scenario) that betrays a blatantly majoritarian bias, Mr. Vajpayee's "we can do without you" talk cannot but be regarded as irresponsible.

WORKING TITLE

THE HINDU

22 FEB 2002

Vajpayee held Ayodhya talks: PMO

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 17. — The government today rubbished the VHP's claim that Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee hadn't talked to its leaders on the Ayodhya issue, saying he had spoken to them on several occasions.

"The Prime Minister has been talking to all concerned, including VHP leaders," a PMO official said. "Discussions don't always involve formal meetings where points are taken up and resolved one by one, but informal discussions too." He said the issue had come up almost every time the leaders of the rival groups met Mr Vajpayee.

The VHP disputed Mr Vajpayee's statement that his efforts for a solution had failed because of the stubborn attitudes of the rival parties. "No talks were held with me by the Prime Minister," the Ram Janambhoomi Trust chief, Mahant Ramchandra Parmahans, said in Ayodhya today. The VHP president, Mr Ashok Singhal, was present there.

"The VHP will go ahead with the construction programme" and start moving carved pillars from its workshop at Ramghat from 15 March, the mahant said.

Earlier in the day, a carved stone pillar was consecrated at the workshop and moved to Kar-sevakpuram where a 100-day *Ram Naam Jap Yajna* has begun as part of the programme to build the Ram temple.

Mr M Karunanidhi today said he was confident that Mr Vajpayee would take right steps to prevent construction of the Ram temple. UNI adds from Chennai.

THE STATESMAN

13 FEB 2002

PM APPRECIATES UAE COOPERATION

Vajpayee sees 'conspiracy to disintegrate country'

By Sarabjit Pandher

BATHINDA, FEB. 10: The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today warned that through a deep-rooted conspiracy by abettors of global terrorism, an attempt was being made within India to disintegrate the country.

Addressing an election rally here today, Mr. Vajpayee appreciated the co-operation of the UAE authorities in apprehending and deporting Aftab Ansari, the main accused in the terrorist attack outside the American Center in Kolkata. He called for the setting up of an organisation at an international level to counter terrorism, against which the U.S. had taken the lead.

Mr. Vajpayee said initial investigations proved that Ansari possessed a Pakistani passport indicating the involvement of Islamabad in terrorist activities in India.

"Is this not evidence that Pakistan is sheltering terrorists? Why do such individuals go to Pakistan?" he asked. He complimented the role of the police officers and intelligence agencies



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, at an election rally in Bathinda on Sunday. — PTI

in establishing Ansari's role in the Kolkata attack.

Mr. Vajpayee sought to remind that Pakistani passports were recovered from the bodies of the terrorists whose attempt to kill Parliamentarians was aborted by the valiant staff. As

in the Kargil conflict, Pakistan refused to accept the bodies, he said.

Dismisses allegations

Mr. Vajpayee dismissed the allegations made by the Pakistan President, Pervez Musharraf, on the eve of the latter's visit to the U.S., that India was responsible for the disappearance of the *Wall Street Journal* reporter, Daniel Pearl.

During the visit of former U.S. President, Bill Clinton, to the country, Pakistan had tried to blame India for the massacre of Sikhs at Chhattisinghpura in Jammu and Kashmir. Such wild accusations could not be believed by anybody, as everybody knew who was behind such acts, he said.

Pakistan is yet to respond to the demand regarding the handing over of terrorists wanted by India. New Delhi favoured reviving talks with Pakistan, but this could not be unilateral and sought proper steps for creating a conducive atmosphere.

The Army deployment along the border would continue till Pakistan continued with abet-

ting terrorist activities against India, he said.

The international community had accepted the Indian point of view.

The attack on the World Trade Center (WTC) had made the U.S. realise the gravity of the activities of forces such as the Taliban. The world community now realises that terrorism knows no distance.

Advani justifies Govt. stand

SRINAGAR (Uttaranchal), FEB. 10. The Home Minister, L. K. Advani, today justified the Government's tough stand against terrorism and said India, which has been experiencing Pakistan-sponsored terrorism for two decades, was correct in declaring a war against the menace.

