

BJP creating atmosphere of fear: Sonia

By Manas Dasgupta

HADAD (GUJARAT), DEC. 3. The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, today urged the Centre to take preventive steps when it was aware of the possibility of more terrorist attacks on temples. Apparently commenting on the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's speech to this effect at a public meeting in Solan, Himachal Pradesh, Ms. Gandhi reiterated her party's total cooperation in meeting the terrorist threat and wondered what was preventing the Government from taking the necessary steps.

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Launching her party's campaign for the Gujarat Assembly elections, Ms. Gandhi attacked the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, for raising "non-issues" to distract people's attention from the BJP Government's "dismal failures" on all fronts. Without referring to Godhra or the post-Godhra riots, she said that when the Congress was talking of development and progress, the BJP was raising such irrelevant "issues".

Describing the December 12 elections as "very important," she said it would be a choice between "development and destruction". The Congress want-



The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, at a campaign rally in Hadad village, 175 km from Ahmedabad, on Tuesday. — AFP

and darshan" at the famous Ambaji temple and later addressed public meetings at Hadad, Surendranagar and Vadodara. She launched her campaign from Hadad, a small town in the tribal belt of north Gujarat, to "woo back" the tribal votes as the party is doubtful of their traditional support this time.

The party collected a large crowd despite the meeting being held in a remote corner and the people in their colourful dresses were very responsive and cheered Ms. Gandhi repeatedly.

Without referring to Mr. Modi by name, Ms. Gandhi criticised his repeated references to Pakistan and terrorism and said the entire country was united behind the Government in fighting terrorism. "Pakistan and terrorism are not the State Government's concern but that of the Centre, and the Congress was always cooperating with the Government in fighting against terrorism."

The Congress had sacrificed many of its leaders in fighting terrorism and did not have to take lessons from the BJP about terrorism and patriotism, she said.

ed to create an "atmosphere of development, peace and prosperity". "I want to see smiles on the faces of every Gujarati," while the BJP was only interested in "creating an atmosphere of fear and destruction," she charged.

Ms. Gandhi began her Gujarat trip this morning with "puja

Bid on VHP leader's life

By Our Special Correspondent

AHMEDABAD, DEC. 3. The Gujarat Vishwa Hindu Parishad general-secretary, Jaideep Patel, was shot at and injured when two youths on a motorcycle fired at his car him near a traffic junction in the crowded Naroda locality here this evening. He has been admitted to hospital with a bullet lodged in his throat.

PTI reports from New Delhi:

The VHP working president, Ashok Singhal today alleged that the attack on Mr. Patel was the result of a "deep-rooted conspiracy of jihadi forces" to silence Hindus.

4 DEC 2002

THE HINDU

Cong CMs focus on governance

Swaraj Thapa

NEW DELHI 11 NOVEMBER

SEEKING to patent the slogan of good governance, Congress chief ministers have taken a slew of decisions that include slashing old jobs and putting a freeze on new ones, disinvesting state PSUs and upholding food subsidy for the poor.

At the recently concluded two-day Mount Abu conclave, party chief ministers competed with each other to impress Sonia Gandhi with the reformist measures they had taken in their states. Maharashtra chief minister Vilasrao Deshmukh's claim of cutting 30,000 jobs was rivalled by the Madhya Pradesh chief minister who said he would not be filling up 65,000 posts when their incumbents retired. Kerala chief minister A.K. Antony, on the other hand, said creation of new posts had been put on abeyance.

The disinvestment story was forwarded by Punjab chief minister Amarinder Singh, who, contrary to the party line, said he had put five profit-making state PSUs up for sale. Even tiny Nagaland projected itself as the only state in the North East to have put up a sick PSU — Nagaland Sugar Mills — up for sale.

The political import of the meet, in other words, clearly demonstrated that the Congress was employing an unusual approach of mixing conventional politics with boardroom tactics.

It underlined another important factor — that the Congress was making a subtle shift in its election plank — from stability to good governance. It was apparent that the party was no longer giving much premium to its decades old "stability" plank.

"There is always an underlying political message in such meetings. Even if there was no politicking and only serious discussions were held in a highly systemised form," party leader Jaipal Reddy said. The next such chief ministers conference is expected to take place four months



Sonia

from now, indicating that Sonia and her managers clearly think this strategy is a success.

Congress managers believe that this recipe of good governance can even counter the anti-establishment factor in the states to a large extent.

Admitting that it was a part of the campaign, a senior party functionary said: "It gives us a good platform to stand on. It has helped to counter the growing disillusionment among the people about politicians." There is, however, some amount of scepticism in party circles whether "good governance" will actually yield dividends, given its abstract nature and the conflict it logically shares with populism.

However, although the party has had four such meets now, it was only the last conclave at Guwahati where the theme of good governance really got highlighted.

Anti-divestment cry still irks BJP

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 11 NOVEMBER

THE Vajpayee government's pro-disinvestment zeal may have ebbed, but the BJP is yet to stop making a dig at the Opposition for criticising the sale of PSUs. Notwithstanding the growing anti-disinvestment decision within the Vajpayee government and the NDA, BJP chief M. Venkaiah Naidu on Monday flayed his Congress counterpart Sonia Gandhi for opposing the sale of profit-making PSUs. Mr Naidu termed Ms Gandhi's remarks on the sale of profit-making government units in the Congress-controlled states as inconsistent.

Interestingly, the remarks of Ms Gandhi are also in line with the position taken by George Fernandes' Samata Party, an NDA constituent. The resolution adopted by the Samata's Rajkot national council meet called for a halt to the sale of profit-making PSUs. Objections by NDA constituents, similar to those raised by Ms Gandhi at Mount Abu, have stalled any action on the disinvestment front. This was

due to the contrived reservations that had put a spanner in the sale of HPCL and BPCL.

While Mr Naidu's remarks will suggest a continuing commitment to the disinvestment agenda, the government, in fact, doesn't seem keen to grasp what has become a political nettle.



Naidu

In the case of the strategic sale of HPCL and BPCL, for instance, the government was reluctant to move even though all the protagonists maintained that they have no objections. Hopes of the sale going through before the end of the three-month

CCD-imposed freeze, were revived last month when Prime Minister A B Vajpayee defended the programme on October 3. They have since faded with the Prime Minister being reluctant to follow through his declaration and overrule the disputants. The feeble optimism that the approaching session of Parliament might spur the government into some quick action was also belied despite that the circles close to the Prime Minister and other decision-makers keep maintaining that their interest in the disinvestment agenda remains unfinished.

Country looking to Cong: Sonia to CMs

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
MOUNT ABU, NOVEMBER 8

GUJARAT and J-K weighed heavily on Congress president Sonia Gandhi's mind this morning as she kicked off the Chief Ministers' conclave, giving a loud call for replacement of the NDA Government by Congress rule that would "take the country from stagnation to growth, from strife to harmony and from darkness to light."

"The BJP-led NDA Government has just completed three years in office at the Centre. The country has seen through the hollow claims made by the coalition which has been a comprehensive failure," she said.

Though unsparing of the NDA rule, she began her opening remarks with J-K and Gujarat, indicating where her priorities lie in the days to come. In fact, point out observers, her eagerness betrayed what most in the meet would not admit in front of a camera: That the major — but unstated — objective of the conclave was to sharpen the Congress' political objective now that the going was good. All else, including the need for economic and administrative reforms, came next even though much would be talked about these too.

In J-K, Sonia began, the Congress was determined to ensure that the common minimum programme was implemented in letter and spirit to secure a new future for its people. "I believe," she added, "that we have reached a decisive turning point in J-K and with sensitive and humane governance, with purposeful and decisive governance, we will be able to end the tragic cycle of violence that has wrought such havoc in all regions of the state."

The electoral victory in J-K was reflected in Sonia's "confidence" in the people of Gujarat, whom she held

Tiwari avoids conclave, escapes embarrassment

■ DEHRA DUN: Uttaranchal CM Narain Dutt Tiwari has escaped some bitter questions about the functioning of his government by excusing himself from the Congress CMs' conclave. He stayed back due to prior engagements related to the state's anniversary on Saturday. Party sources mentioned the filing of nomination papers for the lone Rajya Sabha seat by state Congress president Harish Rawat as another reason for the Chief Minister's absence.

This has saved Tiwari from having to answer tough questions about governance. In the past seven months, his government has been rocked by scandals. The CM had to cancel the selection of patwaris in Pauri Garhwal district. A district magistrate was suspended after allegations of irregularities and corruption were proved in a government inquiry. Fingers were raised at state Revenue Minister Harak Singh Rawat, who belongs to the district. — *ENS*

would come out decisively in favour of the Gujarat of Mahatma Gandhi and Sardar Patel irrespective of their caste, religion and economic status. "We are going to Gujarat with one over-riding message," she told the CMs, "it's the message of religious tolerance and understanding, of social reconciliation and amity. The enterprising people of Gujarat have made the state an economic success story. That economic success can only be sustained if bigotry is defeated."

Beside party CMs, Sonia's audience included top party leaders like Ambika Soni, Kamal Nath, Motilal Vora, Pranab Mukherjee, Shivraj Patil, Oscar Fernandes, Vallayar Ravi, Sushil Kumar Shinde, Mukul Wasnik, Margaret



Sonia Gandhi at the Congress CMs' conclave at Mount Abu on Friday. PTI

Alva and Salman Khurshid. Empowerment of Dalits, women and weaker sections remained top priority item for the Congress, Sonia told partymen.

As she held, the primary focus of such meetings was the effective implementation of programmes for the weaker sections of society. "The ghastly lynching (of Dalits) that took place a few weeks back in Haryana is shameful. We have been once again made painfully aware of the prejudices that still exist against Dalits even in relatively more prosperous parts of the country."

Beginning the day with the review of the six-month-old Guwahati resolve, Sonia asked the CMs to be more self-critical and introspective. Repeated digs at the Centre marked her speech. Like

when she disclosed the "disquiet" she felt when she saw the progressive weakening of the Centre. But then, she was quick to add that "India needs a strong Centre, strong states and strong panchayats and nagarpalikas, all supporting and driving strength from each other."

In the end, Sonia reminded the partymen that the country was looking to the Congress to provide a Government that would govern and an administration that would administer. And then she spelt out the party's final aim to be achieved by 2004 general elections: "We have to consolidate, retaining power in the state where we are in the office and ousting the BJP and its allies in states where we are in the Opposition."

Check Cong track-record first: BJP tells Sonia

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 8

THE BJP today asked Sonia Gandhi to check the track-record of Congress chief ministers rather than use the Mount Abu conclave to criticise the NDA.

Party spokesman Arun Jaitley listed the failures of Congress chief ministers. He said that Ashok Gehlot, the host at the conclave, should account for the starvation deaths in Rajasthan. Digvijay Singh should explain the 22 starvation deaths in Madhya Pradesh besides the underdevelopment in the state.

Jaitley said Karnataka Chief Minister S.M. Krishna had to cut a sorry figure before the Supreme Court and his people on the Cauvery dispute. While the A.K. Antony government in Kerala has no money to pay salaries, the Maharashtra coalition is facing internal contradictions. "We would have appreciated if she (Sonia) had pulled up her chief ministers," he said.



OPEN TO SEAT ADJUSTMENTS: KAMAL NATH

H10-1 Cong. not for 7/11 alliance in Gujarat

By Anita Joshua

NEW DELHI, NOV. 6. Despite pressure from various quarters to put up a secular platform against the BJP in the Gujarat Assembly elections, the mood within the Congress is not in favour of an electoral alliance.

Of the view that the battle of the ballot in the State is primarily between the Congress and the BJP, "seat adjustments" with like-minded parties is the maximum the Congress is willing to yield by way of a pre-election understanding.

Even as the screening committee of the Congress sat for a greater part of today to draw up the 'penultimate' shortlist of candidates for the Assembly elections, the All-India Congress Committee general secretary in-charge of Gujarat, Kamal Nath, ruled out any alliance, but said the party was not averse to seat adjustments with like-minded parties.

This, Congress sources maintain, is one issue on which the Gujarat unit — riddled with groupism — is unanimous about. And, though open to seat adjustments, indications are that the Congress will not yield too many seats.

As the Congress sees it, the Lok Janashakti Party of Ramvilas Paswan can be conceded a couple of seats and the CPI(M) its lone pocket-borough.

Even the Nationalist Congress Party's assertion of having a hold over south Gujarat is challenged by the Congress.

"We do not have a transferable vote; so even if we give up a seat to another party, it will be lost in the absence of a political apparatus to fight the elections," explained a senior Congress leader, arguing that many of the like-minded parties which claim to have a base in Gujarat do not have the wherewithal needed to romp home.

Also, according to the Pradesh Congress Committee president, Shankarsinh Waghela, given the ground realities in the State and winnability being the prime concern, like-minded parties ought to throw in their lot with the Congress without hoping for seats if they are serious about defeating the BJP.

With the Congress due to launch its election campaign on November 11, preparations have begun in right earnest and today's screening committee meeting was one in a series of such election-related exercises being undertaken by the party high command.

At the meeting — attended among others by Pranab Mukherjee, P.M. Sayeed and the Gujarat Congress Legislature Party leader, Amarsinh Choudhary, besides Kamal Nath and Mr. Waghela — the screening committee went through a list of 700 names referred to it by the pradesh election committee from the 2,000-odd applications it had received.

The shortlist prepared by the screening committee will then be put before the AICC's central election committee which is

due to meet on November 10, a day before the Congress kicks off its campaign for the crucial polls.

Samata to go it alone

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, NOV. 6. The Samata Party will go it alone in the coming Assembly elections in Gujarat next month.

Though a BJP ally in the NDA coalition at the Centre, the Samata is distancing itself from the BJP in Gujarat and will contest about 50 out of 182 seats in the State that witnessed riots and violence earlier this year.

"We will have no alliance with the BJP in Gujarat. There will be no common manifesto or programme. We will have our own manifesto and they will have their own," the party spokesman, Shambu Shrivastava, told mediapersons here today.

There was a proposal for seat adjustments with the BJP and the Samata Party chief, George Fernandes, had conveyed it to the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, who sought a week's time to decide upon it.

However, more than a week had passed since then and there had been no communication from the other side, Mr. Shrivastava said. His party had started drafting its election manifesto.

Sonia snubs Mulayam

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Oct. 30. — The Congress high command today turned down Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav's request for using the "services" of Congress MLAs in Uttar Pradesh to reinforce the SP's attempt to dislodge the Mayawati government. Sources in the Congress said the party's refusal to come to Mr Yadav's aid after keeping him waiting for many days "is its way of hitting back at him for having embarrassed the party and Mrs Gandhi during her prime-ministerial bid in 1999".

AICC spokesman Mr Anand Sharma made three observations at a press meet which virtually amounted to the party high command rejecting Mr Yadav's SoS. Mr Sharma said the Congress "does not think" the prevailing situation "warrants any proactive role from the party". He said party workers in the state "disapprove" of the Congress "engineering splits in other parties" and that as of now, Mrs Sonia Gandhi "has not called" any CWC meet on this.

Mr Sharma said the Congress will think of

its course of action in UP only when the "government collapses due to its contradictions". He said the Congress believed in the need for "consolidation of secular forces", but clarified that UP does not warrant "hypothetical observations".

The think tank also feels the party's top priority in UP should be to find ways to revive its base by exploiting the "failure" of the BJP, BSP and SP to provide a stable government. They also feel entering into an alliance in UP will not help the party.

For the Congress, UP has strategic importance in terms of its calculations for the Centre. Mrs Gandhi's frequent and whirlwind trips to various parts of the state with the slogan of "reviving" the party were with a firm eye on the next Lok Sabha polls. The Congress has lined up a series of agitational programmes against the state government's policies.

A 19-day *padayatra* starts tomorrow to protest the diversion of land allotted for a memorial to Indira Gandhi to construct Ambedkar Park.

BJP rejects rebels' demand, page 4

PDP-Cong offers balm for Valley

Anil Anand & Rashid Ahmad
New Delhi/Srinagar, Oct 27

THE PROPOSED Congress-PDP Government in Jammu and Kashmir will disband the dreaded Special Operations Group by merging it with the State police, free militants against whom there are no specific charges and will stop the use of Pota in the State.

The two parties today pledged to run their coalition Government on the basis of a 30-point Common Minimum Programme (CMP) that took into account each other's pre-poll pledges without upsetting one another's political identity. The two parties also promised to try and rehabilitate the militants and their families, work towards the return of Kashmiri Pandits to the Valley and create jobs.

The CMP was released at a joint News conference by Congress leader Manmohan Singh, PDP chief Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and PCC chief Ghulam Nabi Azad. The CMP pledged that the new Government would fully cooperate with the Centre in combating cross-border militancy. The Centre would

PEACE PACKAGE

Special Operations Group: To be relocated to the regular police establishment

Pota: Will not be implemented

Rights violations: Cases to be probed and the guilty punished

Talks: Centre asked to hold unconditional dialogue with new MLAs and citizens' teams

Former militants: Special schemes for those who shun violence

Terrorism: Government to fully cooperate with the Centre to combat cross-border militancy

be requested to initiate unconditional dialogue with the new MLAs and citizens' teams for restoration of peace. The two parties will stake claim to power on Tuesday.

The CMP promises that all cases of detainees held without trial for long periods will be reviewed and custody deaths and rights violations investigated.

The PDP is the gainer from the more Kashmir-centric CMP.

Barring a few passing references to the need to address regional tension in the State by ensuring equitable distribution of funds, the CMP doesn't hold any promise to address the root cause of the regional distrust between Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh.

The Mufti has ensured that the Government's priorities are rehabilitation of former militants, providing succour to the wards of deceased militants and a review of draconian laws. The Congress wasn't opposed to these, but hadn't earlier seen them as the thrust areas.

The Congress has ensured an adequate share of political power for Jammu. It has secured the posts of Deputy Chief Minister, Speaker and chairman of the co-ordination committee.

Yet all this failed to prevent a short-lived revolt by some Congress MLAs today. Angry at the high command's decision to gift Mufti the top job, two Congress MLAs, Taj Mohiuddin and Mohammad Shafi Bhat, declared that they would form a Government of their own with the National Conference's support. They fell back in line after a phone call from Sonia Gandhi.

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

J&K: SONIA TO ANNOUNCE DECISION SHORTLY

Cong. may go it alone

By Anita Joshua

NEW DELHI, OCT. 22. Though a formal announcement has been kept in abeyance, the Congress leadership is said to have decided to stake its claim to form a government in Jammu and Kashmir, possibly in the next couple of days.

Briefing mediapersons after a three-hour meeting of senior leaders at 10 Janpath here this evening, the leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Manmohan Singh, said a "decision had been taken on government-formation in J&K", but refused to disclose it on the plea that it would be announced "shortly" by the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi. He was equally non-committal on the question

of whether or not the PDP would be part of the government.

Dr. Singh was sent by Ms. Gandhi to Srinagar over the past weekend to talk to the People's Democratic Party (PDP) president, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, in the hope of putting up a Congress-PDP government.

Most of the leaders who participated in the consultations made themselves scarce after the meeting. Party sources said the decision to delay the announcement was a last-ditch effort to win over the Mufti before the Congress formally stake its claim to form the government with the support of the 19 independent MLAs who have supported a coalition led by the Congress.

The core group of Dr. Singh, Arjun Singh, Ambika Soni and the Jammu and Kashmir Pradesh Congress Committee president, Ghulam Nabi Azad, is expected to meet Ms. Gandhi tomorrow morning to discuss the possible PDP reaction to the Congress move.

