

# Bill to rein in defectors likely soon

Our Political Bureau  
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**S**EEKING to plug the scope for more Jogi-type operations to suborn the verdict by engineering defections, the Union Cabinet has cleared the Anti-Defection Bill which the government intends to pass in the ongoing session itself.

The bill, when enacted, will de-legitimise the loophole in the Anti-Defection Act which, while criminalising retail defections, condones the act if it involves one-third of the total strength of the legislature group in question. The measure may, however, lead to the "tyranny of whip" leaving no room for, as some have argued, even principled dissent.

The constitutional amendment to disallow defectors from holding office of profit till they win the next elections and peg the strength of the Council of

Ministers to 15% of the total number of members in Lok Sabha and State legislatures also got the Cabinet nod last night.

Parliamentary affairs minister Sushma Swaraj told reporters today that the government will try to pass the bill in the current session. With the winter session ending on December 23, there is just another week for it to go.

The 97th Constitution (Amendment) Bill incorporates recommendations of the Parliamentary Standing Committee, including fixing the size of the council of ministers to 15% of the Lower House instead of 10% of the strength of both Houses.

Describing it as a milestone in electoral reforms, Ms Swaraj said this modification has been made from the earlier recommendation as not all states have a bicameral legislature. The 44-member Standing Committee on Home Affairs, headed by

Pranab Mukherjee (Congress), sought revision of a clause which provides for disqualification of a member to be appointed minister from the date of defection till the date of expiry of his term in office or until he contests an election, whichever is earlier.

The panel instead suggested that the disqualification in view of the defection be removed only when he/she wins an election to a legislature. The 10th Schedule allows a member to defect in the case of a split. If one-third of a party's strength in a House decide to split, it is recognised by the Speaker as a breakaway group and can function as a distinct political entity. The panel suggested that protection under the provision of split should be scrapped.

It said split in a party for a cause other than ideological, such as situational and motivational, will be stopped checking proliferation of political parties.

The committee was of the view that size of a council of ministers including the chief minister in a state should be 15% of the total number of members of the legislative assembly and the minimum number of ministers in the smaller states should be 12 instead of seven as provided in the Bill.

On the question of party whip, it felt the government may not be physically destabilised but instability would follow when it fails to ensure safe passage of its legislative business in the House and it may not be desirable to give freedom to vote on the floor of the House to ensure stability of government. It said the existing practice of including ministers in the government from both the Houses of Parliament may continue but in order to limit the size of the ministry, the strength of Lower House would be reckoned.

*The Economic Times.*

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# Curfew in Daman as anger rises

By Amarendra Jha  
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**Daman:** Angry mobs here attacked government buildings, burnt vehicles and got into pitched battles with the police on Friday evening. The protesters, who got out of control, were venting their spleen over Thursday's bridge collapse, in which at least 26 people, including several children, died. The target of their ire was the administration of the Union Territory.

Curfew was imposed on the town at around 6.45 p.m. as the mobs showed no signs of calming down. Police burst tear gas shells and lathi-charged the crowds, which failed to have

any impact as groups of youngsters emerged from the narrow lanes to attack the offices of chief of police Ram Nivas Meena, and administrator of Daman Arun Mathur. At least ten people, including three policemen, were injured. Two are in a critical state.

Much of the anger against the administration is because of its failure to heed warn-

ings about the frail condition of the bridge and the delay in carrying out rescue operations.

The offices of the administrator and police chief of Daman, the panchayat office and the MP's office were damaged in sporadic attacks by the mobs. Protests against the Daman administration began on Friday afternoon as people gathered on the banks

of the Damanganga and raised slogans against the visiting Union minister of state for home, Harin Pathak.

According to eye-witnesses, the crowd that had gathered on the Nani Daman side of the river, where the bridge col-

lapsed, became enraged when Mr Pathak and Daman MP Bhai Patel reached Moti Daman on the opposite bank in a helicopter and waved at them. They refused to come over to the Nani Daman side where the crowd had gathered. This enraged the crowd which started pelting stones at the Union minister and also attacked several police vehicles.