"If the U.S. can declare a war against terrorism after September 11 attacks on the World Trade Centre, why can't India, which is experiencing Pakistan-sponsored terrorism for the past 20 years, do the same?", Mr. Advani asked while addressing an election meeting here. — PTI

THE HINDU

Pak. must undo crisis of confidence: PM

By Our Staff Correspondent

DEHRA DUN, FEB. 7. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today urged Pakistan to undo the crisis of confidence between the two countries by acting as a true friend and paving the way for fruitful dialogue and cooperation.

"Pakistan was preparing for a war with us when I was in Lahore on a friendly mission. There have been incidents of such deceit many times and its mere wish to hold talks with us cannot be fulfilled till we are sure of Pakistan's intentions to end the proxy war in Kashmir. Kashmir has and will always be a part of India and no one can take it from us," Mr. Vajpayee said.

He wanted Pakistan to remember the bashing it got from the Indian forces in all the wars fought. "It would be better if they stopped sponsoring terrorists against India and began thinking of having good trade and other cooperative ties with us".

Addressing a BJP election rally at the Parade Grounds here, Mr. Vajpayee wanted the people to think and vote for the BJP which wanted to create the right infrastructure for the rapid development of Uttaranchal. The BJP knew the art of functioning peacefully with other parties — this has been proved by the NDA Government at the Centre. But the Congress, which ruled the nation for decades, "seemed to be living in the past".

The Prime Minister said it would be the task of the people and the next Government to develop Uttaranchal into a model tourism State where every visiting pilgrim spent a week or ten

days in its scenic locations. This would mean revenue generation in a big way. Education, information technology, horticulture and handicrafts should also be promoted to make Uttaranchal prosperous.

The Uttaranchal Chief Minister, Bhagat Singh Koshiary, said about 15000 jobs would be created in the information technology sector soon.

Terrorism, pertinent issue: Advani

RAJPURA (Punjab), FEB. 7. There will no compromise on India's resolve to stamp out terrorism, the Home Minister, L. K. Advani, said today, rejecting the Congress charge that the Bharatiya Janata Party was raising the bogey of terrorism during elections to the four State Assemblies. The issue was pertinent as the elections were being held in border States.

"The issue of terrorism is pertinent and security is the first step for establishing a 'suraj' (good governance)," Mr. Advani said at an election rally here in Patiala district.

Attacking the then Congress Government for not resolving the Kashmir issue after the Indo-Pak. war of 1971, he said "Shimla (in 1972) was a missed opportunity... in 1971, we had a glorious victory and that was an appropriate time to sort out the Kashmir issue." After the Shimla agreement, Pakistan had changed its strategy to wage a proxy war against India. — PTI

More reports on Page 9

Cong. attacks PM's remark

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 7. The Congress has reacted sharply to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's less-than-flattering reference to Sonia Gandhi as a "foreigner lady". During electioneering in Punjab on Wednesday, Mr. Vajpayee had spoken quite sarcastically about the Congress president.

In a statement, issued in the name of Digvijay Singh, senior-most among the Congress Chief Ministers, the party said the Prime Minister's remarks were in bad taste. "His remarks were, in fact, contrary to the high moral ideals that Mr. Vajpayee always preached. Ms. Gandhi, heading the 117-year-old Congress, is no longer a foreigner. She was as much an Indian as any member of the Prime Minister's party and certainly more patriotic," Mr. Singh said.

He also gently reminded the Prime Minister that he need not worry about the Congress' political future; if anything, said Mr. Singh, Mr. Vajpayee ought to be concerned about the fu-

ture of his own party which was about to suffer serious electoral setbacks in Uttar Pradesh, Punjab and Uttaranchal.

Unwilling to concede the BJP's claims to define the na-

Meant no disrespect: Vajpayee

NEW DELHI, FEB. 7. Under attack from the Congress for his remarks on Sonia Gandhi at an election rally in Punjab, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, tonight said he meant no disrespect to her and his criticism was "political and not personal."