At today's meeting — convened after the 'Manmohan mission' failed to break the Congress-PDP stalemate over government formation — Ms. Gandhi is said to have sought the views of those present. Though Dr. Singh said there was no difference of opinion, some felt that the Congress ought to proceed slowly while others maintained that the party should stake its claim as soon as possible.

Ms. Gandhi apparently asked Mr. Azad whether he was confident of winning the vote of confidence. Mr. Azad's answer was a confident "yes"

Our demands reasonable: Azad

PTI reports: Earlier in the day, Mr. Azad said the Congress' demands were reasonable. It had also suggested that the post of the Chief Minister be rotated, and the six-year term be split between the Congress and the PDP. "But the PDP doesn't agree to the suggestion. They want the post for six years."

Mr. Azad said the National Conference was the single-largest party in the 87-member Jammu and Kashmir Assembly but it had not come forward to form the government. The Congress, with 20 seats, was second and had the support of independents. As for fresh pleas by the PDP for more negotiations, Mr. Azad said "we already had a number of meetings. We have to decide whether we would continue to have more such meetings or just say goodbye."

The PDP, meanwhile, showed no signs of relenting on its claim for Chief Ministership and indicated that it was even prepared to sit in the Opposition, a report from Srinagar said.

The party vice-president, Muzaffar Baig, said any Congress-led Government in the State without the presence of his party would be "unstable." Both the parties needed each other to provide a "stable and responsive" government. "Our efforts will be to continue talks to form a stable government in cooperation with the Congress and I hope the door is not closed by the Congress (on talks with PDP) because it is a larger party."

SOG stops operations?

By Shujaat Bukhari

SRINAGAR, OCT. 22. The political stand-off in Jammu and Kashmir has put on hold many things but the most significant is the stopping of operations against militants by the J&K Police's elite Special Operations Group (SOG), which became a leading issue in the just-concluded elections.

Top officials refused to comment saying "we do not want to talk on issues which have become political". "Normal policing goes on against criminals", said the Director-General of Police, Ashok Suri.

Whether the demand of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) that the SOG be disbanded for "it has committed atrocities against the people" is met or not the rank and file of the SOG have started "fulfilling their (PDP) promise to the people" on their own. In the last 10 days the SOG, also known as Special Task Force (STF), has stopped operations against the militants particularly in Kashmir, reliable sources told *The Hindu*.

The decision not to conduct operations, for which no formal orders have come from any

level in the department, is seen as a reaction to the campaign against the force.

Middle-rung officials in the SOG admit that the operations have been suspended in view of what they say "is filth and dirt being thrown against the force." The SOG has broken the back of militancy and "we have sacrificed 600 officials adding to the numbers of orphans and widows", said officials. Wrongs had of course been done by certain officials but "that does not make the whole force untouchable". Security experts believe that sending the SOG back to the barracks would prove dangerous.

The PDP which has the SOG on top of its agenda wants to fulfil its promises. "It is our commitment to disband the force and absorb it in police. It has committed atrocities on the people", says the PDP vice-president, Mehbooba Mufti. She used to call it a "symbol of state terror".

The SOG was introduced in 1994 with the special task of breaking the militant network. It is still small in numbers with less than 1,000 personnel operating in 12 of the 14 districts in the State.

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MANMOHAN-MUFTI COALITION TALKS FAIL

Sonia to decide J&K future

CL Manoj and H Bula Devi in New Delhi

Oct. 21. — The last-ditch effort for a Congress-PDP patch-up has failed with Dr Manmohan Singh and Mufti Mohammed Sayeed sticking to their parties' claim for the chief ministership. The Congress high command will take a final decision tomorrow on whether to continue with more "peace talks" or form a government through "other means".

After Dr Singh briefed Mrs Sonia Gandhi tonight along with the CLP leader, Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, the possibility of the Congress trying to install a government, even through a 'poaching operation,' looks likely. Mrs Gandhi has been trying to avoid this option for the last two days.

Mr Azad said Dr Singh had offered Mufti three options — Ms Mehbooba Mufti becoming the deputy chief minister, Mufti himself heading a coordination committee of the coalition partners or both the Congress and PDP sharing the chief ministership on an alternative basis. But Mufti rejected these proposals and stuck to his claim for the chief ministership saying the PDP represented the Valley.

"How can he say so? Out of 40 seats in the Valley he has won only 16 seats, and even the NC has won more seats than PDP. The Congress has its MLAs from the Valley, Jammu region and Ladakh therefore we represent the state from all regions. Moreover out of 20 legislators, 17 Independent MLAs are clear that they will support the coalition government only if it is headed by the Congress. The Congress is the

largest party, followed by the Independents and the PDP is only the third largest party".

Dr Singh said Mrs Gandhi will hold a meeting with senior leaders tomorrow where the whole situation will be reviewed. Mr Azad said: "Tomorrow we will decide whether to go on with this exercise of more talks or not." To a question, Mr Azad said he was 'confident' of a government being in place within a week. However he tried, unconvincingly, to deny that the Congress is in touch with the a section of PDP MLAs.

"The whole nation should learn from the behaviour of Independent MLAs of the Valley. They have taken a decision to back the Congress claim on their own. I have not got a chance to talk to them even over a cup of tea," he said.

Some Congress leaders even spoke of the party staking claim first and working towards "arranging the remaining numbers later".

Since it is "now or never" for Mufti he is adamant about being chief minister. As a result internal bickering has started surfacing in the party, formed only three years back. Despite the rumb-

lings, Ms Mehbooba Mufti said the PDP can't afford to climb down on its stand because its candidates have won seats on the basis of the election manifesto in which the party has promised to bring to an end all anti-militancy programmes, disband the STF-SOG and so on. She said: "Since ours is a regional party, we can do a lot for the people of Kashmir. But the Congress being a national party will have its own restrictions before taking any step."

The Congress can try to form a government through a 'poaching operation', a possibility Sonia Gandhi had been trying to avoid for the past two days

Cong caustic to Togadia taunt

New Delhi: Lashing out at VHP leader Praveen Togadia for describing Congress president Sonia Gandhi as "a dog from Italy", the Congress on Saturday accused the Sangh Parivar outfit of "vulgarising and debasing our political culture" and asked the BJP leadership to respond "appropriately".

Condemning the language used by Togadia at a rally in Gujarat, Congress leaders including Manmohan Singh, Pranab Mukherjee, Natwar Singh and R.K. Dhawan, appealed to 'saner' elements within the ruling establishment to put a stop to "this kind of vulgarity".

At a hurriedly called press conference, Manmohan Singh said "the type of language being used day in and day out by people like Togadia amounts to debasing our political culture, which is a cause for serious worry".

The Congress leaders said they decided to meet the press since the BJP leadership, including the



Togadia

"'Dog from Italy' speech did not name any particular person"

"This type of language debases our political culture"



Manmohan

Prime Minister and the deputy prime minister, had not condemned Togadia's remarks "which have crossed all limits of vulgarity".

Singh said if the general elec-

tions were to be fought in "this manner" it would vitiate the political atmosphere.

Referring to the Godhra incident and its aftermath, VHP international general secretary Togadia reportedly said at a rally in Bhuj on Friday that "first, the local pups started barking. They were then joined by dogs from other parts of the country. And last came Italy *ki kutri* (dog from Italy)".

Togadia, responding to the controversy, said he had not named "any particular person" and that he had made a general statement about all those who "curse Hindus".

Asked by a TV channel whether his references to 'Italy' while making the controversial remarks did not mean an attack against Sonia Gandhi, Togadia shot back: "You secularists have imposed it on Sonia Gandhi. I have nothing to do with it." PTI

CANNOT IGNORE GROUND REALITIES: AMBIKA SONI

Cong. sending Manmohan for talks with Mufti

By Anita Joshua

HD-1
20/10

NEW DELHI, Oct. 19. In an attempt to break the deadlock over government formation in Jammu and Kashmir, the Congress today decided to send its senior leader, Manmohan Singh, to Srinagar tomorrow to talk to the People's Democratic Party president, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed.

Billed as part of the ongoing effort to "consolidate and unite" all the MLAs who fought the elections on an anti-National Conference plank, the decision to send Dr. Singh was taken at a meeting of senior leaders at 10, Janpath, shortly after the president of the People's Democratic Forum and CPI (M) leader, Mohammad Yusuf Tarigami, met the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, in the afternoon.

Mr. Tarigami is said to have impressed upon the Congress the urgency to end the uncertainty at the earliest as the "credibility

of the entire electoral process was getting lost." He also suggested that the Congress take a fresh initiative to win over Mr. Sayeed to provide the people of the State with a viable alternative to the National Conference.

Besides trying to build bridges with Mr. Sayeed, Dr. Singh will also talk to all other political parties and independents. The Jammu and Kashmir Congress president, Ghulam Nabi Azad, is also scheduled to go to Srinagar tomorrow.

Giving details of the efforts being made by the party to form a government in the State at the earliest, the AICC general secretary, Ambika Soni, refused to comment on whether the Congress had an open mind on the issue of Chief Ministership. "There are certain situations we have to deal with, and certain ground realities that cannot be ignored."

Asked to elaborate on the "ground real-

ities," Ms. Soni said: "We are the second-largest party and enjoy the support of the maximum number of MLAs, and the independent MLAs have expressed support for a Congress-led government."

As for the Jammu and Kashmir Panthers Party president, Bhim Singh's plans to lead a government, she said: "He has given a letter extending support to a Congress-led government to the Governor and to us. He has said that should the Congress find itself unable to form a government, then he would like to make an attempt."

Though officially the Congress maintained that it had an open mind on all the contentious issues, party sources said that there was no question of yielding on the issue of Chief Ministership, particularly after electing Mr. Azad the leader of the Congress Legislature Party. With an eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation, the question is who will blink first.

20 OCT 2002

Congress condemns Togadia diatribe

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, OCT. 19. In by far the sharpest response of the party to the ongoing verbal diatribe by leaders of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, senior leaders of the Congress today condemned the "most foul language" used by the Sangh Parivar leader, Pravin Togadia, to describe their party president, Sonia Gandhi.

Seven members of the Congress Working Committee addressed a joint press conference here today to condemn Mr. Togadia's description of Ms. Gandhi as a "dog from Italy" made in a rally in Bhuj, Gujarat. The Congress leaders said they were not taking up the cudgels for their leader alone, they were raising their voice for the sake of decency in polity itself. The Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha, Manmohan Singh, said: "We must ponder as to where this kind of debasing of political culture would lead the country to".

Mr. Togadia had crossed all limits and his speech was "extreme vulgarity". The Congress expected the Prime Minister, the Deputy Prime Minister and the leading BJP functionaries to condemn this kind of attack which debased political culture.

In fact, according to R.K. Dhawan, their response would not have been necessary had Mr. Togadia's political masters reined him in. The Rajya Sabha member, Pranab Mukherjee, said: "We are not over-reacting



The senior Congress leader, Pranab Mukherjee, addressing a press conference at the AICC headquarters in New Delhi on Saturday. Party leaders, Manmohan Singh and Ambika Soni, are beside him. — Photo: S. Arneja

because the statement was against a particular individual, but we are expressing our concern over the debasing of political culture".

However, when questioned whether the Congress was "over-reacting" — particularly as the CWC seldom reacted in such fashion — Dr. Singh said that with elections on the horizon in Gujarat, there was a fear that this could vitiate the political atmosphere.

The other CWC members who attended the press conference were Ambika Soni, Shivraj Patil, Natwar Singh and Kamal Nath.

Ahmed Patel, who could not attend the press conference,

said in a statement that the "lust for power has pushed people like Mr. Togadia into a distressingly low and appalling behaviour".

Describing Mr. Togadia as a "shame for Gujarat and every Gujarati", Mr. Patel said his utterances were a direct and humiliating attack on the ethos and culture of Hinduism which attached divinity to womankind.

Speaking at a gathering of villagers at Lodia in Bhuj, Mr. Togadia is reported to have said while referring to Godhra:

"First, the local pups started barking (against the Hindus). They were then joined by dogs from other parts of the country.

And last, came *Italy ni kutri* (a dog from Italy)"

'Only a general remark'

PTI reports:

Mr. Togadia, responding to the controversy, said he had not named "any particular person" and that he had made a general statement about all those who "curse Hindus". Asked by a TV channel whether his references to "Italy" while making the controversial remarks did not mean an attack against Sonia Gandhi, Mr. Togadia shot back, "You secularists have imposed it on Sonia Gandhi. I have nothing to do with it."

More protests: Page 10

2 11 2002

Manmohan deputed for Mission Kashmir

¹¹⁻¹ ^{20/10} ⁹⁻⁸⁷
Srinagar\New Delhi: After two days of governor's rule in Jammu and Kashmir, the Congress and the PDP on Saturday appeared keen on a rapprochement on government formation. Senior Congress leader Manmohan Singh will arrive in Srinagar on Sunday for talks with PDP chief Mufti Mohammed Sayeed to break the deadlock.



Manmohan Singh

The PDP appeared to have softened a bit when its vice-president Mehbooba Sayeed spoke of the impossibility of an alternative to a PDP-Congress coalition government. However, both parties maintained their claim to the chief ministership. Ms Sayeed asked the Congress to give up its claims for the post while AICC general secretary Ambika Soni threw a broad hint that it was unlikely to do so. "We must respond to the hopes and aspirations of the people of Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh," Ms Soni said.

Governor G.C. Saxena, addressing his first press

conference after the elections on Saturday, made it clear to various parties that his effort would be to keep governor's rule "short" and asked them to come up with "credible claims" to form the government.

Mr Saxena said his earlier deadline of October 21 for parties to put up their claims no longer held valid. "The door remains open and will continue to remain open even beyond October 21," he said.

Congress president Sonia Gandhi chose Mr Singh as the emissary after consultations with party leaders, including state Congress president Ghulam Nabi Azad, to continue the process of consultations.

This came a day after Mr Sayeed hardened his stand on the issue of chief ministership, asserting that the PDP would firm up alliances with other political parties only on its own terms or sit in the opposition.

"Our main objective is to consolidate the mandate of the people. It should not be frittered away," Ms Soni said. On his assignment, Mr Singh said he was very hopeful that a government would be formed. "I see no problem in a common minimum programme (being) formed," he said. PTI

2 9 OCT 2002

CLP leader does not rule out splitting PDP

Azad finalises action plan

CL Manoj in New Delhi

Oct. 18. — The Congress tonight appeared to be firming up its resolve to form a coalition government led by it in J&K, though its talks with the PDP made no headway. Top AICC leaders hinted that if Mufti Mohammed Sayeed continues to act tough, there could be a "split" in the PDP, a course they have been "consciously avoiding so far".

CLP leader Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad, who reached Delhi this evening even as the mufti held a rally in Srinagar, said a government could be in place "any time within a week" though "Governor's rule has now given us enough time". But he added that he was trying to meet the new deadline of 21 October.

Mrs Sonia Gandhi held an informal CWC meeting tonight where Mr Azad briefed Congress leaders about the situation. The Congress declared it would not back down from its demand of heading the coalition. Now commanding the support of 41 MLAs, party sources said the Congress has not ruled out the possibility of engineering a defection in the PDP to reach the magic figure of 44.

After the meeting, a guarded Mr Azad said the party would continue to make efforts along with like-minded parties to consolidate the people's mandate. He rejected Ms Mehbooba Mufti's charge that the Congress was creating hurdles in the formation of government. "The whole world knows who is doing that". Sources said the meeting apparently

cleared Mr Azad's action-plan which could be operational from early next week.

Earlier, Mr Azad claimed the Congress has the support of all MLAs barring those of the NC, PDP and the lone BJP member. Sources said the Congress has come to the conclusion that given Mufti's tough stand, the only way out was "poaching" especially as it is not sure about the Governor accepting any claim below the half-way mark of 44.

Mr Azad said his effort is to install a non-NC, non-BJP government in the state. Asked if he was planning to split PDP, he said: "I have not thought of that course so far. I will prefer to avoid that (splitting the PDP) and would like all those who are opposed to the NC and BJP to join hands and I hope Mufti-saab will support the Congress initiative."

Sources said Mr Azad is also working through back-door channels with PDP leaders to ready the ground for a split in case the mufti refused to oblige. "Almost all PDP MLAs expect Mufti and his daughter are upset about his stand," a Congress leader who accompanied Mr Azad to Delhi said.

Responding to the PDP demand that the chief minister be from the Valley (to checkmate the Jammu-based Mr Azad's claim), he said: "Nobody in J&K says so. Not one newspaper in the Valley has raised this issue. Only some interested parties talk on these lines. It is this kind of talk that led to some parties raising the demand for dividing the state."

Turn to page 4

THE STATESMAN

19 OCT 2002

DECIDE BY 11 A.M. TODAY, SAY SUPPORTERS

Deadline set for PDP, Cong. ^{HD-1 16/10}

By Shujaat Bukhari

SRINAGAR, OCT. 15. The People's Democratic Forum (PDF) and the CPI (M) in Jammu and Kashmir have set a deadline of 11 a.m. tomorrow for the People's Democratic Party and the Congress to sort out the issue of Chief Ministership and come to an agreement on government formation.

They made it clear to the PDP chief, Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, that if there was no agreement by that time they would support a Congress-led government.

The Congress is believed to have mustered the support of 41

MLAs and is said to be looking for possible defection either from the PDP or the National Conference. Sources said the party could stake its claim to form the government after 11 a.m. tomorrow and seek time from the Governor to prove its majority on the floor of the Assembly.

The last-ditch efforts by the leaders of the PDF (consisting of six independent MLAs) and the CPI-M (which has two MLAs) to bring about an accord between the Mufti and the Congress failed. Earlier in the day, the talks between PDP and the Congress ended in a deadlock.

With the tenure of the Jammu

and Kashmir Assembly expiring on tomorrow evening, desperate efforts are on to avert the imposition of Governor's rule.

The day started with hectic consultations and the Mufti said the issue of Chief Ministership was the basic one though there were some other grey areas of disagreement with the Congress leadership.

"We had four rounds of meeting with the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, and other leaders," he told a news conference. "The Congress has its own natural concerns but has to rise above partisan interests."

The people of Kashmir had given a verdict against the Na-

tional Conference and were in favour of the PDP. "The PDP is a movement and we have certain commitments which we can fulfil only if we have the leading role in the government," Mr. Sayeed said, adding that only his party could fight the internal problems in Kashmir. "We do not want to dilute our stand and regional character."

The PCC chief and CLP leader, Ghulam Nabi Azad, told presspersons late in the evening that last-ditch efforts were on to avert Governor's rule.

Governor consults experts

The Governor, G. C. Saxena, meanwhile, continued his efforts to break the impasse. He consulted a number of legal and constitutional experts. Ashok Bhan, Supreme Court lawyer and convener, Kashmir Committee, also met Mr. Saxena.

"If, by October 17, a new government is not in office it will be legally impermissible and politically improper for the Governor to ask the caretaker government to continue. So in the light of Section 92 of the Jammu and Kashmir Constitution, he has to assume the charge of Government," he said adding that the newly-elected Assembly would be placed in suspended animation.

However, the Governor can exercise his discretion to invite the single-largest party, National Conference, to form the government. But the Supreme Court guideline in the Bommai case, which makes it mandatory for the party to assure the Governor that the government will not fall on the day of seeking the vote of confidence, has to be borne in mind.

