

Favourable climate for early polls: Advani

2/10/12
H.D. 1
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Bal Thackeray backs BJP stand

By Mahesh Vijapurkar

MUMBAI, DEC. 30. The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, said here today that the National Democratic Alliance was "reasonably confident of a renewed mandate" if early elections were held to the Lok Sabha.

Addressing a press conference after a meeting with the Shiv Sena chief, Bal Thackeray, Mr. Advani said the "feel good factor" and the assessment that its victory in the Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan Assembly elections would have a positive impact on the rest of the country had led the Bharatiya Janata Party to believe that "it would be good" if the polls are advanced.

The party and the Government, Mr. Advani said, were studying the pros and cons before taking a decision.

He would brief the Prime

Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, on today's meeting. Mr. Thackeray, who along with the BJP general secretary, Pramod Mahajan, attended the press conference at the Mayor's Bungalow, near Shivaji Park in central Mumbai, said he was one with Mr. Advani on the reasons for advancing the polls.

If advanced, the polls are likely to be held in the last week of April or the first week of May. The BJP will consult the allies before its national executive meets in Hyderabad next

month to take a final decision.

After the recent Assembly elections, there had been a lot of talk of advancing the Lok Sabha elections. But Mr. Vajpayee wanted the NDA and the Government to focus on the business at hand in the just-concluded winter session of Parliament. "This proved correct as momentous legislation were approved, including those relating to defections and limiting the size of ministries," Mr. Advani said.

Lyngdoh sees no problem

NEW DELHI, DEC. 30. The Chief Election Commissioner, J.M. Lyngdoh, today said that there should not be any problem in holding elections in April/May. "Early elections are possible. Technically, it should be possible," he told NDTV 24x7. Asked if he expected any problems in holding elections in April/May, he said, "In my opinion, no." But it was for his colleagues to decide as he was scheduled to retire in February. "I won't be there," he said. — PTI

REVIEW COMMITTEES' DECISIONS WILL BE BINDING

Ordinance to amend POTA approved

By I. Venkatesan

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NEW DELHI, OCT. 21. The Union Cabinet today approved an ordinance to amend the Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA) to confer more powers on the Central and State review committees to make their decisions binding on the Central and State Governments and the police officers investigating the cases.

Briefing reporters on the Cabinet decision, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Shushma Swaraj, said the ordinance giving statutory powers to the review committees would be promulgated by the President and a Bill to replace it introduced in the winter session of Parliament.

The recommendations of the Centrally-appointed review committee set up in April this year is only advisory in nature at present and not binding on the enforcement authorities even if there is a finding that the law has been abused in a particular case. States such as Tamil Nadu have also set up State-level review committees to go into complaints of POTA cases and their role is also advisory and recommendatory in nature.

Under the proposed ordinance, if the Central review committee comes to the conclusion that POTA has been misused or abused in a particular case or cases, it could direct the release of the victims and the decision will be communicated to the States concerned immediately. Such a decision will also be final and binding on the special POTA courts dealing with these cases.

MSW

The Centre's move to provide teeth and strengthen the Central review committee follows persistent demands by the MDMK (Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam) and other constituents of the ruling National Democratic Alliance to confer more powers on the committee which is now going into various cases, including the one against the MDMK leader, Vaiko. He has been detained under POTA since July 2002. Over 40 persons have been detained in Tamil Nadu under POTA, including P. Nedumaran and R.R. Gopal, Editor of the Tamil bi-weekly *Nakkeeran*.

Preventing POTA misuse

Ms. Swaraj said the Centre's view was that the law was intended only to effectively tackle terrorism. However, as several complaints of "misuse" of POTA in various States had come to its notice, it was decided to provide for an individual redress mechanism in the Act by conferring more powers on the review committees.

Under the ordinance, a provision will be incorporated in POTA that the decision of the Central review committee on complaints scrutinised by it is binding on the Centre, the States concerned and the investigation officials.

Similarly, the State committees' decision is binding on the State Governments concerned. And if there are conflicting decisions between the Central and State committees with regard to the same complaints, the Central committee's decision will prevail. No time limit is proposed under the ordinance for

the disposal of complaints by the review committees.

Law Ministry sources told *The Hindu* that the overriding provision would not impinge on the rights of the States. Being a law under the 'Union List' of the Constitution, the Centre was empowered to make such a provision by way of safeguards against misuse of POTA.

The Cabinet decision comes at a time when the DMK, one of the constituents of the NDA, has announced an agitation programme on December 1 seeking repeal of POTA. The decision is also a sequel to a delegation of MPs meeting the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, to bring in amendments to POTA to prevent its "misuse".