Defending his references to Ms. Gandhi at the rally in Pathankot on Wednesday, Mr. Vajpayee said in a statement that "in referring to Sonia Gandhi as a 'videshi' in my speech, I meant no disrespect to her. On the contrary, my personal references to her were respectful." — PTI

tional interest and patriots, he defended Ms. Gandhi's reference to the so-called coffin scandal. Joining issue with the Prime Minister, he observed: "The coffin scandal was, perhaps, the most despicable thing that could have happened in independent India. It needs to be condemned roundly by all patriotic people and the guilty exposed and punished. This would raise the morale of the security forces and not demoralise them."

'PM must apologise'

Our Chandigarh Special Correspondent reports:

The Congress today sought an unqualified apology from Mr. Vajpayee for making the remarks against Ms. Gandhi. The demand has been made by the Congress general secretary, Ambika Soni, the Treasurer, Motilal Vora, and the president of the party's Punjab unit, Amarinder Singh. They said it did not behove a leader of Mr. Vajpayee's stature to make statements which slighted entire womanhood.

THE HINDU

8 FEB 2002

Pak. will not get Kashmir: PM

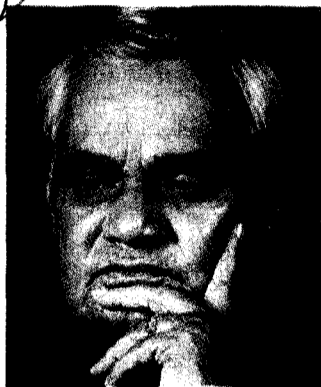
By Sarabjit Pandher

FEROZEPUR, FEB. 6. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, asserted today that deployment of troops along the border would continue as long as Pakistan continued sponsoring terrorism. India favoured a dialogue to resolve the Kashmir issue peacefully and it was the responsibility of Pakistan to build mutual trust and a congenial atmosphere for talks, he said.

Mr. Vajpayee was in this border town to address an election rally. Though the model code of conduct prevented him from making announcements, he was aware of the plight of the people in the border villages and assured all possible help by the Government. He was referring to the hardship faced by farmers, whose fields had become inaccessible due to laying of mines, following Army deployment.

The Prime Minister said deployment was to defend the borders and uphold the sovereignty of the country. India had no intention to attack Pakistan, he added, asserting that the soldiers would return to the barracks the day Pakistan stopped sponsoring terrorist activities in India.

Warning of a conspiracy to disintegrate India and break



Kashmir into pieces, Mr. Vajpayee said Pakistan would not be able to get Kashmir by observing "Kashmir Day" as it did this past Tuesday. Referring to the Gen. Musharraf's "obsession" with the Kashmir issue, he stressed the need to talk about poverty, unemployment, trade and cultural ties as well.

Mr. Vajpayee said that, continuing with democratic traditions, elections would be held in Jammu and Kashmir shortly, while the right to franchise was not available to the people in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK). In India diverse opinions and cultural, linguistic and religious identities co-existed whereas, in Pakistan, every change in government meant that leaders of other parties had to either flee or face prolonged detention in jail.

The Prime Minister came down heavily on the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, for making "irresponsible statements". The Government appreciated criticism of policies or decisions but political leaders should avoid actions which might affect the morale of the armed forces, he said.

The Congress, Mr. Vajpayee said, must be patient and stop continuing with its tactics of "divide and rule" which were responsible for the problems faced by the country. He said there was no hope for the Congress to return to power in the near future.

Mr. Vajpayee congratulated the Punjab Chief Minister, Parkash Singh Badal, on completion of five years in office by the Akali-BJP alliance Government.

Appealing to the people to support the Akali-BJP candidates in the coming elections, Mr. Vajpayee assured all help for Punjab.

Mr. Badal asked the people to compare the attitude of the present Union Government with that of the previous Congress regimes which had "destroyed" the State through terrorism and violence. He criticised the statements of Ms. Gandhi and asked her to list a single project which her party had given to Punjab during its 45-year rule at the Centre.