Cong. claims support of 41 MLAs

By Anita Joshua

NEW DELHI, OCT. 15. Even as various permutations and combinations are being tried out by the three main contenders for power in Jammu and Kashmir, the Congress central leadership is confident of being invited to form the government first as "we have the support" of 41 MLAs in the new Assembly. While the issue of Chief Ministership remains the bone of contention, the Congress is hopeful of bringing round the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The optimism hinges primarily on the belief that the PDP would not like to be seen as a stumbling block in the formation of a government to keep the National Conference (NC) out.

Stating that it was a "war of nerves" and conceding that parallel efforts were on to woo PDP MLAs, senior Congress leaders said they would rather have Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's party as an ally than a foe in deference to the indecisive verdict. As for ideological differences with the PDP — which is seen to be soft on terrorism — the

Congress contention is that even the Kashmir-based party would have to rethink its promises once it dons the mantle of governance. With the NC also throwing its hat into the ring, keeping its flock together is a major concern for the Congress. Beginning with 20 on the day of counting, the Congress today claims a strength of 21 MLAs, with an independent — who fought the elections with its backing — joining it.

Then there are the six independents who have given a written undertaking and have become associate members of the Congress. Add to this the four MLAs of the Panthers Party, whose leader, Bhim Singh, met the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, on Monday and pledged support on the condition that the Chief Minister should be from the Jammu region.

This apart, the Congress is claiming the support of 10 independents, including those who have come together to form the People's Democratic Forum. "This takes our number to 41 — three short of the required 44 — and we hope the Governor will call us first."

16 OCT 2002

DELHI

Cong turns up heat

SEEMAGUHA

Srinagar, Oct. 14: The Congress today declared that it would form the next government in Jammu and Kashmir, but left the formal bid to be made tomorrow.

State Congress president Ghulam Nabi Azad drove to Raj Bhavan to meet Governor G.C. Saxena immediately after being elected legislature party leader.

The Congress claims to have the support of 41 legislators, but the numbers still appear uncertain. The horsetrading that started immediately after the election intensified when talks on an alliance between the People's Democratic Party and the Congress dragged on. The rumour in Srinagar puts the price of an Independent at Rs 1 crore.

So far, six Independents from Jammu have joined the Congress while three from the Valley have offered support. Four Panthers Party MLAs have promised issue-based support and the two

CPM members are behind the Congress. But all this still leaves the party well short of the majority mark of 44. Some Independents have, however, pledged to remain neutral if the Governor asks Azad to prove his majority.

Sources in the Congress and the PDP said differences over ideology were blocking an alliance, but the real reason was competing claims to the chief minister's chair.

The PDP said it would sit in the opposition rather than compromise on its agenda. "The PDP defeated the National Conference and deserved to get the chief minister's post. The Valley is where the maximum amount of atrocities were inflicted on the people and Kashmiris came out in large numbers to vote us in so that we can give them the healing touch. A Congress government's installation would mean betrayal of the people's trust," Qazi Afzal, the man who defeated National Conference

president Omar Abdullah, said.

Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, the PDP chief, held a meeting of the party where the majority preferred sitting in the opposition to joining a coalition headed by the Congress.

Some PDP sources said the Congress was against talks with separatists but the other side refuted this argument, saying that Sonia Gandhi had declared during her visit to Srinagar that her party stood for "unconditional talks with all sections of people".

"If the BJP government at the Centre wants to begin talks with separatists, why should we oppose such a move? This is a canard being spread by the PDP," Taj Mohi-ud-din, a senior Congress leader, said.

The PDP's main argument against having Azad as chief minister rests on the history of the state, which has never been ruled by a leader from Jammu.

■ See Page 6

Sonia, Mufti begin talks on J&K CM

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 12. — Efforts to form a Congress-PDP government in J&K made headway tonight, with Mrs Sonia Gandhi meeting former Union minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed.

But the meeting remained inconclusive with both sides subtly but firmly bargaining for the chief minister's post. Sources said it could take "three to five more days" before a government is put in place in Srinagar.

The "dominant view" in the Congress is to have a government led by one of its leaders because it has more MLAs than the PDP. Mrs Gandhi reportedly conveyed this to Mr Sayeed. "First we have to sort out the issue of chief ministership. The common minimum programme (CMP) can be finalised later," a leader said. A Congress government would be a psychological boost before the Gujarat polls.

For the PDP, the question of chief minister too has to be sorted out immediately. But the problem that may catch up with it is its tall promises to the people, such as of holding "unconditional" talks with separatists.

Ms Mehbooba Mufti said over the phone from Srinagar that the

PDP can't afford to compromise on certain issues, including the unconditional talks. "With more powers come more responsibilities ... the CM's post is a trivial issue; we first have to decide on the CMP if we want to ally with another party," she said.

Mr Sayeed reportedly conveyed the importance of having a chief minister from the Valley to address the sense of alienation of Kashmiris.

Congress leaders expect the PDP chief to bargain for some more time, but he may be asked to consider the option of having his daughter as the deputy chief minister. "There is no rule that the chief minister will have to be from the Valley. The Gajendra Gadkar committee stated that if the CM is from the Valley, his deputy should be from Jammu 'or vice versa'. It can be done by having the deputy chief minister from the Valley", a senior leader said.

With the CWC resolution stating that Mr Ghulam Nabi Azad would be the chief minister if a Congress-led government is formed, it is clear that the PDP's chances are slim.

■ More reports on page 6
■ Editorial: Bravo India,
page 8

One battle won, Sonia sizes up Mufti for Round II

RASHED KIDWAI

New Delhi, Oct. 10: Sonia Gandhi was today praying at Banke Bilhari temple of Krishna in Mathura when she received the news of the Congress surging ahead in Jammu and Kashmir.

She immediately told a party colleague: "We have been blessed. Our tally is going to go up from 14 to 15 states."

The feel-good factor of increasing the tally of Congress-ruled states, the prospect of having a Muslim chief minister in its fold and an opportunity to

showcase the Congress domination from Kashmir to Kerala to Arunachal Pradesh to Maharashtra have prompted Sonia to decide on staking claim to form a government in Jammu and Kashmir.

Sonia returned late in the evening from temple town of Mathura and went into a huddle with Manmohan Singh, Ambika Soni, Ahmad Patel and other senior leaders to take "charge" of the situation.

In her scheme of things, lucky mascot Ghulam Nabi Azad is man of the moment.

through, the Congress, which has 20 seats, will have the support of 43 legislators — one short of the majority mark of 44 in the 87-member Assembly. Congress leaders said there are several "others" who have shown interest in keeping the National Congress in power.

Ironically, there is no dearth of senior party leaders — Azad's friends as well as detractors — pushing his name for the chief minister's post.

Some influential AICC general secretaries are backing Azad on the hope that he would be

away from the 'Delhi durbar'. Madhya Pradesh chief minister Digvijay Singh today came forward to propose Azad's name.

On the home turf, Azad is wary of his arch rival, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, who is more than keen to become chief minister.

The first sign of Mufti's interest became clear when his daughter tacitly ruled herself out for the race of chief ministership. Mufti feels that he has the political acumen to lure some sections of separatists — a factor which he is using to build

his case for the post.

Mufti is pitting himself ahead of Azad by arguing that unlike the Congress, he would be far more flexible in addressing the tricky issues of autonomy and resolution of the Kashmir dispute.

Besides, he would be better equipped to deal with the Centre unlike the Congress, which would be forced to view each and every gesture of the Vajpayee regime with suspicion.

Sonia is however, wary of Mufti. First, he is one leader who had walked out of the Congress

after she had taken over as the Congress chief. Mufti is too old and crafty for her liking.

But the Congress president has admiration for his daughter, Mehbooba. Sources close to Sonia said if Mufti was prepared to play second fiddle, the Congress would offer the post of deputy chief minister to Mehbooba.

In addition, a Hindu leader from Jammu could be sworn in deputy chief minister to maintain regional balance.

The Sonia camp is not "unduly" worried about holding talks

with separatists. A senior Congress leader said: "So far, all political parties say that talks have to be held within the framework of Indian Constitution. If there is a national consensus to walk the extra mile, we too would cover that."

On tricky Centre-state relations, Congress leaders said their party has been in power in 14 states and there has been no major Centre-state standoff. "We have been in governance since the independence, so we know how to conduct ourselves," a former minister said.

Congress is also divided house on disinvestment

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Congress party on Friday tried to expose the Union cabinet's doublespeak on disinvestment but in turn displayed its own lack of unity on the issue.

Portraying the public spat between the Ram Naik-George Fernandes-Murli Manohar Joshi axis and the Prime Minister as an intense power struggle within the Union Cabinet that is going on in the garb of an ideological debate, the Congress claimed

the tussle for supremacy between the PM and the deputy PM is being reflected in the disinvestment controversy.

But the party was unable to make political mileage out of the government's predicament because the Congress itself is divided on the issue of privatisation with its economic cell secretary, Jairam Ramesh, and its high profile MP, Mani Shankar Aiyar, taking diametrically opposite positions. The Congress high command's views against selling profit making

PSUs have been violated by Congress-ruled state governments like Punjab, which has proceeded to sell Punjab Tractors and Punjab Alkalies.

The Congress, for the first time, declared that oil is a strategic sector and hence oil PSUs should not be disinvested. But when pointed out that the Narasimha Rao government had sold off oil fields, party spokesman Jaipal Reddy refused to comment on what happened earlier.

Charging the government with a lack of collective responsibility on

the issue of disinvestment, Mr Reddy attacked the Prime Minister, saying that the PM can only propose and that it was his dissenting ministers who disposed. Mr Reddy also pointed out that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad has called the PM weak.

But Mr Reddy was on the defensive when asked about the Congress party's stand on disinvestment. Mr Reddy tried to brush aside the embarrassment posed by Mr Ramesh's views on privatisation, claiming they are just his personal views.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

5 OCT 2002

Sonia blasts NC, says autonomy is key to J&K crisis

TIMES NEWS NETWORK
AND AGENCIES

S. P. P. Cong I 2/9
Srinagar: Addressing her maiden election rally in J&K on Thursday, Congress president Sonia Gandhi called for greater autonomy for the state and said her party would initiate a dialogue with all concerned parties to resolve the Kashmir crisis without compromising on the basic structure of the state.

Ms Gandhi accused the BJP and the RSS of toeing the Pakistani line by supporting the division of J&K and lashed out at the National Conference for raising the autonomy issue only as an election ploy. In contrast, she said, the Congress was always ready to talk about greater autonomy for the state and supported equal development of all its three parts—Ladakh, the Valley and Jammu.

The Congress president, who was addressing a rally of about 2,000 people, complimented the people for participating in the first phase of elections in the face of threats from the militants.

Reminiscing about her association with J&K, Ms Gandhi recalled that it was a far more peaceful state that she had visited some 20 years ago with her husband and family. But since then, the Valley had seen terrible days thanks to terrorism and the subsequent breakdown



Sonia Gandhi

of the economy. But, she promised, better times would return if the Congress was voted to power. Ms Gandhi accused the ruling National Conference

leaders of enjoying all luxuries while the people continued to suffer unemployment and lack of basic amenities.

The NC, she said, was trying to fool the people by whipping up anti-Centre sentiments even though it was part of the ruling NDA coalition.

Ms Gandhi had a special mention for the Valley's women. They, she said, had been the worst sufferers in the 15 years of militancy. "I, too, lost my husband and mother-in-law because of this terrorism," she added.

The Congress chief's election rally was held in the backdrop of continuing terrorist attacks. Militants gunned down five army jawans in an encounter and attacked a school killing a teacher and a student in Jammu division since Wednesday evening.

Elsewhere in the state, seven more people were killed and nine wounded, six of them security personnel, in militancy-linked incidents, official sources said here on Thursday.

Modi targets Cong. at rath yatra launch

By Manas Dasgupta

PHAGWEL, SEPT. 8. The Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, today launched his 'Gujarat gaurav rath yatra' in the presence of a large gathering of BJP workers.

Even senior BJP leaders were pleasantly surprised at the turnout and encouraged a beaming Mr. Modi to launch a frontal attack on the Congress. Mr. Modi questioned the credentials of both the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, and its State unit chief, Shankarsinh Waghela, for demanding the cancellation of the rath yatra.

Calling it a "Congress conspiracy to defame the 5 crore people of Gujarat", Mr. Modi said the people would give a fitting reply through the ballot boxes whenever the Assembly elections were held. "It does not matter if the elections are held in December or in 2003; even if the elections are held in 2013, the rout of the Congress is definite."

The rath yatra was flagged off by the BJP general secretary, Rajnath Singh, in the presence of members of the Modi Cabinet and other senior leaders. The former Chief Minister, Keshubhai Patel, also briefly addressed the gathering.

The yatra, which culminated

at Himmatnagar, was peaceful today. The murder of a BJP Councillor of Kadi municipality has caused tension as the yatra is scheduled to come here tomorrow. The Councillor, Kirit Patel, was allegedly shot dead by one Ajaysinh Jadeja today while making preparations for the yatra. Three persons, including two boys, were also injured when Jadeja fired indiscriminately, police said.

The grand show at Phagwel, a non-descript village known for its temple of Bhatiji Maharaj,

overshadowed Mr. Waghela's rally at the same place last Tuesday. Despite Mr. Waghela's call to the Kshatriyas to boycott the BJP rally, a huge crowd turned up.

Both Mr. Modi and Mr. Singh asked the party workers to maintain peace in the face of any "provocation" by the Congressmen. The Congress might try to disrupt the yatra only to prove its point that it had sparked off violence "but you must thwart all such attempts", they said.

In an attack on Ms. Gandhi, Mr. Modi repeatedly stressed her Italian origin and said only the Congressmen "who were wearing Italian spectacles" could not see the "rich history and traditions of the State that make every Gujarati proud". Mr. Modi said the post-Godhra riots, which were "highly condemnable and a blot on the peace-loving people of the State", had been blown out of proportion ignoring the fact that 98 per cent of the State remained unaffected. Questioning the democratic values of the Congress, he said that in a democracy every political party had the right to go to the people. "We never asked the Congress not to take out a rally. What authority does it have to demand that we cancel our rath yatra?"

He threw a challenge to Ms. Gandhi to organise a "rally of this size" anywhere in the State and said the Government would provide her all facilities if she had the "guts to face the people of the State".

He was equally critical of the national and international media and the "gang of former Prime Ministers" who had time and again tried to defame the people of the State by "blowing up issues out of proportion."

A shame yatra: Cong.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 8. The Congress has decried the attempt by the BJP to "once again deepen the agony of communal riots" witnessed in the State earlier this year by going ahead with the thrice-postponed 'gaurav rath yatra', which it described as a "shame yatra".

Accusing the BJP of following its own "hidden agenda" in Gujarat, the senior Congress leader, Balram Jakhar, today said he was certain the people would punish the BJP in the elections later this year for communalising the State and inflicting the horror of the killing of thousands of innocent people.

What is the BJP proud of? Was it proud that the riots had given a bad name to India's secularism? Was it to signal the party's blessings to those anti-nationals who had participated in murder and loot? Was it to remind the people of the atrocities committed and to sprinkle salt on the unhealed wounds? These were the questions asked by Dr. Jakhar.

9 SEP 2002

Jaya questions Sonia's loyalty to the country

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 2 SEPTEMBER

IN a frontal attack on Ms Sonia Gandhi, the Tamil Nadu chief minister Ms J. Jayalalithaa on Monday questioned her loyalty to the country and alleged that the Congress president is a "political trader helping her rapacious Italian relatives to make India a happy hunting ground for their operations."

"I do not want a strong country to be handed over to a political trader, whose rapacious Italian relatives and friends have made this country a happy hunting ground for their operations," she told a press conference in Chennai, a week after raking up the issue of Ms Gandhi's foreign origin in New Delhi. The Tamil Nadu chief



JAYA & SONIA: TOUCHE' ?

minister also accused Ms Gandhi of having shown "reluctance" to take Indian citizenship for 15 years after her marriage with Rajiv Gandhi and said "her loyalties stood somewhere else."

Ms Jayalalithaa repeatedly referred to Ms Gandhi by her maiden name Antonio Maino and alleged that "love for India and loyalty to India is totally missing from her." Ms Jayalalithaa also alleged that Ms Gandhi was involved in "an an-

tique smuggling case" in which the CBI has filed an FIR and in the Bofors deal case and said India "has to be relieved from the clutches of Sonia Gandhi and her rapacious relatives."

Ms Jayalalithaa said her attack on Ms Gandhi at Delhi was not a mere "outburst." The chief minister said she was raising the issue now because the general elections were just 18 months away and already a media projection was going on that Ms Sonia Gandhi was the alternative and next Prime Minister. "She has conveyed an impression through her demeanour that she is already the Prime Minister and this can't be tolerated," Ms Jayalalithaa said claiming she had been "consistent" in her stand against Ms Gandhi's candidature for prime ministership.

98 P
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Debate on Sonia issue rages

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, SEPT. 1. The Bharatiya Janata Party seems as determined to keep alive the debate on the "foreign origin" of the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, as the Congress is keen on showing this up as bogus, unconstitutional and even anti-Hindu.

The BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, today joined the debate from Thiruvananthapuram, saying that his party from day one had been in favour of reserving

high constitutional offices for Indians born in this country, and that "some leaders" within the Congress had also favoured this approach and severed links with the Congress on this issue. (He was referring to the Nationalist Congress Party led by Sharad Pawar.)

From the Congress, it was Devendra Nath Dwivedi, former general secretary of the party, who joined issue and found fault with the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, for her outburst against Ms. Gandhi

"with an eye on the political box office". Acknowledging that he himself had "committed the same mistake and regretted it" (he had left the Congress for the NCP for a while), Mr. Dwivedi said that in all cases the raising of the "foreign origin" issue had been prompted by personal considerations and political expediency. "To raise this bogey now is patently un-Indian, unconstitutional and against the basic tenets and the very grain of Hinduism," Mr. Dwivedi added. Un-Indian because ad-

herence to the issue would create two categories of Indians, unconstitutional because the Constitution gives equal rights to all citizens, and anti-Hindu, because the daughter-in-law of a family becomes very much a part of the family (and even takes the caste of her husband).

Mr. Dwivedi has also attacked Ms. Jayalalithaa for showing ingratitude to the Congress which has over the years helped her gain power in Tamil Nadu, besides lending her respectability and credibility as a leader.

THE HINDU

2 SEP 2002

Cong drops letter bomb on Jaya

RASHEED KIDWAI

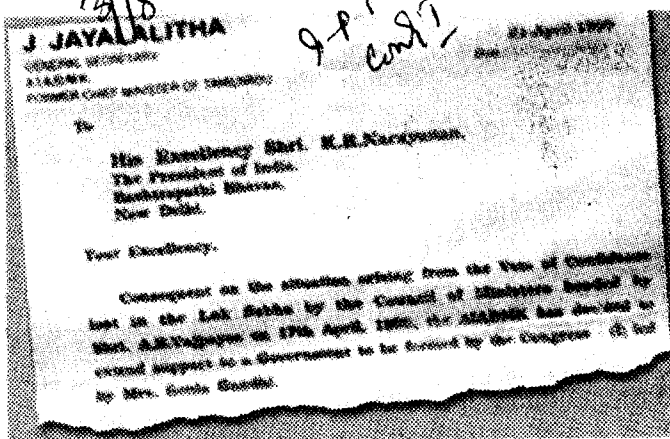
New Delhi, Aug. 30: Raking up Congress President Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin, Jayalalithaa had thrown a challenge on Wednesday to "show me a single statement where I had supported her as Prime Minister".