**People block a road in Daman on Friday protesting the authorities' indifference towards Thursday's tragedy.**

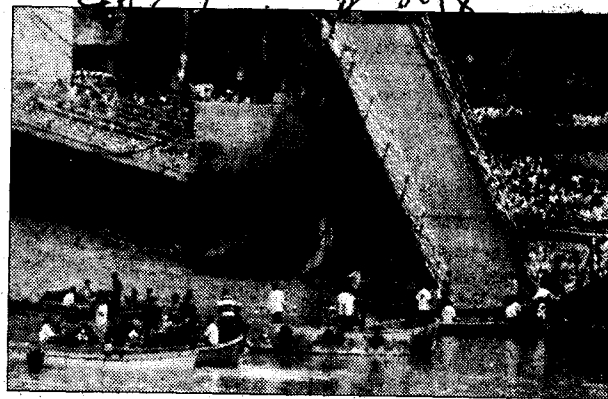
# Daman residents not surprised by accident

MELVYN THOMAS  
SURAT, AUGUST 29

GUESS who scripted the disaster story that unfolded in Daman on Thursday? Who else but the lackadaisical administration. For, it was they who let this 150-year-old bridge — built by the Portuguese — go to seed. All tall claims about the bridge having been repaired, its life span having increased came crashing down on Thursday as the bridge collapsed, killing 24. But if residents of Daman are to be believed, it was an accident waiting to happen.

The Principal of Institute of Our Lady of Fatima at Moti Daman, Sister Josephine Carvalho, said: "This bridge collapsed twice after 1973 and was renovated in 1983. The administration of Daman has been doing little on the maintenance and repair front."

"Now there is no other alternative but to take a 30 km detour from Moti Daman and get to Nani Daman," she added. Daman Councillor Khursheed Manjra admitted to the earlier collapses. "Yes, it did collapse partially twice earlier. The ad-



ministration has literally minted money over repairs but despite that it posed a serious threat. But no heavy vehicles were allowed to ply here."

In 1982, Mumbai-based Shah Engineering Company was awarded the task of renovating the bridge. Experts had submitted their report, clearly stating that the bridge was capable of "sustaining its weight for barely 10 years."

The ministry also promised the people of Daman a new bridge on the Daman-Ganga creek. However, the bridge started showing problems again in 1990. After several complaints from elected representatives of Daman Municipal Corporation and residents,

the administration awarded yet another renovation contract to Mumbai-based Bhagat Engineering Company in 1999.

Some months back, the proposal to construct a new bridge was approved by Joint Secretary P.K. Jalali. But since the construction cost was pegged at around Rs 16 crore, the proposal hasn't taken off. MP Dahyabhai Patel said: "Construction cost of a new bridge was estimated at Rs 16 crore while the administration had just Rs 5 crore."

"When the approval was not granted by the Centre, I kept on taking up the issue with the concerned ministry. I had even warned that it could lead to a disaster," he added.

# 40 feared killed as bridge collapses in Daman

49-1  
29/8

*9-union journal*

By Manas Dasgupta

AHMEDABAD, AUG. 28. At least 40 persons, mostly school children were feared killed as part of the 300-metre long bridge over the Daman-Ganga river linking Moti Daman and Nani Daman in the Union Territory of Daman collapsed this afternoon.

The Daman Inspector-General of police said that at least 20 children had died and their bodies had been retrieved. Six persons were rescued.

About 28 to 30 children of a local convent school returning home in a mini bus were be-

lieved to have been among those trapped in the vehicle inside the water.

The authorities were not sure whether all the bodies could be recovered as currents were strong.

Official sources here said that along with the bus, several other vehicles, including an autorickshaw, some motorcycles and a van carrying some passengers had also fallen into the water as the small old bridge caved in.

Reports reaching here speak of some "administrative lapses" in maintaining the bridge which was in a bad shape — further accentuated by the heavy rains this year.

The bridge, said to be over a century old, is believed to have outlived its utility and was in the process of being de-commissioned, though some emergency repair was carried out.

Normally, people are asked to disembark at either end of the bridge and cross it by foot while the vehicles are allowed to cross empty.

Due to some "lapses", the school bus and the other vehicles today were crossing the bridge with the passengers and this is believed to be the reason for the collapse of a 90-metre portion of the bridge.

The Union Minister of State for Home, Haren Pathak, is going to Daman tomorrow.