THE HINDU

7 FEB 2002

Emergency-like situation: PM

HT Correspondent
Patna, February 3

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee said today that with India and Pakistan locked in a border standoff, an undeclared Emergency-like situation was prevailing in the country. The Opposition, therefore, must not rake up contentious security-related issues. It was important that the nation projected a united face to the world, he said.

"An undeclared Emergency-like situation prevails in the country with India and Pakistan engaging in an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation on the border....I urge the Opposition parties not to raise contentious security-related issues, as it adversely affects the morale of the armed forces," he said.

The PM was addressing a public rally at the Gandhi Maidan here after inaugurating three railway projects through video conferencing

Reacting to Opposition accusations of financial irregularities in defence purchases, he said petty politics must not come in the way of ensuring national security.

"Emergency situations demand emergency measures.... We cannot keep haggling infinitely over prices of military equipment when the country's sovereignty is at stake," the Prime Minister said. Ruling out talks with Pakistan, he said no discussion would bear fruit unless Islamabad stopped its export of terror.

The Hazaribag encounter deaths of Pakistanis responsible for the attack in front of Kolkata's American Center was ample proof that despite joining the in-

DEFENCE TO GET ALL THE MONEY IT NEEDS

FINANCE MINISTER Yashwant Sinha has said India's armed forces will get "whatever it takes to safeguard and protect the country". There will be no compromise when it comes to Budget allocations for defence, Sinha told a Press conference in New York on Saturday. "Like any other country in the world, India would not compromise with its security concerns. Therefore, whatever it takes to safeguard and protect India will be unhesitatingly provided for the defence."

HTC, New York

ternational coalition against terrorism Pakistan was still funding and training terrorists, he said.

"We have fought three wars, but Pakistan has still not realised that when it could not keep the people of East Bengal, now Bangladesh, despite the majority Muslim population there, it is unreasonable for it to stake claim on Jammu and Kashmir where there are majority Hindu and Buddhist populations in the Jammu and Ladakh regions", he said.

Charging Pakistan with treachery, he said, "I had gone to Lahore with a message of goodwill, but we got Kargil in return."

The Prime Minister recalled that when the Shimla Accord was being signed, he, in the Opposition at that time, had suggested that India pressure Pakistan to

hand over PoK in return for the 90,000 Pakistani prisoners of war (PoW).

"We had in our possession vast Pakistani territory and their 90,000 PoWs. We could have sought and might even have got PoK in exchange for them. But the Indian Government of the time paid no heed," he said.

"My Government wants to bring in peace and development to J & K but Pakistan is fomenting trouble there in the name of religion."

Referring to his much-talked about handshake with General Musharraf during the Kathmandu Saarc Summit, the PM said, "I told him we have shaken hands in the past; what we want is a meeting of hearts". India's consistent stand against terrorism had now been acknowledged by the world. "We have earned global respect as a nation committed to crushing terrorism in all its manifestations across the world," he said.

Referring to the oft-repeated Pakistani charge that India is the big bully of the region, he said, "We have very cordial relations with Nepal, Bhutan, Sri Lanka and other neighbours."

He ruled out any possibility of converting the Line of Control (LoC) into international border and said the return of Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK) would top the agenda in any resumed dialogue with Pakistan on Kashmir.

He also rejected Rabri Devi's demand for special status to Bihar, but promised that the Centre would provide a special financial package to let the State tide over revenue losses due to its bifurcation.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

4 FEB 2002

Diplomacy on the menu at PM's New Year lunch

Saurabh Shukla
New Delhi, January 1

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee spent the first day of the New Year in the company of his predecessors and some old friends.

The message conveyed at the end of the lunch meet was that the Government has adopted a policy of "cautious optimism" on its relations with Pakistan.

The lunch was catered by a five star hotel and designed by the foodie PM himself. The venue was Vajpayee's Race Course Road residence.

The guest list included President R Venkatraman, former Prime Ministers VP Singh, IK Gujral, Chandra Shekhar and PV Narasimha Rao and the Prime Minister's Principal Secretary and National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra. The only other Cabinet member present was Home Minister LK Advani.