The Congress today picked up the gauntlet and sprang a letter that it said was written by the ADMK chief. The letter (reproduced on right) extended "support to a government to be formed by the Congress (I) led by Mrs Sonia Gandhi".

The letter, released by Congress spokesman Jaipal Reddy, was dated April 21, 1999, and addressed to the then President, K.R. Narayanan, in the aftermath of the fall of the Vajpayee government.

The letter adds that the decision to offer support was taken at by the ADMK parliamentary party, which met at 10 am on April 21, 1999.

"I am communicating this decision to you along with the enclosed resolution of the ADMK parliamentary party," says the letter that carries Jayalalithaa's name. Her name was then spelt Jayalalitha, to which an 'a' was



added later for good luck.

The parliamentary party resolution communicating the party's decision was signed by the then ADMK House leader, Sedapatti R. Muthiah.

On Wednesday, Jayalalithaa had reignited a dying controversy by saying that Sonia would be a "disaster" as Prime Minister and was unfit for the post because of her foreign origin. Addressing a press conference, the ADMK leader had bluntly denied that she had ever supported Sonia for Prime Minister despite having an alliance with the Congress.

Reddy today launched a scathing attack on the ADMK leader, saying: "Jayalalithaa is a novice in national politics. She is an Alice in Wonderland of Delhi. We know her one-point programme is liberation from major criminal cases."

Asked why the Congress released the letter today, Reddy said: "We wanted to expose her bluff as two days earlier she had denied of any letter extending support to Sonia's candidature for the prime ministership."

The letter strikeback was followed by a flurry of state-

ments from Congress chief ministers, senior leaders and AICC officials, condemning Jayalalithaa's opposition to Sonia as Prime Minister. Sonia's managers also used the controversy to declare that she would be the party's prime ministerial nominee.

Chhattisgarh chief minister and a self-proclaimed "Sonia loyalist" Ajit Jogi said: "Let it be settled for once and for all. Soniaji is our prime ministerial candidate. We have accepted her in that role since she took over the Congress leadership."

A joint statement by 14 chief ministers of Congress-ruled states accused Jayalalithaa of belittling the legacy of her mentor M.G. Ramachandran. "The great patriot MGR would never have approved of such a low cunning in her or any of his disciples," said the chief ministers' statement.

A similar statement signed by senior party leaders said Jayalalithaa's remarks were "uncalled for, irrelevant and speaks of her unstable mind". The leaders endorsed Jogi's view that Sonia would form the next government after getting a "decisive mandate".

Deshmukh meets Sonia, gets breather

AJAY SURI
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 29

MAHARASHTRA'S beleaguered Chief Minister Vilasrao Deshmukh had a difficult time today defending his turf before party president Sonia Gandhi. After a closed-door session at 10, Janpath, in the afternoon, Deshmukh appeared relieved, said he was still the CM but by many accounts his troubles appear far from over.

What really transpired between Sonia and Vilasrao talk is open to conjectures. What is now known, though, is that the party's coordination committee for Maharashtra — comprising senior,

Delhi-based leaders including S.B. Chavan, Shivraj Patil and Vallayar Ravi — would meet soon to decide his fate which now hangs by a thread.

Growing dissidence within the party ranks in Maharashtra is just one of his troubles. Sonia's biggest grudge against him, point out observers, is his inability at basic governance which has led to the alliance partner NCP making things difficult for the government at every step.

Deshmukh denied that he had offered his resignation or the high command had demanded it. Explaining his position, he said: "I have discussed with Sonia the various speculative media reports in this regard. It's for our party presi-

Later, he had another round of talks — this time with Vallayar Ravi, the AICC general secretary in-charge of Gujarat. Ravi denied reports about Deshmukh's "impending sacking", but at the same time, the senior Congressman did not pitch heavily for the CM either.

"Everything is under control in Maharashtra," was Ravi's reply to a query linking Deshmukh's visit here with the reports of party high command cracking a whip on him. On his part, Deshmukh denied that he was summoned by Sonia and said his visit was scheduled much earlier. "I also came here to call upon the President and the Vice-President." He said "no Delhi leader" was campaigning against him but if some MLAs de-

cidated to rush to the Congress president with their complaints, he really could not stop them.

Deshmukh may have got a breather yet back home in Mumbai, the party reacted sharply to the statement some Independent MLAs issued yesterday, rallying behind the CM and saying that a change in chief ministership may not be welcome. Terming it as "unfortunate", the Congress said it will not succumb to pressure tactics. "The Independents had extended support to the DF and not to a particular leader and their statement is unfortunate," MPCC chief Govindrao Adik told reporters here, sending the message across that the party was keeping its options open.

NCP dares Congress to 'pull out' of DF govt

MUMBAI: The Maharashtra unit of the NCP dared the Congress to "pull out" of the DF government, asserting it would "never" compromise on opposing Sonia Gandhi's claim to prime ministership. "Our basic stand of June 1999 that a person of foreign origin should not become Prime Minister cannot be compromised at all," party spokesman Nasim Siddiqui told media persons here on Thursday. —PTI

dent to decide who she will keep. She heard me patiently and said my performance is satisfactory."

Jayalalithaa's remarks evoke protest

HD - 1
By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, AUG. 29. The Bharatiya Janata Party seems to have made up its mind to rake up in a big way, once again, the issue of the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin. The remarks of the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, on this yesterday are being seen as a 'teaser' that will be followed up actively by the BJP and its partners in the National Democratic Alliance.

Today, the BJP's youth morcha issued a statement: "It is really tragic that the party which ruled for more than 50 years has chosen a leader who has a foreign origin. This is really shameful for the Congress Party in particular and the country in general."

Yesterday, the BJP general secretary and spokesperson, Arun Jaitley, was quick to say that the issue was on the agenda of the ruling National Democratic Alliance, and it could be legislated upon, may be even through a law to be carried by a simple majority in Parliament which would debar citizens not born in India from holding high constitutional office.

The Rashtriya Janata Dal president, Laloo Prasad Yadav, today criticised what he called the "BJP game", saying in Patna that Ms. Jayalalithaa's "outrageous outburst" against the country's 'bahu' (daughter-in-law) was "at the behest of the NDA and the RSS". After all, Ms. Jayalalithaa had given a letter supporting Ms. Gandhi to the President in 1999, he recalled.

The former Finance Minister, P. Chidambaram, described the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister's attack as "unprovoked", even as he suggested that it was calculated and well-rehearsed. Ms. Jayalalithaa had no problem using the Congress and the Tamil Maanila Congress to wrest power in Tamil Nadu, but now she wants to discard those who helped her to get back to power.

Several politicians suggested that Ms. Jayalalithaa's remarks were calculated to soften the BJP Government's attitude towards her and help her get over her legal cases. Congress leaders in Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Madhya Pradesh and elsewhere dismissed the foreign origin issue as a "closed chapter" that Ms. Jayalalithaa had attempted to reopen "after meeting the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani".

However, the fact is that the NDA Government had already demonstrated during the passing of the Prevention of Terrorism Act that it would not hesitate to short-circuit the Rajya Sabha, where it does not enjoy a majority, by calling a joint session of Parliament. It passed POTA despite strong opposition, and it could well pass a law debarring Ms. Gandhi from holding the office of Prime Minister.

It seems that the BJP is coming to the conclusion that it has been unable to stop the Congress from growing under Ms. Gandhi's leadership. The Opposition has been able to wrest power in many States, and even in Gujarat, where a key contest will take place later this year, it is not at all expected to be a runaway victory for the BJP.

The foreign origin issue was taken up by the BJP in a big way soon after Ms. Gandhi became Congress president. The Venkatachalaiah Constitution Review Commission was expected to take up the issue. But after the Commission failed to bite the bait and the Supreme Court settled her citizenship status, the issue was largely dropped.

The BJP then dismissed Ms. Gandhi as a novice in politics and "a no match for Atalji and Advaniji". But four years later, with the Congress having notched up significant electoral victories, the BJP leadership seems to have come to the conclusion that the best way to deal with her is to eliminate her from the race altogether and sow the seeds of confusion in the Congress.

9 0 AUG 2002

Jaya's foreigner fire on Sonia warms BJP heart

(w)

KAY BENEDICT

J.P.P. 29/8

29/8

New Delhi, Aug. 28: Jayalalithaa today fanned afresh the dying flames of Sonia Gandhi's foreign origin controversy and opposed the idea of the Congress president becoming Prime Minister, driving possibly the last nail in a relationship that began with the unfulfilled promise of a "political earthquake".

The BJP — widely perceived as Jayalalithaa's prospective ally — was circumspect in its official reaction, but the scandal-smothered party could not hide its glee in private.

The BJP kept the pot boiling by mooted a debate on the foreign origin issue. "We favour a debate as it involves changes in the law and it can be arrived at only through consensus. Of course, it is on the NDA agenda," BJP spokesman Arun Jaitley said.

The spark was lit in the morning when Jayalalithaa told a press conference that a country of one billion could have only an Indian leading it. She said her party was prepared to bring a legislation barring people of foreign origin from occupying

high offices if other parties backed her.

She berated the Congress for "backtracking" on its support to the Ordinance on electoral reforms. She also assailed the Election Commission, accusing it of trying to arrogate the powers of the executive by delaying polls in Gujarat.

The ADMK chief, who had backed Sonia's bid to form the government after toppling the Vajpayee regime in 1999, said the ADMK would not support a "foreigner" as Prime Minister. "It was a crying shame and a pointer to the moral bankruptcy of the Congress," she said.

Referring to the controversial tea party in 1999 when the two women leaders had met and Jayalalithaa had hinted at a "political earthquake", she said it had nothing to do with making Sonia the Prime Minister. She said it was not Sonia, but CPM veteran Jyoti Basu she had backed for the post of Prime Minister. However, Sonia had scuttled the plan when everyone (in the Opposition) had agreed, Jayalalithaa added.

"When did I say I support Sonia Gandhi as Prime Minister of

the country? Show me one statement," the ADMK chief said.

The Tamil Nadu chief minister had met the Prime Minister at the Cauvery meeting yesterday and the deputy Prime Minister today. Asked if the ADMK was supporting the NDA, she said her party was extending only "issue-based" support. She had backed the controversial anti-terror law.

But there was "no question of joining the alliance (NDA)", she stressed. Asked whom she would align with in the next election, she came the reply: "Certainly not the Congress."

Jayalalithaa's impatience with Sonia used to find expression in occasional jabs. The flashpoint of today's outburst is being traced to the Tamil Maanila Congress' recent merger with the Congress, which Jayalalithaa had tried hard to scuttle.

The outburst also came when the stage has been set for a fresh round of legal battle involving corruption cases against Jayalalithaa. The CBI had moved the Supreme Court last Friday against Madras High Court's stay on the proceedings in a divestment case. (See Page 8)

29 AUG 2002

BID TO EXTRICATE HERSELF FROM CASES: CONG.

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Jayalalithaa rakes up Sonia's foreign origin issue

HD 1
23/8

By Our New Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI, AUG. 28. The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, today made a surprise attack on the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, by raking up the issue of her foreign origin and saying that having her as the prime minister would be a "disaster."

Though taken aback by the diatribe, the Congress today dismissed the development and attributed Ms. Jayalalithaa's "180 degree somersault" to her need to "ingratiate herself with the Vajpayee Government to get herself extricated from a number of criminal cases"—particularly, the TANSI case, listed for final hearing this week.

In fact, according to the Congress, Ms. Jayalalithaa had not missed any opportunity in the recent past to endear herself to the Bharatiya Janata Party.

The BJP itself seemed anxious to reopen the debate and



The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, at a press conference in New Delhi on Wednesday.

— Photo by V.V. Krishnan

suggested that there was need for "action in the matter." And that the matter could be dealt with through legislation.

Bringing up the issue on her own at a press conference here, Ms. Jayalalithaa said the AIADMK was firmly committed to supporting only an "Indian" for the office of Prime Minister.

That she had come with the intention of making the "personal attack" on Ms. Gandhi was evident from her offer to explain her refusal to align with the Congress in the next Lok Sabha elections.

Also, she described as a "crying shame" and an indicator of "moral bankruptcy" the fact that the Congress was projecting Ms. Gandhi as the prime ministerial candidate.

Asked why she was raking up the issue now after having supported the Congress claim to form the government under Ms. Gandhi following the fall of the Vajpayee dispensation in 1999, Ms. Jayalalithaa shot back: "When have I supported Sonia Gandhi's candidature as Prime Minister? Even when I withdrew support, I did not agree to support Sonia Gandhi; I was in favour of Jyoti Basu," adding that Ms. Gandhi had "scuttled" the move then.

In fact, her party was prepared to bring in a bill barring

people of foreign origin from holding constitutional posts, provided other parties were prepared to support it.

Responding to a question, Ms. Jayalalithaa said that even though the Congress had governments in 14 States, the people there had voted for an "Indian Chief Minister."

'Nationalise rivers, extradite Prabakaran': Page 11

On court decisions confirming Ms. Gandhi's Indian citizenship, she said that in other countries, Indians acquiring citizenship could not aspire to occupy such political posts.

Ms. Jayalalithaa also gave on her own her views on Ms. Gandhi's statement opposing the Representation of the People (Amendment) Ordinance without any prodding from the media.

"Aren't you going to ask me about Sonia Gandhi's turnaround on electoral reforms," she asked and went on to read a statement on the issue to back her contention that Ms. Gandhi's claim of there being no consensus on the ordinance was "nothing but a classic case of back-tracking, as an afterthought."

Even as the Congress maintained that the foreigner issue was a settled one — describing Ms. Jayalalithaa's statement as "flogging a dead horse" and "sympathising" with her compulsions — its spokesman, S. Jaipal Reddy, said that it was Ms. Jayalalithaa who had taken the initiative to destabilise the Vajpayee Government in 1999 and lend support to the leadership claimed by the Congress.

Issue on NDA agenda, says Jaitley

Meanwhile, at a press conference, the BJP spokesman, Arun Jaitley, said the foreigners' issue was on the NDA agenda.

Though the Constitution Review Commission had not taken it up, there was a view that only a simple change in the law was needed to debar people of foreign origin from occupying a constitutional office, while the second opinion was that an amendment would be needed, for which this Government did not have the requisite strength. Did the BJP favour a simple law on this? Mr. Jaitley was non-committal.

29 AUG 2002

Sonia blasts Modi 'poison'

OUR CORRESPONDENT

Pipalia (Rajkot), Aug. 25: Congress president Sonia Gandhi today kicked off her party's election campaign from the BJP bastion in Saurashtra with a well-attended public meeting in this quake-devastated village, rebuilt by the Chhattisgarh government and renamed Rajiv Nagar.

Exhorting the electorate to overthrow the "communal, corrupt and insensitive government", Sonia condemned the Narendra Modi government for committing atrocities and spreading "communal poison". She accused it of dividing the people on communal lines, thereby creating "deep wounds" that would take a long time to heal.

Lashing out at both the state and Centre — which she referred to as "scam-tainted" — Sonia said the BJP, in its four-and-a-half year rule, has not addressed the real problems of the people.

Referring to the rehabilitation and welfare of victims of the earthquake that had ravaged the state last year, she alleged that the huge foreign aid the government had received had been misused. This act of the BJP government was not only irresponsible, but also cruel, she added.

Stating that Congress activists would not tolerate such a corrupt government, she urged the people to take a pledge to overthrow the Modi administration. "I'm specifically addressing my sisters, who have to walk miles

to fetch drinking water," she said to resounding applause. "You should elect a government you can call your own and the government that understands people's problems."

The government, said Sonia, has created a climate of all round despondency, with industrialists, businessmen and virtually every section of the society highly demoralised. No one is willing to invest in Gujarat, once considered a highly progressive and pro-business state, she added.

Chhattisgarh chief minister Ajit Jogi said his government was one of the first to respond to the calamity following the quake. It constructed 183 dwelling units for the quake victims of Pipalia, situated 85 km from Rajkot, at an estimated cost of Rs 3.30 crore that was raised from the tribals of the state, he informed.

State Congress chief Shankersinh Vaghela expressed his gratitude for the construction of Rajiv Nagar and said that while quake victims pleaded for a roof over their heads, Modi was more keen to hold elections.

Former state chief minister Amarsinh Chaudhary said that during his party's regime it had rebuilt and dedicated several quake-hit villages in Kutch, but the BJP government had failed to rebuild a single village. So much so, that nearly two years after the quake, the planning for four major towns in Kutch district — Anjar, Rapar, Bachhau and Bhuj — has not yet been finalised.

26 AUG 2002

Throw Modi Govt. out: Sonia

By Manas Dasgupta

MORBI (GUJARAT), AUG. 25. Calling upon the people of Gujarat to "throw out" the "irresponsible" Modi Government, the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, today launched a scathing attack on the Bharatiya Janata Party Government in the State and the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance Government at the Centre.

She described the Vajpayee Government as a "Government of scams and scandals" — it was "looting" the country — and asked the people in general, and the Congressmen in particular, to raise their voice against the BJP's "misrule."

Accusing the Centre and the State Government of misappropriating financial aid and other assistance sent by foreign countries for the victims of the Gujarat quake, Ms. Gandhi said the BJP Governments not only behaved "irresponsibly" but also in an "inhuman manner."

She was addressing a rally after dedicating to the people the newly-constructed Rajiv Nagar to rehabilitate the quake victims of Pipaliya village in Rajkot district of Saurashtra region.

The Chhattisgarh Government adopted the village after the quake and constructed 183 houses and other common fa-



The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, with Jain Muni Mahapragya at the Preksha Vishwa Bharti Sansthan in Ahmedabad on Sunday. — PTI

cilities at a cost of about Rs. 3.30 crores.

While relief and rehabilitation of victims of natural calamities were the responsibility of the Government, the Centre and the Gujarat Government had failed to live up to the people's expectations and behaved in a "most irresponsible manner," Ms. Gandhi alleged.

Even the foreign aid meant for the quake victims had been

"misused." And the special funds earmarked by the Centre for natural calamities were never allocated to the quake victims, she claimed.

Without once referring to the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, by name, Ms. Gandhi said the recent communal riots had caused irreparable damage to the State once known for its message of peace and harmony. The BJP Government had

caused "total destruction" in Gujarat where the people were depressed, trade and commerce were dull and investors from outside refused to risk their money.

Urging the people to throw out such a "ruthless" Government and install one that would be responsive to the people's needs, she said "the Governments at the Centre and in the State have no answer to your problems, but you can find an answer by throwing out such Governments... I am sure all of you will do that."

The Chhattisgarh Chief Minister, Ajit Jogi, while appreciating the people for braving the earthquake asked them to exercise similar will power in facing the "man-made calamity" and give a "fitting reply" to the Modi Government.

Ms. Gandhi was accompanied by the AICC general secretary in-charge of Gujarat affairs, Kamal Nath, her political adviser, Ahmed Patel, the State Congress president, Shankarsinh Waghela, and the former president, Amarsinh Chaudhary, among others.

Earlier, she visited an old-age home run by the Prabodh Raval trust. She also visited the Jain Muni Mahapragya in Gandhinagar, a centre for Jain religious learning, and spent about 15 minutes.

26 AUG 2002

110-1 TMC RETURNS TO PARENT PARTY

15/8 Let's bring back Kamaraj rule in T.N., says Sonia

By Radha Venkatesan

MADURAI, AUG. 14. Marking a new phase in Tamil Nadu politics, the Tamil Maanila Congress re-joined the parent Congress at a huge rally here even as the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, appointed its president, G.K.Vasan, as a new AICC secretary.