Several political parties have also requested the Union Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, to incorporate sufficient safeguards so that POTA is not used as a "vendetta" against politicians.

Reacting to the Cabinet decision, Justice Arun B. Saharya, who heads the three-member Central review committee which is already reviewing the POTA cases across the country, told *The Hindu*: "At present, our work is not handicapped due to lack of powers but only due to lack of basic facilities to do our job." While welcoming the ordinance, he said he would like to study the ordinance before giving his comments.

The Central committee, while giving its findings on the complaints, was to make a comprehensive review of the use of POTA so far in various States and give suggestions for removing shortcomings, if any, in the implementation of the Act.

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Cabinet nod for death to fake drug manufacturers

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

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New Delhi: Manufacturing spurious drugs will be termed an attempt at "mass murder" and invite the death penalty. The decision was taken by the Union cabinet at its meeting on Thursday. The distribution and sale of such drugs and medicines will also become cognizable and non-bailable crimes and will attract stricter punishment.



Announcing this, parliamentary affairs minister Sushma Swaraj said manufacturing and peddling spurious drugs to unsuspecting ailing humans was "the highest of crimes" and since it was without provocation and meant purely for profiteering, there could be "no room for mercy".

Ms Swaraj said the proposal had been made by a committee headed by R.A. Mashelkar. A bill would be introduced in the current winter session, but would be referred to the standing committee. She said that in doing so, the government was keeping a promise which it had made to the nation earlier.

The cabinet also approved an amendment to the Patents Act, 1970 to meet its international obligations contained in the trade-related aspects of the intellectual property (TRIPs) agreement of the WTO since product patents will be operational from January 2005. The legislation, aimed at both updating and rationalising the current provisions, will also be referred to the standing committee, Ms Swaraj said.

An amendment to the Antiquities and Arts Treasures Act, 1972, envisages increased punishments and penalties for offenders who have been whisking away the country's cultural heritage for profiteering. These will be cognizable offences, allowing no bail.

The cabinet also approved an amendment to the Arbitration and Conciliation Act, 1996, to modify or insert certain clauses to speed up arbitration cases and fix new time limits.

It also approved a bill that seeks to bring about a synergy between the excise and customs regimes through adoption of a common Harmonized System of Nomenclature-based eight-digit classification code. Legislation would be enacted to provide for assistance between the customs authorities of India and the US.

PM targets Jogi, 'defends' Judeo

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Dec. 11. — The Prime Minister today told the Lok Sabha that while he had asked Mr Dilip Singh Judeo to resign, the case of the former minister from Chhattisgarh was different from that of Mr Ajit Jogi. Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's speech was interrupted several times by Opposition leaders, who said the PM was adopting "double standards".

Commenting on the Judeo bribery case, Mr Vajpayee said: "Despite all attempts to implicate Mr Judeo... in Chhattisgarh we've won handsomely and you have lost the confidence of the people... Mr Judeo still has some confidence of the people".

Mr Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M) interrupted Mr Vajpayee to say that the Prime Minister was, on the one hand, talking about the CBI inquiry and on the other, giving a certificate

to Mr Judeo. "It was I who demanded resignation from Mr Judeo. Everyone knows it," Mr Vajpayee responded. "But why did you ask for his resignation?" Mr Chatterjee asked. "Because wrong allegations were levelled against him and till an inquiry is conducted...", Mr Vajpayee could not complete his sentence amid protests from the Opposition benches.

The Prime Minister said till Mr Judeo was exonerated, the allegations would remain valid. "That was the basis of my asking Mr Judeo to resign."

He denied his government was adopting double standards vis-a-vis Mr Judeo and Mr Jogi. "Can't you see Mr Jogi peeping from behind the curtain," the Prime Minister said. The visuals showing Mr Judeo taking money, he said, were not very clear. "It's yet to be established who gave the money and for what motive?"

The Congress today protested against the Prime Minister "giving a

Who was correct?

NEW DELHI, Dec. 11. — The BJP today was at a loss while trying to explain the contradiction between the Prime Minister's statement that he had asked Mr Dilip Singh Judeo to resign and the party's stand that the former minister had resigned on his own. Party spokesman Mr VK Malhotra said what the Prime Minister said was true. Trying to play with words, he said it didn't make any difference "whether he (Judeo) tendered his resignation on his (Vajpayee) asking or PM asked him (Judeo) to tender resignation". — SNS

clean chit" to Mr Judeo. Party spokesman Mr Satyavrata Chaturvedi asked how could the CBI conduct a "fair probe" against Mr Judeo after this.