"It was an informal lunch and we had a good interaction with the Prime Minister who appraised about the present situation and Pakistan's role in abetting terrorism and that of the US following the attack on Parliament," Gujral said.



PTI PHOTO
Prime Minister Vajpayee at his residence in Delhi on Tuesday.

"At the end of the meeting my reading is that he gave us an impression of a cautious optimism and that the worst can be avoided," Gujral said.

The Prime Minister's message was clear: he did not want war. Vajpayee also emphasised that he expected concrete measures from across the border. He won full support for his diplomatic initiatives following the attack on the Parliament House.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

- 2 JAN 2002

J. Prime Minister

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 2, 2002

INDIA'S ANTI-TERROR AGENDA

HD-10
2/1

THE PRIME MINISTER, Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee, has clearly sought to sensitise the people of India to the challenges of fighting the external terrorists. In sounding a wake-up call for this purpose by ruminating on the state of India's tenuous relationship with Pakistan, he appears to have been guided by an urge to do some plain-speaking. If his "New Year Reflections" on India's anti-terror agenda are short on specific steps, that is only to be expected from an exercise of this sort. The sheer complexity of the terrorist threat to India might have also compounded his task. Yet, discernible through the labyrinth of ideas is a thrust for peace that Mr. Vajpayee seems inclined to portray as his primary policy preference in dealing with Pakistan at this critical juncture. Addressing the Indian people directly, he spoke of his administration's "current multi-pronged strategy" to "defend ourselves" by "forcing Pakistan to stop cross-border terrorism". By avoiding a public discourse on the option of a military response to Pakistan-encouraged terrorism, the Prime Minister appears to have wanted to reassure both India and the larger global community about New Delhi's present priorities. The Vajpayee administration will therefore do well to build its current anti-terror strategy on the foundations of the latest all-party consensus to work together.

Quite unusually, the Prime Minister has also tried his hand at some public diplomacy directed at the "people of Pakistan and all the right thinking persons in its ruling establishment". His purpose was to urge them to recognise that it was in their own national interest to stop "their Government's appeasement of terrorism" that might be designed to destabilise India. He served a pointed message to the "leadership of Pakistan" in the context of its "commendable decision to join the international coalition against terrorism in Afghanistan". India, according to Mr. Vajpayee,

would be "willing to walk more than half the distance" to "resolve, through dialogue" all issues including the "contentious" one concerning Jammu and Kashmir. The rider in his reckoning was that Pakistan should "shed" its "anti-India mentality". Now, it requires no clairvoyance to know that a conditionality of psychological proportions will be almost impossible to verify as a tangible catalyst of dialogue. Yet, the broad sweep of a New Year message is not the right medium for a precise diplomatic formulation for reviving the India-Pakistan parleys.

On the whole, Mr. Vajpayee's political objective is to try and convince the leaders and people of Pakistan that there can be "no double standards on terrorism". The central point, in his view, is that Pakistan, which decided to sever its links with the Taliban-Osama axis of terror despite the perceived tactical advantages, should think of jettisoning terror as a strategy in relation to India. However, it is in New Delhi's interest to let the Pakistanis act autonomously. In any case, the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, seems to be pressuring and persuading his Pakistani counterpart, Gen. Pervez Musharraf. At one level, Mr. Bush has sternly asked the Pakistani leader to "eliminate" the terrorist groups which are hostile to India as also to the very idea of any rapprochement between Islamabad and New Delhi. At another level, the U.S. President has also praised Gen. Musharraf for arresting some key purveyors of terror. On a related plane, New Delhi too should act with a deep understanding of the present ground realities in Pakistan while asking Gen. Musharraf to clean up the anti-India terrorists. While this does not mean that India should soft-pedal its anti-terror drive, the need is for the kind of spirit that the External Affairs Minister, Mr. Jaswant Singh, has displayed in welcoming some of Gen. Musharraf's recent steps.