At the merger mela on the outskirts of the temple town, Ms. Gandhi not only assured all the erstwhile TMC men "due respect and positions" but also assigned them the task of "re-establishing" Congress rule in Tamil Nadu where the party has been out of power in the past 35 years now.

(The TMC, a breakaway outfit of the Congress, launched by the former AICC general secretary, G.K. Moopanar, has merged under the leadership of his son, Mr. Vasan.)

Amid a wave of applause, Ms. Gandhi said: "History is beckoning us. Let us prepare for the challenge of tomorrow and work towards re-emerging as the major political force in the State." As for the sceptics, she said: "I know we can do it. And, we will do it". Ms. Gandhi did not launch a frontal attack on her former ally and the ruling AIADMK, but focussed on the "sufferings" of various sections of the people in the State — from farmers in 14 drought-hit districts to ryots in Thanjavur reeling under "wrong policies" of paddy procurement to the starving weavers. Touching on the starvation faced by weavers

following the withdrawal of the free "dhoti and saree" scheme, Ms. Gandhi asked "every Congressman" to go to the villages to buy handloom clothes and alleviate the sufferings of the weavers. "During the Congress rule, Tamil Nadu was one among the three best governed States in the country. It is up to all of us to put Tamil Nadu once again on the path of development." And, the 14 States under Congress rule now were "working for the welfare of people," she added. "We in Tamil Nadu should, one day, bring in Congress rule again in the State," was her refrain. The "best tribute" to Kamaraj in his birth centenary year, was "to re-establish" his rule in the State.

Against the backdrop of the State Government's crackdown on the supporters of the banned LTTE, she said, without naming any outfit, "Congressmen

should defeat the divisive forces".

All the Congress leaders who addressed the rally, including the AICC secretary, Ramesh Chennithala, the TNCC president, E.V.K.S. Elangovan, and Mr. Vasan gave a call for ending Dravidian rule in the State and restoring "Kamaraj rule". As the one-hour rally ended, a section of the crowd hailed Mr. Vasan as the "future Chief Minister" of Tamil Nadu.

'Heartless NDA Govt.'

In Pondicherry, Ms. Gandhi mounted a scathing attack on the BJP-led NDA Government at the Centre describing it as "most insensitive" and "indifferent" to the needs of the States. Formalising the merger of the Puducherry Makkal Congress with the Congress, she said that never before the country had such a "heartless" government at the Centre.

'We will go it alone'

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, AUG. 14. "It is our goal and aim to fight it alone in the State minus the Dravidian parties," the AICC president, Sonia Gandhi, said today. Talking to reporters at the Chennai airport on her return from Madurai where she presided over the merger of the Tamil Maanila Congress with the Congress, she said: "Now we are one, we will go from strength to strength."

On the possibility of mid-term polls to the Lok Sabha, she said the Congress was not averse to mid-term polls. "That is for the Election Commission and the Government to decide, but we are most unhappy with the Government's performance," she said.

Sonia, Cong. CMs meet PM on drought relief

By Anita Joshua

NEW DELHI, AUG. 5. A Congress delegation, led by the party president, Sonia Gandhi, today met the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, on drought relief, and according to the Union Agriculture Minister, Ajit Singh, the meeting was held in a cordial atmosphere, with neither side making any accusations.

The Chief Ministers of Delhi, Chattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Karnataka had, on Sunday criticised the Government for 'not being even-handed' while providing relief.

Giving details of what transpired at the meeting, Mr. Singh dismissed allegations of step-motherly treatment towards the

Opposition-ruled States. Also, according to him, this year's drought was more severe than the one in 1987.

Denying the charge that the Government was showing preferential treatment towards States ruled by its allies, Mr. Singh said Rajasthan had received the maximum of Rs. 80 crores last year while Chhatisgarh was given Rs. 42 crores. As for the criticism that the Government's relief this time round was a perfect case of too little too late, he said the second instalment announced on Sunday under the Calamity Relief Fund (CRF) was two months ahead of schedule.

In its memorandum, the Congress has demanded that the Government declare the

drought a national calamity, establish an inter-ministerial crisis management group as was done during the 1987-88 drought; create an all-party committee on drought management to discuss the implementation of drought plans; send Central teams to all affected States immediately; enhance the corpus of the CRF to at least Rs. 10,000 crores; and improve the effectiveness of the national crop insurance scheme.

The Government was represented at the meeting by the Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani; the Food Minister, Sharad Yadav; the Rural Development Minister, Shanta Kumar; and the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, K. C. Pant.

Sonia overcomes fear of pump skeletons

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RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, Aug. 5: The Congress is going for the kill on the petrol pump scam. But party chief Sonia Gandhi had to virtually veto an influential lobby within the party before going all out against petroleum minister Ram Naik.

At a meeting of the party's political affairs committee today, senior Congress leaders and former Union ministers advised Sonia to settle for a discussion instead of resorting to parliamentary logjam.

However, a younger lot, including Kapil Sibal, Priva Ranjan Das Munshi and Jagmeet Brar, took a different stand, saying the time to "oppose, expose and depose" the Atal Bihari Vajpayee regime had come. They sought CPM leader Somnath Chatterjee's services to prevail upon Sonia not to dilute her stand on the petrol pump scam.

As soon as the Congress chief reached Parliament, Somnath met and managed to convince her about mounting pressure on the government.

Sonia and Somnath also agreed to focus on Naik's resignation instead of demanding Vajpayee's exit as such a demand could prove counter productive and help the BJP and its NDA partners close ranks.



Sonia Gandhi leads a Congress delegation at a meeting on drought with Prime Minister AB Vajpayee. Picture by Rajesh Kumar

Oust-Naik cry rocks Houses

OURSPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 5: Even as the Vajpayee government struggles to quell the controversy over the allotment of petrol pumps, both Houses of Parliament today adjourned without transacting any business amid the Opposition's vociferous demands for the resignation of petroleum minister Ram Naik.

As soon as the Lok Sabha assembled, Opposition members trooped into the well of the House demanding Naik's exit and a CBI probe into the "petrol pump scam".

Accusing the ruling BJP of "looting" the nation, they waved copies of a national daily containing the report about the allotment of pumps and LPG agencies to relatives of BJP functionaries as Naik watched from his bench.

Speaker Manohar Joshi tried unsuccessfully to rattle the House for 30 minutes before adjourning for 15 minutes and finally, for the day when presiding officers of both the Houses failed to subdue the demonstration.

Agitated MPs continued to shout slogans like: "Gali gali mein stor hai, BJP chor hai, BJP ne kya kiya hai, desh ko barbad kiya hai (The BJP is corrupt and has ruined the country)" and "Ram Naik istee'fa do (Ram Naik must resign)" even after the House was adjourned.

In the Rajya Sabha, angry members of the Congress, RJD, Samajwadi Party and Left party forced deputy chairperson Neelima Heptullah to adjourn House for the day. On Friday, too, the Rajya Sabha had adjourned for the day amid pandemonium and the Opposition had staged a walkout in the Lok Sabha over the issue.

Indications are that the Opposition will continue its stir in Parliament tomorrow. AICC spokesman Jaipal Reddy and CPM leader Somnath Chatterjee said Prime Minister Vajpayee's move to cancel petrol pump allotment was tantamount to admission of guilt by the BJP leadership.

While welcoming the cancellation, Jaipal said it was a "glorious victory for the vibrancy of Indian democracy" as the decision reflected an "admission of guilt" on the part of the government, particularly Naik.

"We, therefore, demand the resignation of Naik because the chairmen of the dealers' selection boards were directly ap-

pointed by the minister," he said. Reddy also demanded an inquiry by a Supreme Court judge, assisted by the CBI, to unearth the "grave irregularities" in the allotments.

The Congress spokesman added that the CBI should seize all materials and information pertaining to the allotment of these pumps immediately.

On Sonia's direction, All India Congress Committee spokesman Jaipal Reddy said Vajpayee's decision to cancel allotments of all petrol pumps, LPG and kerosene agencies made after January 2000 reflected an "admission of guilt" on the part of the government and demanded the resignation of the petroleum minister.

The group is worried over the political fallout in case the BJP retaliates and releases the list of Congress beneficiaries in the scam. However, for the time being, Sonia is prepared to pay the political price. She seemed convinced that sacrificing a few individuals within the party was worth dealing a deadly blow on the BJP.

According to Congress insiders, the group favouring the "go slow" approach consists of those who have skeletons to hide in the cupboard.

It is an open secret that dozens of Congress leaders issued favours to their relatives with petrol pump allotments during the party's long stint in power at the Centre.

15 AUG 2002

THE TELEGRAPH

Sonia calls meet on drought

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 2. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi has called a meeting of the chief ministers of six drought-hit states ruled by the Congress to work out strategies regarding a bargain with the Centre for relief and to draw up an action plan against the calamity.

The chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and Delhi will attend the meeting to be held on Sunday, Mr Jaipal Reddy said.

Most of these states have complained about not getting enough relief funds/material from the Centre. Sources said Mrs Gandhi may even lead a march on Monday to demand adequate relief funds.

The meeting will also address a "political concern" that the drought has led to. States like

Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Delhi will be facing polls. The Congress high command is worried whether the drought will create an anti-incumbency mood in many of these states where farmers form a major part of the electorate.

The leadership is keen to ensure that the states take enough measures to maintain a popular image before the general elections, a party leader said.

The chief ministers of such states have sent their demands to the Centre for relief money and food grain. Madhya Pradesh has submitted a bill for Rs 626 crore and 2.5 lakh tonnes of foodgrain.

Chhattisgarh has sought Rs 90 crore. Maharashtra has asked for Rs 205 crore while Rajasthan has appealed for Rs 600 crore for relief and another Rs 60 crore for fodder.

Rs 54-crore Central aid for Bihar

PATNA, Aug 2. — The Centre would release Rs 54 crore from the calamity relief fund to Bihar for providing relief to its flood-affected people, the Union minister of state for home said here today. Mr ID Swamy said the Centre had released Rs 27 crore last year from the calamity relief fund. "But the state is yet to submit utilisation certificate."

Marandi seeks grant: The Jharkhand government has sought financial aid from the Centre to combat drought, adds a report from Ranchi. Chief minister Mr Babulal Marandi said only 16 per cent of the farmers have been able to grow crops properly. — SNS

3 AUG 2002

Cong can't come clean on Alexander

Blames BJP for not naming ex-governor for presidentship, but is silent on supporting him for Rajya Sabha

AJAY SURI

NEW DELHI, JULY 16

CONGRESS today said it was former Maharashtra governor P.C. Alexander's misconception that the party did not back his candidature for the President's post. "We do not know why Alexander is hurt with the party. It is his misconception that the Congress did not back his candidature for presidentship," party spokesman Anand Sharma told reporters here.

As far as the formal decision to nominate presidential candidate is concerned, Sharma said it had to come from Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and the Congress had nothing to do with it.



Shiv Sena chief Balasaheb Thackeray talking to the ex-Governor of Maharashtra P.C. Alexander in Mumbai on Tuesday. PTI photo

PC's assets worth Rs 1.66 crore

MUMBAI: P.C. Alexander has declared assets of Rs 1.66 crore in his affidavit submitted with the nomination papers for Rajya Sabha. In the affidavit, Alexander has declared assets of Rs 1,66,37,298 held by him and his wife Akkamma. The assets include his bank deposits of Rs 46,95,130 and Rs 1,08,148 in the name of Akkamma. He has invested Rs 12,28,000 in the shares, bonds and debentures.

He violated code of conduct: Keswani

MUMBAI: Industrialist Suresh Keswani, who is contesting a Rajya Sabha seat from Maharashtra, on Tuesday questioned the propriety of a former governor filing his nomination papers for the Upper House from the same state. Keswani said Dr P.C. Alexander, former governor of Maharashtra, has violated the election code of conduct by filing his nomination papers from the state.

nothing to say. As per the understanding, the Congress left the seat to the NCP and it has decided to back Alexander. We have not fielded any candidate of our own," held the party spokesman.

While senior leaders here said they would not like to "interfere" in what was essentially a state matter, they also hinted of seeking the view of Maharashtra Congress legislators in the matter.

In Maharashtra, though, the two major allies in the state government are already on a war path. While the party leaders here are still fidgeting over a response, the state Congress unit has gone a step ahead and offered support to Suresh Keswani.

To a query, Sharma here said "to the best of our information, Keswani is an independent candidate." In private, however, Congress leaders here admit that the party is indeed in a Catch-22 position over Alexander. And the situation, instead of becoming clear, is likely to get murkier in the coming days.

southern state. Snubbing him again could put the Kerala Congress in doldrums, it is felt in the party circles here.

That the Congress is groping frantically for a strategy became evident yesterday when senior leaders refused to comment on the development. "We have

minefield; not in Maharashtra but in far-off Kerala. While putting down Alexander's candidature for the President (when it was first offered by the NDA Government before it opted for A.P.J. Abdul Kalam), the party had to incur the wrath of the sizeable Christian community in the

Yet, now the party is in a double-bind over what to do with Alexander now after the NCP, party's ally in Maharashtra, declared support to him as a Rajya Sabha candidate from the state. And observers here said opposing Alexander once again could be a walk over a political

BJP polarising society: Sonia

By Anita Joshua

NEW DELHI, JULY 16. One with the Government in the war against terrorism, the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, nevertheless said there was no coherence or clarity in the official stance on national security issues and Jammu and Kashmir, and cautioned against "allowing the confrontation with Pakistan to be used by the BJP to polarise Indian society".

Addressing the general body meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party here today, Ms. Gandhi listed the issues on which the Government ought to be held accountable during the monsoon session. Besides terrorism and Kashmir, the subjects that she mentioned are Gujarat, "harassment" of the media, FDI in the print media and electoral reforms.

Commenting on what she called the "deliberate double-speak" of the Government on Jammu and Kashmir, Ms. Gand-

hi quoted several instances of senior Cabinet Ministers speaking in two voices. "What are we to make of all this confusion? Loud thinking cannot be a sub-



stitute for policy. But, 'talk now and think later' appears to be the motto of the BJP-led Government."

The Government had not come out with a cohesive and effective policy on Jammu and Kashmir despite the "unprece-

dent support" given by the Opposition, Ms. Gandhi said. Instead, the confrontation with Pakistan was used cynically by the BJP to polarise society to stoke communal feelings.

Reflecting on the recent developments in the BJP and the NDA, Ms. Gandhi said the allies had been totally marginalised and "what matters now is the BJP's communal agenda". "The entire Government and party machinery are in the hands of those who misuse religion for partisan purposes. The VHP has displayed its utter contempt for the law of the land and stridently announced that it will not abide by the Supreme Court's verdict on Ayodhya."

Apart from criticising the Gujarat Government for its "blatantly partisan approach" vis-à-vis the relief and rehabilitation of the victims of the communal violence, Ms. Gandhi said there were "alarming reports" of communal elements being systematically recruited

for government jobs at the Centre and in the States where the BJP was in power.

Ms. Gandhi took exception to the way in which some of NDA allies in Tamil Nadu had been publicly espousing the cause of the LTTE. "Functions were held in that State in the presence of the Union Home Minister when the LTTE was being extolled." Asserting the need for the nation to send a strong and unequivocal signal that support to banned, terrorist organisations would not be permitted, she said: "We are shocked to note that the compulsions of the NDA coalition are being placed above the basic principles and the national interest."

Lest the unanimity in political circles over electoral reforms be construed as the Congress being opposed to clean politics, Ms. Gandhi said the party stood for "greater transparency and accountability and for cleansing politics of criminal and other undesirable elements".

THE HINDU

17 JUL 2002

VHP's turnaround disturbing: Cong.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 24. The Congress today accused the Vishwa Hindu Parishad of showing disrespect to the law of the land in the light of its latest declaration that it would not obey the court order on the Ram temple issue.

The party spokesperson, Anand Sharma, asked the NDA constituents to make their position clear on the BJP's "duplicity" and its linkage with the VHP and other Sangh outfits.

Mr. Sharma described the VHP's turnaround at the Kendriya Margdarshak Mandal in Harwar as a "disturbing development".

Given the fact that the VHP had given a written assurance to the Kanchi Shankaracharya earlier this year that it would abide by the court order on the Ram Mandir issue, he said, "the latest development confirms that the VHP cannot be trusted."

The BJP cannot 'cohabit' with the VHP or

Sangh Parivar and its allies at the same time. The Government "must make it known whether it intends to rein in these elements". If the Government failed to do so, "the silence will be construed as an endorsement".

The Congress spokesperson condemned the VHP's demand for division of Jammu & Kashmir into four and said this was in furtherance of the Sangh outfit's "diabolic agenda".

The party dismissed the J&K Chief Minister, Farooq Abdullah's demand for autonomy as "the characteristic favourite pre-election statement expected of him".

"Our position (on the autonomy issue) is the same as the one we took after the State Assembly passed a resolution in 2000 demanding autonomy.

The devolution of powers had been dealt with in the accord of 1975 and all related issues ought to be addressed within its ambit and that of the Constitution of India," Mr. Sharma said.

25 JUN 2002

THE HINDU

AICC leash on Deshmukh

20/6 5:1
Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI/MUMBAI, June 19. — In the wake of demands from a section of the Maharashtra Congress leaders for a change in leadership of the state government, the party brass today curtailed the powers of chief minister Mr Vilasrao Deshmukh but firmly ruled out his removal.

The AICC announced the setting up of a nine-member co-ordination committee, comprising almost all Maharashtra faction leaders to monitor state affairs. Besides Mr Deshmukh, Mr SB Chavan (who was appointed as convener) and MPCC president Mr Govindrao Adik, other members of the committee are deputy leader of the Congress in

Riot toll five

JALGAON, June 19 — The toll in the communal violence at Jamner mounted to five with two more deaths reported even as the government today ordered a magisterial inquiry into the disturbances in the north Maharashtra town, where indefinite curfew was clamped last night. — PTI

the Lok Sabha, Mr Shivraj Patil, former MPCC president Mrs Prabha Rau, Mr Sunil Dutt, Mr Murli Deora, Mr NM Kumble and Mr Ishaq Jamkhanwala.

Several state leaders, including some MLAs, earlier met the AICC general secretary in-charge, Mr Vyalar Ravi, and demanded the change in the party

9-P Pn - Ceng 1
and government leaderships. Rajya Sabha MP Mr Suresh Kalamadi was reportedly part of this group.

Party spokesman Mr Jaipal Reddy said: "As the political crisis in the state has blown over, a nine-member coordination committee for the MPCC has been constituted to ensure better coordination within the party."

Mr Vilasrao Deshmukh announced that the state would go in for a jumbo Cabinet. The chief minister said political compulsion had forced him to take the decision. The expanded Cabinet — likely to accommodate around 70 ministers instead of the existing 53 — would be in place in a fortnight. Deputy chief minister Mr Chhagan Bhujbal said the NCP favoured Mr Deshmukh's decision.

File ST 14

20 JUN 2002

Cong discovers Kalam virtue

FROM RASHEED KIDWAI

New Delhi, June 13: Bowing to growing opinion within and outside the party in favour of A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, Congress president Sonia Gandhi today declared the party's support for his presidential candidature.

Sonia brushed aside the Left's insistence on forcing a contest on Kalam after all Congress chief ministers, as well as Arjun Singh, Kamal Nath and Ghulam Nabi Azad pointed at the futility of a fight.