On Mr Vajpayee's statement that Mr Judeo still has the people's mandate, Mr Chaturvedi said only "perverts can accept the logic".

PM defers statement on Judeo

Vajpayee has scant regard for parliamentary proceedings: Opposition

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, December 9

PRIME MINISTER Atal Bihari Vajpayee has deferred the statement he was to make on the Judeo cash-on-camera scandal on Tuesday to Wednesday without citing any specific reason.

The PM's decision, conveyed to Speaker Manohar Joshi, on Monday evening created uproarious scenes in the Lok Sabha on Tuesday, with the Opposition charging the government with paying "scant regard" to Parliament and parliamentary proceedings.

When Joshi made the announcement, angry Congress members demanded of the government why the PM had expressed his inability to make the statement when it had been scheduled for Tuesday. Party Chief Whip P.R. Das Munshi asked: "Is the Prime Minister taking the House seriously? Your decision is being ignored," he told the Speaker.

Veteran CPI(M) leader Somnath Chatterjee said he was informed by the Lok Sabha Secretary-General on Monday evening that Vajpayee's statement on the Judeo episode had been deferred to Wednesday. "Why is Parliament not being taken seriously? What is Parliament being reduced to?" Chatterjee asked.

Clarifying why the PM had chosen to make the statement on Judeo on Wednesday, Swaraj said Vajpayee had spoken



ALL THE PM'S MEN: Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee with the three new chief ministers — Uma Bharti, Vasundhara Raje and Raman Singh — at the BJP's Parliamentary Party meeting in Delhi on Tuesday. L.K. Advani and Venkatesh Naidu flank them.

to the Speaker and sought his permission to defer making his statement in the House. "The PM will now reply in the Lok Sabha at noon and in the Rajya Sabha at 12:30 pm on Wednesday," Swaraj said, adding that Vajpayee's decision was not altogether "unprecedented".

"I don't see any reason

why the Opposition should have any objection. The Prime Minister returned from Abuja on December 7 and then spoke to the Speaker and took his permission before deferring making the statement," Swaraj said.

The Opposition also expressed unhappiness at the presence of three outgoing

BJP MPs—Uma Bharati, Vasundhara Raje Scindia and Raman Singh—who have been elected chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, respectively. Congress member Mani Shankar Aiyar sought to know why the three had been seated in the front bench when "they have all along

been back-benchers".

While Chatterjee disapproved of the presence of Bharti, Scindia and Singh, saying: "There is no need for their presence. I had congratulated them earlier," Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj said: "Decorum demanded that we bid adieu to the three outgoing colleagues".

HT

PM defers statement on Judeo

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Dec. 9. — The Congress and Left members took serious objection to the Prime Minister not turning up in the Lok Sabha today to make his promised statement on the Judeo bribery case. The Prime Minister conveyed to the House through the Speaker that he would make the statement tomorrow.



Mr Dilip Singh Judeo

“It means the leader of the House has no regard for the highest forum of democracy”, observed Mr Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M). When the Speaker informed the House about the change of schedule, there was a chorus of protest from the Opposition benches.

The Speaker, Mr Manohar Joshi, told the Lok Sabha yesterday that Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee would make statement on the Judeo case today. “Does it mean that the Prime Minister has no respect for your decision?” Mr PR Das Munshi asked the Chair.

Only under exceptional circumstances the Prime Minister, who is the leader of the House, fails to keep his engagement, particularly when it is announced in advance, by the Speaker. However, in today's list of business for the Lok Sabha, there was no mention of the Prime Minister making a statement. When contacted by The Statesman, the table office said that the Prime Minister's statement was not listed. The official spokesman of the PMO was not available for comment.

The PMO said Mr Vajpayee would make a statement tomorrow. No reason was cited for the sudden change. Mr Vajpayee curtailed his stay in Nigeria due to pressing engagements back home, which also included the ongoing monsoon session of the Parliament.

Get ready for Lok Sabha polls, Vajpayee tells party MPs

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, DEC. 3. With the results of the four Assembly elections expected tomorrow, the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, has already blown the bugle for the Lok Sabha elections due next year. Addressing the parliamentary party meeting of the Bharatiya Janata Party here this morning, he asked the party MPs to "start preparing for the Lok Sabha polls even though they are nearly a year away."

He told them that they should "maintain contact with their constituencies and carry the in-

formation about the many achievements of the Centre." He emphasised that though the elections may be one year away, they must begin preparing now.

Mr. Vajpayee said they should not do anything that would tarnish the party's image. Referring to the Judev videotape episode, he said that "the Congress party made every effort to tarnish our image but it was not successful." It might once again resort to various tricks to hurt the image of the party and its MPs so they should be forewarned.