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Vajpayee talks peace amidst words of war

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Dec. 31. — As an "eventful" year was about to end, the Prime Minister said India didn't want war and was "willing to walk more than half the distance" with Pakistan to "resolve all contentious bilateral issues, including J&K, through dialogue." But Pakistan will have to "shed its anti-India mentality" and stop cross-border terrorism.

In his New Year message to "my dear fellow countrymen," Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said: "We leave an eventful year behind us, a year of many trials and tribulations," but with a hope for peace.

"As we begin our journey in 2002, it's time for all of us together to resolve that we shall grow further in fortitude. Let us pledge that our motherland shall emerge stronger — in national security, which is of supreme importance, and in development that better the life of those of our brethren who continue to be victims of poverty and neglect."

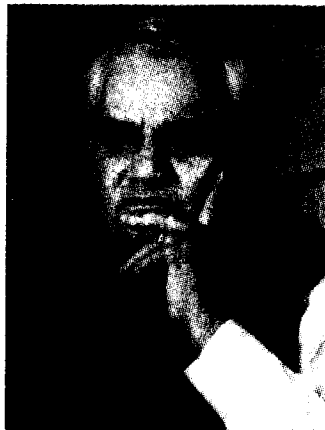
But the focus of his message was on terrorism and his determination to remove it.

"Is this a dream? Yes. Is it an impossible dream? No, it isn't. Nations achieve greatness when their people learn to dream lofty dreams and to strive hard — and make sacrifices, when necessary — to realise those dreams, without getting disheartened by the difficulties along the way." Though he urged the people to be "prepared for any eventuality," the tenor of his musings was reflective of his confidence in handling the terrorist menace from across the border.

"The world has come to look at India with renewed respect, recognising a strong and prosperous global power in the making. I've no doubt that India in the foreseeable future will begin to play a decisive role in global affairs, not to advance any parti-

san agenda at the expense of others but to protect and promote mankind's most cherished universal ideals."

Tracing the roots of the Indo-Pak conflict, he said: "It often happens that the road to the future is rendered difficult by roadblocks placed by the past. One such roadblock for us, indeed the biggest, is Pakistan's consistent and continuing anti-India policy, beginning with its refusal to accept the constitutionally valida-



Mr Vajpayee: 'We are willing to walk more than half the distance.'

— The Statesman

ted and democratically endorsed accession of J&K to India.

"For a long time, the rulers in Islamabad relied on military confrontation, as exemplified by the wars they waged in 1948, 1965, and 1971, to settle this issue in their favour. After failing abjectly in their endeavour, the anti-India forces in Pakistan decided to foment terrorism and religious extremism as the principal means to instigate separatism in our country. I must say they are nursing a dangerous delusion. What they couldn't achieve through open military aggression, they never will achieve through cross-border terrorism.

"They failed miserably in their

evil designs in Punjab. Terrorism bled Punjab; but, in the end, it fled Punjab. It could not dent Hindu-Sikh unity. Similarly, the terrorists and their mentors are doomed to fail in Jammu & Kashmir, too.

"However, the very certainty of failure is driving them, in desperation, to embrace a more dangerous agenda. The terrorist attack on our Parliament on 13 December has shown beyond a shadow of doubt that the anti-India forces in Pakistan are prepared to wreak any havoc on our soil. It was an attack on our sovereignty, on our national self-respect, and it was a challenge to our democratic system. Although India has been a victim of cross-border terrorism for the past nearly two decades and has lost tens of thousands of innocent men and women and security forces, the outrage of 13 December has breached the limit of the nation's endurance."

Calling the attack "diabolical," Mr Vajpayee warned "that more such terrorist strikes can take place. The only way to defend against such attacks is by forcing Pakistan to stop cross-border terrorism. And this precisely is the objective we've set ourselves in our current multi-pronged strategy," consisting of "many political and diplomatic steps."

"India doesn't want war. India has never been an aggressor... But we've a sovereign right to defend ourselves against cross-border terrorism, which is a proxy war that is already thrust on us. Pakistan will be solely responsible for the consequences of encouraging terrorism against India and, when expedient, turning a blind eye to terrorist groups with trans-national linkages operating from its soil."

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