The Congress leaders, however, made it clear that they would not give a similar "cake walk" to an NDA nominee in the vice-presidential poll, scheduled to be completed by August. Jockeying for the election has already begun.

The AICC's economic department secretary, Jairam Ramesh, paved the way for a telephone talk between Sonia and Kalam where the scientist recalled his "deep association" with the Nehru-Gandhi family and mentioned Rajiv Gandhi's role in

shaping his career at the head of the country's nuclear programme.

Once the Congress made its stand clear, Kalam, too, broke his silence. "The nation is bigger than the individual," he said in Chennai. (See Page 8)

Sonia, who was earlier "advised" against backing an "NDA" nominee, decided to veto Natwar Singh, Manmohan Singh and Left leaders, who had reservations about Kalam's elevation.

Ironically, Manmohan and Natwar called on CPM general secretary Harkishen Singh Surjeet today to convey the Congress Working Committee's decision.

There was a general sense of relief in the party about the choice of Kalam. "Our former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had the fullest faith and confidence in Kalam. It is, therefore, just and fair that the Congress has decided to support him," veteran Congress leader Siddhartha Shankar Ray said in Calcutta.

Several CWC members echoed him. "*Der ae durust ae*" (A delayed decision but a correct one), said a Congress chief minister.

Barring a few CWC members, there was unanimity in the apex decision-making body that Sonia would have been better off extending her support to Kalam on Monday immediately after meeting the Prime Minister.

At that juncture, Surjeet and a section of the CWC had advised Sonia against backing Kalam, saying that the gesture would amount to "disrespect" to President K.R. Narayanan and sound as a mere endorsement of Atal Bihari Vajpayee's choice. The Congress, too, had insisted on Narayanan's continuation in office for a second term.

Congress leaders admitted that the delay did not go down well. By yesterday noon, Sonia had made up her mind, but pressure from the Left and a section of the party prevented her from going public.

Party sources said Sonia had never considered the option of forcing a contest on Kalam. "She sought time to untie some knots. Once Narayanan said no to the Congress offer, she got the party behind her decision," a CWC member said. (See Page 6)

THE TELEGRAPH

14 JUN 2002

Cong. demands Sinha's resignation

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 13. The Union Finance Minister, Yashwant Sinha, is in the midst of yet another controversy with the Opposition targeting him for alleged links with the Flex Industries chairman, Ashok Chaturvedi, who was arrested by the CBI for allegedly bribing the Excise Commissioner, Someswar Mishra.

HO-1 19/5
The Congress demanded Mr. Sinha's resignation both in Parliament and outside. The issue was raised in the Lok Sabha during zero hour by the Con-

gress leader, Pawan Bansal. Demanding Mr. Sinha's resignation for keeping the House "in the dark" about his "links" with Mr. Chaturvedi, the Congress saw a "pattern" in the Minister's decision to ease out Kailash Sethi of Excise Intelligence.

Mr. Bansal said Mr. Sinha's conduct cast a "long shadow of doubt" over whether the Government would prosecute Mr. Chaturvedi or not.

Outside the House, the party spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy, echoed much the same demand. He wanted to know why

Parliament was kept in the dark.

The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Pramod Mahajan, assured the Lok Sabha that the investigation against Mr. Chaturvedi would be taken to its logical conclusion. He would also request Mr. Sinha to make a comprehensive statement on May 15.

In the Rajya Sabha, the issue was raised by the senior Congress leader, Arjun Singh, who referred to a report in an English daily, which gave details of election material despatched through the Railways for Mr. Sinha's campaign. The material

was allegedly booked by Mr. Chaturvedi.

Mr. Singh said that while he did not want to raise an accusatory finger against anyone, he wondered how one could expect the Finance Ministry to hold an impartial inquiry in the wake of the report.

The Congress leader demanded a statement from Mr. Sinha with the CPI(M) member, Nilotpal Basu, making a similar demand.

The Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs, O. Rajagopal, said that Mr. Sinha would make a statement on May 15.

THE HINDU

14 MAY 2002

Cong sees NDA virtues only in selloffs

Party pledges support to govt's war plans



ABOUT TURN: Congress president Sonia Gandhi and other senior Congress leaders at the opening of the one-day special session of All India Congress Committee in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

Swaraj Thapa
NEW DELHI 24 MAY

be the "natural party of governance", by painting itself as the "government-in-waiting" and by projecting Ms Sonia Gandhi as the next Prime Minister. Ms Gandhi's projection as the prime minister-in-waiting pushed everything else to the background as the participants once again living up to the standards of sycophancy, in the process, outdid each other. The tone was set by the veteran Indira-Rajiv loyalist, Vasant Sathe. The former Union minister who lost his job as the editor of the *Sandesh* for calling Ms Gandhi a political novice, on Friday made amends by showering praise on the leadership abilities of the same person, setting a precedent for others to follow. As a confident-looking Ms Gandhi looked on, speaker after speaker launched into unadulterated praise of her.

The proceedings underscored that the leadership was yet to sort out the conflict of opinion over joining a non-BJP coalition. The two contending schools of thought were on display once again. Former Karnataka chief minister, S. Bangarappa took the pragmatic line, arguing that the party shouldn't mind joining coalitions if that emerges as the profitable option. Citing two recent examples, he said while the party bungled by allying with the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal, it could have benefited in Uttar Pradesh by joining hands with Mulayam Singh Yadav. The rival point of view, grounded in a belief in party's ability to wrest the Centre on its own and reinforced by a mutually shared aversion towards most of the non-BJP formations, was articulated by the party MP from Kharajpur, Satyavrata Chaturvedi.

THE Congress on Friday reiterated its support to the government's efforts to tackle the situation on the border but without letting the BJP off the hook over Gujarat. Even as the external affairs resolution adopted at the AICC meet once again pledged party's support to the war preparations, the political resolution came down heavily on BJP for the Gujarat riots. The nuanced response offered the party a way out of the bind it had found itself over what should have been the focus of the meet. Though the party had conceived the meet as a platform for attacking the BJP, a rethink started with many fearing that raising the pitch too high over Gujarat may not be politically feasible when the people were focused on the tension with Pakistan.

The reference to Kaluchak massacre in the beginning of her speech itself was a clear indication that Ms Sonia Gandhi was anxious to send the message of national unity. She reiterated that the Congress will continue its support to the government to tackle cross border terrorism, notwithstanding its differences on other fronts. She, however, contended that deficiencies continued to exist in the government's diplomatic strategy.

The war clouds, however, did take a toll, preventing the party managers from unveiling one overarching theme for the event as was the case in Bangalore or, for that matter, the recent conclave of the party chief ministers at Guwahati. The managers, however, tried to salvage matters by refurbishing party's claim to

Gandhi left off at the CII meet, the document contends: "Recent events in Gujarat have eroded the confidence of both Indian and foreign businesses in the ability of the BJP to provide a modicum of basic, even-handed, fair-minded governance which is an essential pre-requisite for equitable and sustained economic growth."

Merifully for the NDA, however, the on-going disinvestment programme — easily the item number one on its reforms agenda — was spared the bludgeon. The resolution did express its opposition to "mindless privatisation of the public sector, built up over decades with larger socio-economic objectives." But, it goes on to clarify it was not opposed to privatisation per se, giving enough wiggle room for the disinvestment managers to proceed with the selloff. Contrasted with the strident stance the party took over the Balco privatisation just a year ago, the caveats inserted by the party, including issues like transparency, marks a clear rebuff to the small but well-entrenched anti-reforms faction.

Commenting on the state of the economy, the resolution not-

ed that industrial growth was the lowest in the decade, while the export growth rate had turned negative. It criticises the slowdown in agricultural growth, stating that the farm sector now faced a desperate situation. It charged the government with callousness towards the suicides of farmers. The blame for ills afflicting the economy are laid at the doorstep of the government and its "unimaginative policies."

Unlike the last AICC meet at Bangalore, the resolution has steered clear of making policy pronouncements. Power sectors reforms, particularly the vexed question of tariffs, which was on the menu for the chief ministers' conclave at Guwahati, failed to find a mention in the resolution, portions of which have been lifted from Ms Gandhi's speech at the CII session.

The drafting of the resolution was not without strains. A section found faults with the draft — prepared by former finance minister Manmohan Singh and his deputy in the economic affairs cell, Jairam Ramesh — for giving the credit for reforms to the Rao government and excluding the previous regimes.

Swaraj Thapa
NEW DELHI 24 MAY

THE Congress, on Friday, criticised the NDA government's handling of the economy but refrained from attacking the aggressive divestment in a whole range of public sector undertakings (PSU). The economic resolution adopted at the one-day AICC meet here is a scathing critique of the performance of the economy during the NDA tenure. The performance of the farm sector and what the resolution calls the mismanagement of the financial sector have been singled out in the six-page document. It does take note of the redeeming features — rising forex reserves, a comfortable current account deficit position and moderate inflation — but gives the credit for each one of them to the policies initiated under the Congress regime.

Expectedly, the theme of Gujarat conflagration and its adverse impact, particularly the estimate that it may sap the willingness of the investors to put in money here, figures prominently in the resolution. Taking up from where party president Sonia

The Economic Times

25 MAY 2002

Sonia to flaunt 14 CMs

CL Manoj in New Delhi

May 23. — At the last AICC session in Bangalore, the Tehelka expose had provided the Congress with an effective tool to hammer the NDA government, but this time the unexpected flare-up at the border has blunted its Gujarat weapon it had kept ready against the Vajpayee government. Yet, the high command is poised to put its best foot forward at tomorrow's AICC session to be held under tight security.

For Mrs Sonia Gandhi, this fifth session under her leadership has a special significance. During her first session in 1998, the Congress had been virtually withering away and the party had just five wavering state governments. By the Bangalore session, the tally had improved to eight and tomorrow she will flaunt 14 chief ministers as proof of her party's revival under her leadership. The session will vow to deliver more victories in the coming Assembly polls and the final march back to Delhi darbar.

Pat for Modi

KOLKATA, May 23. — The Gujarat violence had claimed lives of more Hindus than Muslims and the chief minister had "competently controlled" the riots within 72 hours of their breaking out, said the BJP MP from Baroda, Ms Jayaben Thakkar. "Narendrabhai Modi did his job well. He's an able administrator and knows how to run the organisation."

Mrs Thakkar said of the 865 victims of the communal flare-up, most were Hindus. — SNS

Even while keeping vigil on the border situation, that included a stand-by resolution in case of any "dramatic development", the session will launch an all-round attack on the Centre, projecting the Congress as the alternative. In view of the national outrage against the Gujarat carnage, Mrs Gandhi has directed the Delhi PCC to avoid the usual fanfare and cultural feasts associated with such sessions.

The meet will start with about 1,200 delegates passing a condolence resolution for the Gujarat victims. They will also mourn the Kaluchak victims and will go high on patriotism, resolve to protect secularism and Gandhian legacy from fundamentalist forces and national unity against cross-border terrorism. The venue — Talkatora Stadium — has been named Sadbhavana Nagar. "This'll be a session of less fanfare and more efficiency," said the co-ordination committee chairman, Mr Subhash Chopra.

Mr Arjun Singh will move the political resolution, Dr Manmohan Singh the economic resolution and Mr Natwar Singh the international resolution. The three leaders, along with Mr Pranab Mukherjee, will steer the session. Mr PV Narasimha Rao is expected to attend the meet.

While extending the party's support to the government on national security and defence, the AICC will accuse the Centre of failing to take concrete policy and diplomatic efforts after the attack on Parliament.

THE STATESMAN

24 MAY 2002

Sonia slams Atal 'doublespeak'

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 30

SONIA GANDHI today accused the Prime Minister of speaking with two voices on the Gujarat tragedy, and demanded that he sack Narendra Modi immediately as the first step towards restoring normalcy to the State.

For 25 minutes in the Lok Sabha, the leader of the Opposition and the Centre for "failing" the people of the country, and promised a relentless battle till peace returned to Gujarat.

"The Government in Delhi has looked on as a passive spectator even as a blatantly partisan Chief Minister besmirched the fair name of Gujarat," she said.

She criticised Vajpayee for changing his statements. "One day he offers sympathy. The next day he condemns a whole community. One day he pleads for tolerance. The next day he plays on divisive prejudices. When the Prime Minister himself engages in such doublespeak, what can

PMO distrustful of Modi Govt?

THE PM may defend the Gujarat CM, but his office does not seem to trust the Modi Government with money. When it released the second instalment of Rs 2 crore for riot victims on Sunday, it ensured that it was routed through the Indian Red Cross Society and not through the State. The first instalment of Rs 1 crore and an ex-gratia of Rs 3.9 crore to the kin of victims had been handed to the State. Complaints of irregularities in the payments seem to have alarmed the PMO.

HTC, New Delhi

the nation expect of this Government?" Sonia said.

She pooch-pooched Vajpayee's remark that the riots could have been pre-empted had Parliament condemned the Godhra killings strongly enough. "What prevent-

ed him as leader of the House from taking the lead in this matter? He is projecting his failure as Parliament's dereliction."

She went on to rebut the "propaganda" that Godhra hadn't been condemned forcefully enough and early enough. She cited how she had condemned the massacre on the evening it happened. "This technique of repeating a falsehood so that it can eventually be passed off as a truth is a favourite tactic of the RSS and the Sangh Parivar."

In a more constructive mode, the Congress leader appealed to the PM's "nobler instincts" and urged him to redeem the situation by taking the following steps: Put the State on notice under Article 355 for failing to control internal disturbance; bring the guilty to book, ensure full relief and rehabilitation, remove the CM who has failed to fulfil his constitutional duties, appoint a sitting Supreme Court judge to look into the riots and implement all the recommendations of the NHRC.

9.8.10
HTC

NHRC raps Centre

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, April 30

NEARLY A month after the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) indicted the Gujarat Government for its failure to control communal violence, the rights panel has come down heavily on the Vajpayee Government saying that the Centre was yet to submit a full report.

The Centre last week submitted an interim report and had sought time till today to file a comprehensive report on the riots. "They are yet to submit a report in full details," a source said, adding that the State Government's report lacked a "narrative of the critical cases with which the Commission is concerned".

NHRC Chairman Justice (retired) J S Verma, who had virtually held the Narendra Modi Government responsible for the

carnage and the failure of the State administration to stop the violence, today said the Centre and the Commission must ensure there are no human rights violations in the name of implementing provisions of the Prevention of Terrorism Act, 2002.

Pointing out that "protection of human dignity was not inconsistent with national security", Verma said, "Everyone knew our stand on the issue (of Pota) but now since Parliament has passed it, it is our responsibility to see that no human rights are violated after its implementation."

The NHRC took exception of the fact that the Modi Government was yet to set up a State Human Rights Commission, which most States have instituted. "We have conveyed our concern to the State and they have to indicate when a State panel will be in place," a source said.

HD-1

TDP blamed for farmers' plight

By T. Lakshmipathi

ANANTAPUR, APRIL 27. The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, today criticised both the BJP-led Government at the Centre and the TDP Government in Andhra Pradesh for the crisis faced by farmers.

"Ever since the BJP has taken over the reins at the Centre, the sufferings of farmers have aggravated. As for the TDP, it is more concerned about power politics than the distress of farmers," Ms Gandhi said, at a public meeting at the Arts College Grounds here.

In her 20-minute speech, Ms. Gandhi had a dig at the TDP for converting the Janmabhoomi into a party programme, thereby eroding the authority of elected panchayat raj functionaries. But she refrained from referring to the other controversial issue — free power to farmers.

Ms. Gandhi arrived here from Bangalore by a helicopter to meet the families of the farmers who committed suicide due to acute drought and mounting debt burden. She consoled them and promised her party's support. The Congress has collected Rs. 25 lakhs to provide relief to these families at the rate of Rs.22, 222 each. She presented cheques to nine women at the public meeting and the rest was distributed by other leaders. Interestingly, an all-party delegation minus the Congress led by the TDP met Ms. Gandhi and submitted a memorandum requesting her to use her good offices with the Karnataka Government in the construction of



The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, listening to grievances of the family members of farmers who committed suicide in Anantapur in Andhra Pradesh, on Saturday. — AP

the Tungabhadra parallel canal intended to benefit the drought-prone areas in Anantapur and Kurnool districts.

Congress leaders, including the CLP leader, Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy, dubbed it a "political gimmick" and blamed the TDP Government for "failure" to take up the long-pending high-level canal.

Ms. Gandhi said that suicides of farmers were reported in other States too but Andhra Pradesh had the dubious distinction of a record number of such deaths.

"There is nothing wrong in the soil and farmers continue to toil. The blame squarely lay with the State Government,"

she said. It was unfortunate that handloom weavers, too, became part of the tragic phenomenon. No farmer would want to end his life unless under extreme distress conditions as he had strong attachment with the family. Input costs had gone up steeply and the power tariff was beyond their reach. The Government could not provide the minimum support price for the produce.

Ms. Gandhi said the policies of the Central and State Governments had brought misery to the people.

While Rajiv Gandhi was instrumental in strengthening the local bodies, the TDP Government created "hurdles" for the

local-self governments through its Janmabhoomi programme which helped only its "party ranks". The voice of elected representatives was "being suppressed".

Ms. Gandhi said she was pained to know about the "spurt" in attacks on Dalits and other weaker sections under the TDP dispensation. She appealed to people to elect the Congress in the State "so that your needs are attended to and sufferings mitigated."

She said Gujarat was "burning" but the Government at the Centre, egged on by some friends, continued to protect the Modi Government in that State.

THE HINDU

CII launchpad to Sonia's campaign for alternative

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, April 26. — Using the CII platform, Mrs Sonia Gandhi today launched a frontal attack on the Narendra Modi government and the NDA dispensation at the Centre. More importantly, she tried to project the Congress as the credible alternative with vision for administration and governance.

Setting the tone at the onset, Mrs Gandhi said: "When the leader of the Opposition is invited by the country's leading industrialists to start off their annual get-together, it is natural to speculate — what could be the motive; what sort of political winds are blowing and in what direction!". She said the country desperately needed "new politics"; that will trigger economic growth and be a catalyst for social transformation; that unites not fragments, that heals not wounds, and is founded not on electoral expediency only but on moral imperatives. "The years out of power in Delhi have taught us (the Congress) a great deal, provided us time for intense introspection" she said.

The CII decision to invite her to make the opening speech is seen as the industry's move to position itself following the electoral success of the Congress and rumblings in the NDA. Mrs Gandhi listed strengthening agriculture,

Riots smoulder

AHMEDABAD, April 26. — Three more persons were killed and 30 injured as violence continued here. Curfew was reimposed at Vejalpur and at Mansa in Gandhinagar today following large-scale arson. The death toll since last Sunday has risen to 44.

One died in police firing in Vejalpur. Police said one was stabbed to death in Mansa. One person injured during Sunday's violence succumbed in hospital today. Tension prevailed in other parts of the city, though curfew was lifted for some hours. Areas still under night curfew include Gomtipur, Bapunagar, Shahpur, Sherkodata, Madhopura, Ranip in Sabarmati area, Kalupur, Gaikwad ki Haveli, Rakhiyal and Karanj. — SNS

investment momentum, public enterprises "a well-considered and transparent approach to privatisation", massive food-for-work programme, national employment guarantee scheme and revival of PDS as "priorities".

She denounced the Gujarat incidents and blamed both the Modi government and the Centre for tarnishing the land of the Mahatma and Sarder Patel and spelling doom in the most economically prosperous state.

27/1
"What happened in Gujarat will first and foremost, have an impact on Indian industry. It has lowered us in our own eyes".

The Congress chief assured the industry of the Congress' continued adherence to economic reforms but made it clear that "economic growth must take place in an all-inclusive social framework".

Visit to Andhra Pradesh

Mrs Gandhi is set to make a 'strategic visit' to Andhra Pradesh tomorrow. The AICC general-secretary in-charge of the state, Mr Vayalar Ravi, said Mrs Gandhi would visit Anantapur and meet the families of farmers who committed suicide.

In view of the reported resentment of farmers with the Chandrababu Naidu regime, the Congress is making a conscious effort to identify with them.

Dislodge NDA govt, says NCP: The NCP today demanded President's Rule in Gujarat. The party also called for the "immediate dislodging of the Vajpayee government" because "it has pervasive priorities". Addressing the press after a two-day national working committee meeting, Mr PA Sangma and Mr Praful Patil said the party would maintain equidistance from the BJP and Congress.

27 APR 2002

THE STATESMAN

Cong. protest at Raj Ghat

By Our Staff Reporter

NEW DELHI, APRIL 16. The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, today led the 24-hour hunger strike at the Raj Ghat here to protest the unabated violence in Gujarat and demanded the restoration of communal harmony in the State.

The hunger strike, organised by the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee, is part of the month-long agitational programme chalked out by the All-India Congress Committee.

A large number of AICC leaders, including the Delhi Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit, and the DPCC president, Subhash Chopra, took part in the country-wide agitation, launched by the Congress to seek the resignation of the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi.

Ms. Gandhi reached the Raj Ghat at 9 a.m. and stayed for an hour before proceeding to Parliament.

An all-religion prayer meeting for the restoration of peace and harmony in Gujarat was

held after Ms. Gandhi's arrival. She was also joined by the Deputy Leader in the Lok Sabha, Shivraj Patil, the AICC general secretaries, Ambika Soni, Kamal Nath and Oscar Fernandes, the CWC member, Arjun Singh, the party spokesman, Jaipal Reddy, the JKPC president, Ghulam Nabi Azad, and the senior AICC leaders, Ahmed Patel and Natwar Singh. Many MLA, Councilors, the Leader of the House in MCD, Ram Babu Sharma, and Ministerial colleagues of Ms. Dikshit also took part in the protest.

A visitor's book was placed at the venue to enable people to record their opinion about the Gujarat situation.

The Congress workers displayed placards seeking the removal of Mr. Modi and decrying the BJP for "unleashing communal violence in Gujarat."

Later, addressing the party workers, Mr. Kamal Nath said the BJP had been making a determined bid to murder the principles of Mahatma Gandhi at his own birthplace. And it was probably for the first time that a Chief Minister had played a lead role in "inciting communal clashes." Demanding the immediate ouster of Mr. Modi, he called for strong legal action against him to strengthen the secular credentials of the country.



The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, the Delhi Chief Minister, Sheila Dikshit, and other party leaders staging a dharna in New Delhi on Tuesday demanding the dismissal of the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi. — PTI

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PTI

Sonia's War

If chroniclers of political history had to choose one day in the year 2002 as the turning point in India's destiny, it would probably be Friday, April 12. It was the day the BJP returned to Hindutva. It was the day the prime minister dropped his cultivated moderation for the kind of belligerence thought to be favoured by the Bajrang Dal, the VHP, and lately, Narendra Modi. But Friday was also the day the Congress, after years of flip-flop politics, finally and firmly declared its commitment to secularism. Sonia Gandhi's call for an "uncompromising war against communalism" is the clearest enunciation of the Congress' beliefs and philosophy in many, many years. Few would quarrel with this happy change in a party that has for too long tried to be all things to all people, and ended up not knowing what it stood for, indeed what its core values were. Mrs Gandhi instructed the 14 Congress chief ministers who had gathered for a conclave in Guwahati to act decisively against "individuals and organisations practising the politics of hate". She told them to act without "fear or favour" and not to compromise in any circumstances. The Congress, Mrs Gandhi stressed, "believes that all those who live in this country are equally entitled to the protection of law, irrespective of the community to which they belong". These are not extraordinary words of wisdom. In no other democracy would a party leader need to underscore principles recognised as fundamental to governance. But in the peculiar democracy called India, it becomes a great occasion when a political leader of some significance speaks for the rule of law. The tragedy is, the Congress has contributed in no small measure to this abysmal state of affairs.

Reassuring as Mrs Gandhi's renewed faith in the basic ideology of the Congress is, it must be weighed against the party's past record, starting with the dark chapter of Emergency. It was a Congress government, and the only government to date, that suspended the fundamental rights of citizens and officially imposed censorship. It was lumpen groups led by Congressmen that mounted a vicious pogrom against the Sikhs in 1984, an outrage magnified many times by Rajiv Gandhi's offensive remarks about tremors being inevitable following the fall of a great tree. It was the Congress again that opened the locks of the Babri masjid complex and lent legitimacy to the Ram mandir campaign by allowing the shilanyas ceremony. Of course, it paid for this manipulative politics by losing the affections of both the Hindus and the Muslims, even if the resounding defeat did nothing to erode the delusion of grandeur evident to this day. In opposition, the Congress has retained the arrogance and imperiousness of power, its refusal even to consider broader alliances being a case in point. It is certainly true that today the Congress' electoral graph is on the upswing and it runs 14 state governments to the BJP's three. But the party has next to no presence in many important states: Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Bengal and Tamil Nadu. For the Congress truly to make a comeback, it must learn to play fair by the people. Which means acting "without fear or favour", as Mrs Gandhi promised. Which means consciously eschewing machiavellian games.

PM's mask has slipped: Sonia

Saroj Nagi
Guwahati, April 13

14/4
THE BJP-CONGRESS battle for Delhi is getting livelier, by the day with razor-sharp verbal exchanges between Sonia Gandhi and Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

In her latest attack on the Prime Minister, Sonia today accused him of losing his "mental balance" and dubbed the BJP as a communal party. The AICC president said the inherent contradictions in the ruling combine could lead to the collapse of the NDA Government.

Sonia was addressing her first formal press conference in three years. Asked whether she would accept Vajpayee's challenge to topple his Government in a replay of the action that had led to fresh elections in 1999, she said: "We don't need to do anything. The contradictions within the BJP and between the BJP and its coalition partners will possibly

bring down the Government. The contradictions have grown in the last few days. They will only worsen."

She began her diatribe by accusing Vajpayee of losing his mental balance, quickly rephrased it to say his "mental balance is disturbed...", and left the sentence meaningfully incomplete.

Sonia said Vajpayee wears a mask that keeps slipping and so "now he is thoroughly exposed", particularly with his refusal to drop Chief Minister Narendra Modi over the continuing communal violence in Gujarat.

Sonia's sharp denunciation of Vajpayee comes close on the heels of her comments at a recent Seva Dal meeting where she talked about people losing their mental balance.

She was referring to the Prime Minister's sudden outburst against her in the joint session of Parliament.

9-1-2 Conf (1) HC-9
During the 40-minute Press meet that spanned a wide range of issues, Sonia, warmed up to the query whether the Congress feels the communal violence in Gujarat has revealed fissures in the ruling alliance and if it was time for the Vajpayee government to go.

But she side-stepped a question on whether the probable snap poll in Gujarat would lead on to general elections too. "It is for them to decide when to have elections. The Congress is ready for elections whenever it comes. We are fully prepared.

But with 14 State Governments in its kitty, the Congress would need to battle the anti-incumbency as well as create a base in UP, Bihar, Tamil Nadu and West Bengal. Sonia admitted that the party's situation in some states is not very happy and it would need to work much harder.

But the popular feedback

showed that people were fed up with coalitions and were "looking to the good old days of Congress rule".

Sonia "personally" did not feel the need to think in terms of a coalition at the Centre at present. "Whenever the time is ripe, we will discuss these issues," she said.

Cong trains Pota gun at PM

Accusing Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee of spreading communal hatred by attacking Islam and Christianity, newly appointed president of Jammu and Kashmir PCC Ghulam Nabi Azad today demanded his arrest under Pota.

In his maiden address to Jammu and Kashmir Congressmen at their party headquarters here, Azad described as "shameful" the Prime Minister's thinking that "Islam and Christianity are threats not only to India but to the world."

DON'T REST ON YOUR LAURELS, CONG. CMs TOLD

Sonia calls for 'war' against communalism

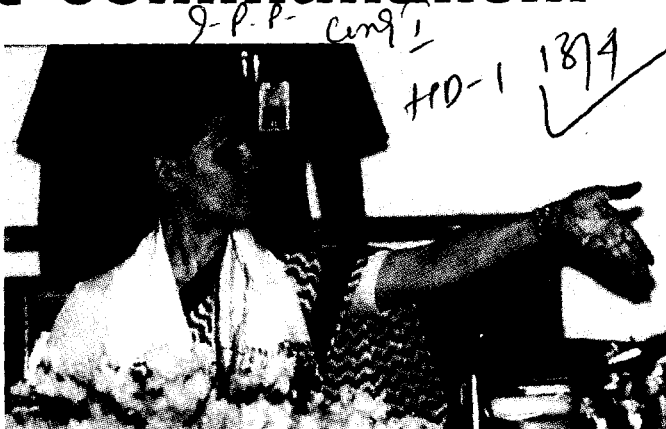
By Javed M. Ansari

GUWAHATI, APRIL 12. The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, has called for an "uncompromising war against the forces of communalism" and set out an ambitious agenda of governance for the Congress State Governments. Significantly, Ms. Gandhi also directed her Chief Ministers to act firmly and decisively against "individuals and organisations" practising the politics of hate. "They must be dealt with without fear or favour and there must not be any compromise under any circumstances," she told the conclave of 14 Congress Chief Ministers here.

The significance of Ms. Gandhi's speech lay in the manner in which she addressed the political realities, her party's role, and the need to match promise with action in order to win the confidence of the people.

The people had begun to recognise the Congress as the "natural party of governance and expectations are high," she said. But, the State Governments should "practise a brand of politics in which economic growth and social development have absolute primacy."

The first part of her speech was a riposte to those who believed that the Congress was "wilting" under the onslaught from the saffron brigade in the wake of the "communal madness" in Gujarat. Even as she came down heavily on the Bharatiya Janata Party, both at the Centre and the State, Ms. Gandhi contrasted the "exclusivist and sectarian nature" of the Sangh Parivar with the compos-



The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, gestures during the conference of the Congress-ruled State Chief Ministers in Guwahati, on Friday. — AP

ite and pan-Indian view of her own party. The country was going through one of the "darkest" phases in history, and the current battle and debate on secularism was between a minority of "self-appointed guardians of faith who practised religious hatred and bigotry," and a majority of Indians who believed in religious tolerance and wanted to "move forward and look ahead." The Congress "believes that all those who live in this country are equally entitled to the protection of law, irrespective of the community (to which) they belong," she said.

Ms. Gandhi set out the agenda for the conclave as well as the benchmarks for the Congress Governments. The attempt clearly was to draw the battle lines against the BJP on the issue of good governance. At the very outset, she cautioned the Chief Ministers against "resting on their laurels." The Congress Governments must stand out as "ever expanding

silver linings in the dark clouds created by the BJP".

Good governance had many facets. It included ensuring that minimum wages were paid, assuring the welfare of the unorganised sector, implementation of measures to curb atrocities against women, the weaker sections and the minorities, besides maintaining social harmony. The anti-incumbency factor, she said, could only be taken care of by credible achievement, political mobilisation and responsive management.

Ms. Gandhi also called for special programmes for the Dalits, the Adivasis, the backward classes, the minorities and women.

Ms. Gandhi asked her Chief Ministers to pay attention to power reforms in their States, so that adequate power was available at affordable rates. She called on her Chief Ministers to collectively boycott arrogant display of wealth and authority.

Cong. against any 'concession' to Prabakaran

By Our Special
Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 11. The senior Congress leader, Arjun Singh, has spoken up against any "soft corner or concession" for the leader of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam, Velupillai Prabhakaran. In a written statement, Mr. Singh, member of the Congress Working Committee, called Mr. Prabhakaran's

statement (about Rajiv Gandhi's assassination 10 years ago) on Wednesday as offensive "to (the) sensibilities of all Indians."

Calling Mr. Prabhakaran "the sole architect of this tragic incidence (Rajiv Gandhi's assassination)," Mr. Singh said "we can never forget this." He called upon "the Government of India to take all legal steps necessary to bring Mr. Prabhakaran to justice in this case."

Mr. Singh, who had earlier taken the lead in demanding that Rajiv Gandhi's assassins be brought to book, asserted that "Rajivji lives in the hearts and minds of millions and millions of Indians, who looked forward to his leading a resurgent India in the 21st century... Our dreams and hopes were cut short by the diabolical planning and brutal act of

assassination. We cannot tolerate anybody making light of this unfortunate event." (Mr. Prabhakaran said in his press conference that Rajiv Gandhi's assassination was "tragic" and refused to comment further saying the clemency pleas of the four sentenced to death in the case were pending in court). The Congress has already demanded that Mr. Prabhakaran be extradited.

'Dharnas' mark Cong. campaign for Modi ouster

NEW DELHI, APRIL 11. The Congress today launched a high-voltage campaign across the country to press for the dismissal of the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi, for his "failure" to contain communal violence in the State, which has claimed over 800 lives in over a month.

Senior Congress leaders and workers wore black badges, sat on 'dharnas' and took out processions as part of their agitational programme to mobilise public opinion against the Modi Government.

In Gujarat, the Pradesh Congress Committee president, Amarsinh Chaudhary, and the Leader of the Opposition in the Assembly, Naresh Raval, joined hundreds of Congress workers at a 'dharna' staged at Gandhinagar. Terming Mr. Modi's rule as

"regressive," Mr. Chaudhary and Mr. Raval said the State was passing through a critical phase. 'Dharnas' were also organised at all the 'talukas' and district headquarters of the State. But the party was denied permission to organise the sit-in at Ahmedabad.

In Kolkata, the Congress workers burnt an effigy of Mr. Modi and accused him of "orchestrating the attacks on minorities" in Gujarat. In Delhi, about 50 Congress activists, with black bands on their arms, raised slogans against the Bharatiya Janata Party and accused Mr. Modi of being responsible for the violence in Gujarat.

Protest demonstrations were also organised in Bihar. The State Congress president, Shakteel Ahmed, its Legislature Party

leader, Vijay Shankar Dubey, and several other leaders staged a 'dharna' in Patna. Speaking on the occasion, Mr. Ahmed charged the Union Home Minister, L. K. Advani, and Mr. Modi with having "failed" to tackle the situation in Gujarat after the Godhra train carnage and demanded their dismissal.

In Bhubaneswar, the Orissa Congress president, Sarat Patnaik, and the Leader of the Opposition, Ramakanta Mishra, staged a 'dharna' outside the Raj Bhavan along with party activists, demanding the dismissal of the Modi Government to halt the continuing communal riots in Gujarat.

"We are observing it (today) as black day," the PCC spokesman, Lalatendu Mohapatra, said. — PTI

Cong set for last lap of oust-Modi race

CL Manoj in New Delhi

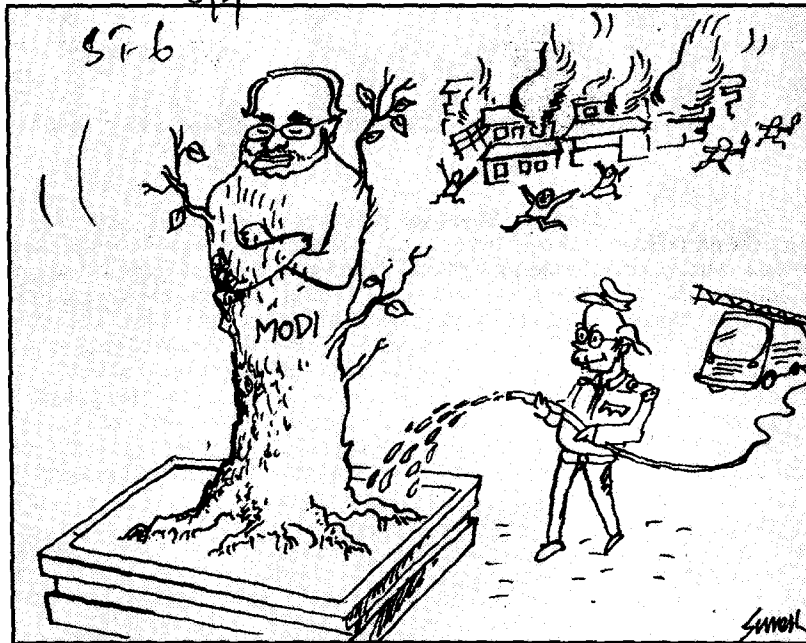
April 9. — The Congress high command has drawn up a detailed "political action plan" as a counter to the Narendra Modi government in Gujarat, after concluding that the party's "self-imposed period of restraint" has turned a political burden.

The Congress — keeping in mind the fact that it is the principal opposition in Gujarat, where rumours are rife about the possibility of the government going in for early Assembly elections some time later this year — has lined up conduct a networked agitation aimed at neutralising the Sangh Parivar theory of a post-riot "favourable communal polarisation" among the electorate. The agitation programme will also serve the twin purpose of galvanising the party cadre in the state ahead of the Assembly polls as and when they are held.

Simultaneously, the high command will coordinate a national campaign on the strife in Gujarat in collaboration with PCCs in all states, and will also confront the AB Vajpayee government, and the home minister in particular, in Parliament, which resumes on Monday.

The Congress may also support the 17 April protest planned by the People's Front. The party is awaiting results of the Gujarat panchayat elections, due tomorrow, which could be the first feedback on the ground realities.

Sources said till now the party has considered the possibility of any coordinated response from it fanning the communal fire. A section of the central leadership also felt "inaction" will be in tandem with the "mental make-up" of the state. But with violence continuing



for the seventh week, that too, despite the Prime Minister's visit to Godhra last week, the Congress now realises any more restraint will be a political blunder. The mob frenzy at the Sabarmati Ashram and the nationwide condemnation of the Modi regime has also spurred the decision to turn proactive. The action plan follows an AICC team's visit to Gujarat recently.

The CWC, which met last night, cleared the plan for a "political response", and a meeting of the AICC general secretaries this evening finalised the details, likely to be announced tomorrow.

Mrs Ambika Soni told The Statesman that on 11 April PCC presidents across the country will organise meet-

ings in their states to protest the Modi government and take a vow to "protect secularism from attacks of the Sangh". This will be followed by Congress demonstrations and *sadbhavana yatras* in all states. The agitation will last till 21 May.

Senior AICC leaders will also visit Gujarat and a visit of Mrs Sonia Gandhi to Sabarmati Ashram is on the cards, too, wherein a conscious effort will be made to play up the Gandhi legacy projecting the party as its inheritor.

In Gujarat, the Congress has decided to observe a "Narendra Modi Hatao Diwas" marked by a day-long *dharna* on Thursday. Mr Amarsinh Chaudhary, PCC president, said the party will "relentlessly" pursue its demand for the

Modi stays, says Jana

KOLKATA, April 9. — The BJP has no plans to remove Mr Modi from the post of Gujarat CM. Mr Jana Krishnamurthy, party president, said today at the NSC Bose Airport. He was here on his way from Ranchi to Delhi.

On the demand for Mr Modi's removal made by the Opposition and some NDA allies including Trinamul, Mr Krishnamurthy said: "There is no such proposal before us. He will continue as CM for as long as he has the confidence of the Legislature." Expressing regret over the riots, he also said the situation there was improving barring stray incidents. The BJP chief further alleged that during the Congress regime there some years ago, communal riots had claimed 1,000 lives in the state.

On UP, he said though BJP-BSP talks on a government were on, no concrete proposal has reached his party. — SNS

chief minister's resignation, adds SNS from Ahmedabad.

Thursday's *dharna* will see Congressmen in agitation at *taluka* and district headquarters starting noon and due to continue till the evening. All partymen will wear black armbands and voice their protest against the continuance in office of Mr Modi. The protest is planned under the aegis of the CWC, which yesterday passed a resolution demanding Mr Modi's resignation.

Though the official toll in incidents of violence in the state post-Godhra is pegged at around 850, Mr Chaudhary claimed "more than 2,000 people had been killed in the riots" and that "Gujarat has been pushed back by 20 years".

Riot fatigue for police

Riot fatigue has caused the Ahmedabad Police to lay off about 2,000-2,500 Home Guards who have been on uninterrupted duty in the walled city since 27 February.

A police spokesman said these men, employed for this duty on a daily wage, were taken off "law-and-order" duties on account of exhaustion. However, Home Guards on duty at the Collectorate, telephone exchanges and schools where examinations are on will stay put.

Of nearly 8,000 policemen in Ahmedabad, some 5,000 continue to be on duty in the city, where night curfew is still in place in six police stations areas, even as daylight curfew has been lifted.

The Sabarmati police station area today witnessed a "bandh" in support of suspended police inspector Mr PR Mehra. Shops and offices were shut to protest the "unfair" treatment allegedly meted out to the inspector.

Riots in Kalyan

Riots broke out in Kalyan in Thane district of Maharashtra late tonight after a Bajrang Dal activist was allegedly stabbed, police said, reports PTI from Kalyan. Police fired at a mob after it set fire to houses of members of both communities following the stabbing.

Somnath spits fire

The CPI-M leader, Mr Somnath Chatterjee, today demanded the removal of Mr Modi and the resignation of Mr LK Advani for their "utter failure" to control the situation. He asked why the Centre, which rushes delegates to Bengal at every allegation of violence, "is quiet in this case". Calling secular forces to join the 17 April Protest Day, Mr Chatterjee also warned the Centre of a battle inside Parliament.

Govt. has failed the nation: Sonia

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MARCH 15. The Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, launched a scathing attack on the Government in the Lok Sabha today, accusing it of "betraying the hopes and expectation of the people and failing the nation." *16/3*

In her 30-minute speech on the motion of thanks to the President's address, Ms. Gandhi covered a range of issues — Gujarat, Ayodhya, the north-east, and the economy — but the emphasis was clearly on social and political issues.

She was critical of the Centre's handling of Gujarat and Ayodhya. Accusing the Gujarat Government of "complicity" (in the recent incidents of violence), she demanded the Chief Minister, Narendra Modi's resignation. "His continuance is a affront to our democracy," she said, adding that the Gujarat developments were a result of the "politics of hate" practised by the BJP. "The traumatic events in the State has de-

meaned us as civilised human beings and as citizens of a modern, progressive, liberal society."

Targeting the Home Minister, L. K. Advani, Ms. Gandhi said she disagreed with his statement on the Gujarat situation, — "it is at variance with facts"— and described as "incredulous" his explanation for the delay in deploying the Army that it would have affected the security on the borders. "Why didn't the Government make contingency plans to deal with such a situation?"

Ms. Gandhi was also critical of the Centre's handling of the Ayodhya imbroglio. "The build-up and tensions were allowed to grow in Ayodhya," she charged. Accusing the Government of "duplicity," she said while it favoured the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, it had said it was neutral and favoured status quo through the President's address. "But it turns out that the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, had instructed the Attorney-General to plead for a

religious ceremony as demanded by the VHP."

She also charged Mr. Vajpayee with adopting an ambiguous attitude towards the VHP and not demonstrating the will to act against it. The "dialogue" initiated with the religious leaders was no substitute for "firm resolute action." The Government had placed factional interests above those of the country and "caved into communal forces" after headline BJP MPs wrote to Mr. Vajpayee. *J. P. P. [unclear]*

On national security, Ms. Gandhi said there was no evidence of any clear-cut strategy and regretted that even three years after of its submission, the Subramaniam Committee report on Kargil had not been discussed. She wanted to know the progress on the list of 20 terrorists given to Pakistan and whether Islamabad had changed its approach to cross-border terrorism. She was also critical of Mr. Vajpayee's decision to reinduct George Fernandes as the Defence Minister

before the Inquiry Commission, probing the Tehelka expose, had given its verdict.

On the Budget, she said it was "full of tokenism" and wondered why the Government was retrenching people during a period of economic slowdown. She also questioned the need to sell profit-making PSUs. *HD - 1*

Somnath Chatterjee of the CPI(M) continued in the same vein and criticised the Government on Ayodhya and Gujarat. The people were wondering whether the country would survive as a secular nation, he said. "Secularism is dead as long as this Government is in power." He termed the Government's decision to send a member of the Prime Minister's Ayodhya cell to receive the "shila" from the VHP today a "constitutional sacrilege."

Vijay Kumar Malhotra of the BJP accused the Opposition of trying to "fan sectarianism" and "pressuring the Muslims not to find an amicable solution to the Ayodhya issue."

15 MAR 2002

THE HINDU

PM attack on Sonia a face-saving attempt



SONIA GANDHI

Jay Raina
New Delhi, March 27

WHY DID Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee resort to an uncharacteristic outburst against Congress president Sonia Gandhi during the debate on Poto in Parliament yesterday? The answer perhaps lies in the near marginalisation of the ruling alliance in the debate and a seemingly stunning success of the Opposition MPs in putting the Government on the mat.

Though sure of pushing the contentious law owing to its advantage in the number game, the Treasury Benches, including key supporter TDP, failed to put up a convincing show in support

of the legislation.

The Opposition leaders, on the other hand, not only stole the show that was televised live across the country but also earned huge brownie points for their well-honed debating skills and oratorical expertise.

Sonia's lethal attack on the Vajpayee Government had not evoked any immediate response from the Treasury Benches. The MPs seemed enthralled by her performance.

In his unscheduled intervention towards the end of the marathon debate, Vajpayee looked somewhat rattled and visibly hurt. There was considerable anger in his expression.

As regards the PM's claim of

Sonia making substantive personal charges, why did he not take exception to the comments immediately after she had finished her speech? Not a single speaker, including Law Minister Arun Jaitley, had made any reference to her alleged personal attack against the PM.

The Government was apparently mulling over Vajpayee's intervention in the debate till late in the evening. At the late evening stock-taking in the PM's Parliament Office, several BJP MPs complained of the poor show of the Treasury Benches in defending Poto.

The transcript of Sonia's speech was then rushed to Vajpayee's office and the "offensive"

portions hurriedly highlighted for the PM's instant attention.

Even as preparations for Vajpayee's riposte were half way, Deputy Speaker PM Sayeed, at the nudging of former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar and Samajwadi chief Mulayam Singh Yadav, called it a day.

Vajpayee rushed to the House after Advani had just begun his concluding comments ahead of the voting. Leaving the podium to the PM, Advani went back to his seat in the front row only to savour the unexpected Vajpayee outbursts. The subsequent pan-demonium and a near clash between the BJP and Congress members near the Well added to the unexpected drama.

Cong gives it back

THE CONGRESS on Wednesday accused Prime Minister Vajpayee of resorting to "self-glorification" as a ploy "to wriggle out of embarrassing situations".

"It seems to have become Vajpayee's brand equity... We are tired of listening to his references to his age and seniority. If age and seniority are the paramount considerations then Bush, Blair, Lionel Jospin should keep rushing for Vajpayee's advice," Jaipal Reddy said.

HTC, New Delhi

J.P. Singh
K.C. 6
28/3

Congress issues whip on Poto bill

NEW DELHI: The Congress Party on Wednesday issued a three-line whip asking its members in the Rajya Sabha to be present in the upper house on Thursday and defeat the controversial prevention of terrorism ordinance (Poto) bill passed by the Lok Sabha on Tuesday.

"A three-line whip has been issued by the Congress to its members in the Rajya Sabha asking them to be present in the house and defeat the Poto bill," party spokesman Anand Sharma said.

Besides the whip, he said the party was also contacting all its members in the Rajya Sabha to ensure their presence on the crucial day. Unlike in the Lok Sabha, where the BJP-led NDA government enjoys a majority, the Congress-led opposition has a majority in the upper house and is determined to defeat the bill. (PTI)

► See Edit: Pushing POTO, Page 8

THE TIMES OF INDIA

21 MAR 2002

Congress shocks BJP by winning Uttaranchal

Statesman News Service

DEHRA DUN, Feb. 24. — The first Assembly elections in Uttaranchal proved to be nothing short of a nightmare for the BJP who lost the battle to the Congress. Contrary to all exit poll results, the Congress managed a clean sweep with 36 seats while the BJP was left with 19. The BSP bagged seven seats.

Ten (out of 12) BJP ministers and the former chief minister were defeated by Congress candidates. The ministers who lost the polls include Mr Bansidhar Bhagat from Haldwani, Mr NS Rana from Mussourie, Mr Lakhi Ram Joshi from Narendra Nagar, Mr Tirth Singh Rawat from Pauri, Mr Kedar Singh Purnia from Badrinath, Mr Ramesh Pokhariyal Nishank from Thalised and Mr Narayan Ram Das from Bageshwar. Former chief minister Mr Nityanand Swami is defeated by his Congress rival, Mr Dinesh Aggarwal, at Laxman Chowk.

The chief minister, Mr Bhagat Singh Koshiyari, who won by a very narrow margin, today submitted his resignation to the Governor, Mr Surjit Singh

Barnala.

Mr Barnala accepted his resignation, but asked Mr Koshiyari to continue in office till alternative arrangements are made, officials said.

Defectors blamed

DEHRA DUN, Feb. 24. — Former chief minister Mr Nityanand Swami's defeat in the Assembly polls may trigger another round of political battle as he has held party defectors responsible for it.

His associates are accusing the Koshiyari group of working for Mr Swami's defeat.

Mr Swami, keeping a low profile, blamed Mr Prem Batta and Mr Yashpal Singh for his debacle. "These defectors managed around 3,000 votes from my vote bank," he said.

— SNS

died after a heart attack in Hardwar, family sources said.

However, contrary to its expectations, the UKD managed to capture only four seats with Mr Kashi Singh Aeri winning the Kanalicheena seat.

The two BJP ministers who won the polls are Mr Harbans Kapoor and health minister Mr Ajay Bhatt. Mr Kapoor won from Dehrakhas while Mr Bhatt grabbed the Ranikhet seat. Mr Kapoor said the party faced a humiliating defeat because it failed to live up to people's expectations within such a short time.

The state president of the Samajwadi Party, Mr Vinod Barthwal, was defeated by the BJP candidate, Mr Trivendra Singh Rawat, at Doiwala. The Samajwadi Party failed to get even a single seat in the elections.

The UKD president, Mr Diwakar Bhatt, lost the Devprayag seat to the Congress candidate. Shocked by the defeat of Mr Bhatt, his wife, Indu Bhatt (48),

THE STATESMAN

Welcome moves Somen to tears

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 15

HE RETURNED to his city after recuperating from a near fatal heart attack. Thousands thronged the roads to welcome him—many after spending their own money—cutting across caste and religious barriers. There was a wizened maulvi, a bishop with the clerks from government offices. The leader missed nothing. He tried to speak but found his throat choked with emotion.

The red carpet welcome accorded to Somen Mitra, the veteran Congress leader, today on his return to the city after undergoing a heart operation in New Delhi was significant. It proved that Mitra might be a mere MLA in the party hierarchy, but he is the only one enjoying the masses' support and credibility.

His plane touched down at

11.45 am at NSC Bose International Airport. As Mitra flanked by leaders Abdul Mannan, Manas Bhuiyan and Samir Chakrabarti came out of airport, his supporters shouted "*Somen Mitra aashchee*, Trinamool kaanpche".

"We have not forgiven what Mamata Banerjee has done. It is only Mitra who can rise up to Banerjee's challenge," said Raju Khan from Kashipur. He is not a Congress worker but a Mitra loyalist. "More than the party it is his personal following. He has helped thousands selflessly," said Gautam Das.

Mitra climbs onto an open Gypsy decked up with flowers, with a huge cavalcade in tow. The convoy comprising more than 10 vehicles slowly weaves across the city, taking VIP Road, Kankurgachhi, Manicktalla, Amherst Street, Sealdah to Moulali and finally to the party headquarters

Bidhan Bhawan.

All along the route makeshift gates, banners and festoons proclaiming "Long Live Somen Mitra" welcomed the cavalcade. Well-wishers shouted slogans like "*sonar Banglar sonar chhele*". At the Ultadanga's crossing Ajit Panja's Trinamool Congress banners joined in welcoming the former PCC chief.

It took the better part of four hours for the cavalcade to reach the Congress headquarters where PCC chief Pranab Mukherjee and nearly a 1,000 well-wishers had gathered. As a band played patriotic songs, Mitra took the stage.

"I was in Delhi recuperating for the last few months. After coming here I have received immense love from all of you," said Somen and broke into tears.

The applause was deafening. But it is still some time before Mitra dives headlong back into

full-time politics.

The strain of the journey and then the huge welcome were too strenuous, and he needed some sleep before he spoke to the press.

Mitra said there would be no change in the leadership of the Pradesh Congress till the panchayat elections next year. He would see to it that Mukherjee remains at the helm of State Congress till the elections. All of Somen's experience will be required to topple Mamata's calculations at the panchayat polls as he did in the Assembly elections in 2001.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

16 JAN 2002

Cong. scales down participation for missions abroad

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 12. The Congress party has scaled down the level of its participation in the all-party delegations being sent abroad. Instead of Manmohan Singh and P.M. Sayeed, who were widely tipped to lead a delegation each, the party will now be represented by Najma Heptullah, R.L. Bhatia, Mani Shankar Aiyer and Kapil Sibal.

The party has also proposed that Dr. Najma Heptulla, the deputy chairperson of the Rajya Sabha, lead the delegation to Saudi Arabia. The list of the Congress party members was finalised by the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, this morning, during her meeting with Manmohan Singh, Arjun Singh, Natwar Singh and Jaipal Reddy. The names were then conveyed to Brajesh Mishra, Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister by Natwar Singh.

Congress sources today indicated that the decision to scale down the level of the party's participation was prompted by the "uncertainty about the level of the delegations interaction, and the protocol that would be extended to it".

Having decided against sending any of the top leaders, the party also did not want to appear as being non-cooperative, hence the decision to send people with some experience of foreign affairs. Dr. Heptulla is the chairperson of the IPU and has had considerable international exposure, Mr. Bhatia has been a Foreign Minister, while Mr. Mani Shankar Aiyer has been a successful diplomat.

THE HINDU

13 JAN 2002

Angry Congress walks out of BJP's team for campaign against terror

Times News Network

NEW DELHI: An angry Congress on Thursday rejected the government's plan to include its leaders in the all-party delegations proposed to be sent abroad to rally international support for India's position on cross-border terrorism. The Congress said the panels had been drawn up unilaterally and without prior consultations with its leadership.

The Congress has taken strong objection not only to the manner in which the government has planned these all-party delegations, but also to the announcement of these teams' composition, not by the government, but by BJP spokesperson V.K. Malhotra. Reports on Thursday suggested some of these all-party delegations to be sent abroad to drum up support for the country's stand on terrorism, would be led by Congress leader Manmohan Singh, Lok Sabha deputy

speaker P.M. Sayeed and Rajya Sabha deputy chairperson Najma Heptulla.

The party's strong view was spelt out by spokesperson Anand Sharma, and Manmohan Singh too issued a statement that he was "distressed at the cavalier manner" in which the government had gone about planning these delegations.

Last month's all-party meeting convened by the PM had mooted these visits. Mr Sharma said there was no subsequent communication from the government and that the party learnt of its leaders' inclusion in the teams from media reports. Even the leaders were unaware of their inclusion, he said. However, he indicated this would not affect the Congress support to the government in the country's battle against terrorism.

Mr Singh, in his statement, pointed out that the Congress had extended full support to the government's initiative and

the "least that was expected in return was consultations and dialogue with the leadership of the Congress about the composition of the delegations and the places to be visited." Mr Singh said this had not happened despite assurances, and that it only indicated the "non-seriousness of the BJP in dealing with vital national affairs and in sustaining a national consensus on crucial issues."

Mr Singh did not refer to the fact that the announcement about the delegations was made by the BJP spokesperson, but Mr Sharma expressed the party's serious reservations about this. Mr Sharma said these panels were official delegations and it was for the government to make these announcements after prior consultations with opposition parties. "We reject the plan", Mr Sharma said, stating it was outrageous that a political party should make such an announcement.

THE TIMES OF INDIA

11 JAN 2002

Cong., BJP join issue with Blair

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 5. The Congress sought to convey its disappointment at the statement of the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair, that Pakistan has a 'strong' position on Kashmir.

Even before Mr. Blair, on a four-day visit to India, made his way to the Capital, the main Opposition expressed its strong views on the subject and made it known at a specially-convened party briefing today.

The Congress said it expected New Delhi's international friends to show "greater sensitivity" and understanding of the situation and suggested that Jammu and Kashmir could not be "casually prejudged".

Expressing disappointment at the statement of Mr. Blair, the Congress spokesman, Anand Sharma, said: "We expect our close international friends to show greater sensitivity and understanding of the situation when the fabric of democracy and secularism is being sought to be torn apart by Pakistan and its various proxies."

The Congress emphasised that the global resolve to fight terrorism would be "undermined if Jammu and Kashmir is so casually prejudged by an important world leader".

To a question whether the party considered the statement as a setback to India-Britain relations, Mr. Sharma said the Congress

would just go with its statement. While joining issue with Mr. Blair, the Congress maintained it would prefer to watch the reaction of the Vajpayee Government to the statement. Meanwhile, the Bharatiya Janata Party also took exception saying that the statement would only lend support to Pakistan in its terrorists activities in Jammu and Kashmir, the senior party leader, J.P. Mathur, said.

Mr. Blair would arrive in New Delhi tomorrow evening and is scheduled to meet the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and attend a dinner to be hosted in his honour. He is slated to call on the President, K.R. Narayanan, on Monday before leaving for Islamabad by noon.

THE HINDU

JAN 5 2002

Cong. dissatisfied with Pak. action

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 2. The Congress today expressed its dissatisfaction with the steps taken by Pakistan to rein in the terrorists operating there.

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"Most of the steps are cosmetic, smack of tokenism and do not indicate a sincere resolve on the part of the Pakistan Government to bring terrorists to justice," said the party spokesperson, Mr. Jaipal

Reddy. The party, however, refrained from passing a judgment on the series of steps initiated by the Indian Government. According to the party it would be premature to pass a judgment.

On whether India should follow the advice tendered by the U.S. President, Mr. George W. Bush, on giving the Pakistan President, Gen. Musharraf, more time, he said, "It is easy for the Western

powers to advise restraint when it comes to others. The Government must take into consideration the advice of all major powers, but the final decision has to be its own," said Mr. Reddy.

Asked if the Congress supported the idea of a war with Pakistan, Mr. Reddy said, "We must take all the necessary steps to bring terrorists to book, but the emphasis must be on diplomatic steps."

THE HINDU

3 JAN 2002