He was confident that the results would be "good." Currently,

the political score in the four States — Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh — was 0 to 4, since the Congress ruled all these States. Whatever the result, the BJP should improve its position. He was also happy that in the recent election campaign the issue of communalism was kept at bay, suggesting that the Opposition did not charge the BJP with being a communal party and making that the focal point of its campaign.

"In this election, communalism did not become an issue. Ideological differences did not come up," Mr. Vajpayee said.

The party spokesperson, V.K. Malhotra, briefed reporters on the parliamentary party meeting.

The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, who was also present, was happy that all the party wings had pulled together to conduct an effective election campaign. Referring to the Judev episode, he said the BJP had run a "clean campaign" and the Opposition's "cleverness" cost it dearly.

Vajpayee demands Jogi scalp

HTC and Agencies
Ambikapur (Chhattisgarh),
November 22

TAKING THE battle to the enemy camp, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Saturday demanded Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Ajit Jogi's resignation in the wake of the chargesheet filed by CBI against him in a forgery case.

"Instead of sticking to his chair, Jogi should have resigned and faced the charges. But unfortunately this did not happen. The chargesheeted chief minister continues to be in office," he told an election rally here, his first in Chhattisgarh,

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nearly a week after the Judeo episode came to light.

Contending that different yardsticks were being used for those in power and the Opposition in dealing with corruption, he said Dilip Singh Judeo resigned as Union minister soon after allegations of bribery were made against him. "His resignation was accepted and the case was handed over to the CBI for an inquiry," the PM said, adding that Judeo has declared that he would take the matter to the people and wait for their verdict.

Recalling Jogi's allegation that the IB had launched a campaign to malign him and other Congress



Ajit Jogi

leaders, Vajpayee said he had asked the Cabinet Secretary to examine the charges made in a letter by the CM earlier this year.

Meanwhile, Information and Broadcasting Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad defe-

nding his colleague and former Union minister Dilip Singh Judeo alleged that the Chhattisgarh CM "knew something more" about the episode than was disclosed by the Press at the time of breaking the news.

On November 16 when an English daily broke the news it did not state the amount or the hotel in which Judeo allegedly accepted the money. "But Jogi said the amount was more than what former BJP president Bangaru Laxman had accepted in the Tehelka case and that the incident occurred at Hotel Taj," Prasad said, suggesting that the CBI should also grill Jogi in this regard.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

23 NOV 2003

Judeo quits, PM orders CBI probe

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Nov. 17. — The Union minister of state for environment and forests, Mr Dilip Singh Judeo, was forced to resign today.

The Prime Minister has ordered a CBI inquiry into the alleged graft case. However, the video footage capturing Mr Judeo taking money was "not clear". On the impact of the Judeo episode on the BJP's prospects in the coming elections in five states, Mr Vajpayee said, "It will be known only after counting of votes." He was speaking to the media at an Iftar party hosted by the Union minister, Syed Shahnawaz Hussain, this evening.

Mr Judeo's alleged involvement in this tell-tale graft scandal has, however, dealt a severe blow to the BJP's fate in Chhattisgarh. He has been the party's leading campaigner and a strong chief ministerial contender.

As a stunned BJP made desperate attempts to brazen the crisis out, the party brass went into a huddle this morning at Mr Vajpayee's residence to work out a damage-control strategy.

Mr Judeo's resignation appears to be part of this exercise. Refusing to step down till yesterday, he said today that he resigned on "moral grounds". His resignation letter was sent by Mr Vajpayee to the President



Mr Dilip Singh Judeo

for acceptance.

The BJP has continued to defend Mr Judeo, with Mr Naidu giving him a clean chit. Mr Naidu had also urged Mr Vajpayee to institute a high-level probe. The party as well as Mr Judeo have claimed that the VCD was "fake and doctored" and that the chief minister, Mr Ajit Jogi, was allegedly behind this conspiracy. The party also said Mr Judeo will continue to campaign in the state.

In a bid to put up a brave face and even take a high moral ground, the BJP mounted a counter-attack on the Congress over the issue of corruption.

Mr Naidu raised the Telgi stamp scam rocking the two Congress-ruled states, Maharashtra and Karnataka, questioning the Congress "silence" over the need for a CBI probe into this massive nationwide scandal.

Hit by scandal, BJP goes on the offensive

9 vs 9

(P.1)

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Nov. 16: Two weeks before the Assembly elections in five states, a Tehelka-like revelation exploded on the BJP with a video CD apparently showing Union minister Dilip Singh Judeo accepting cash.

Judeo, the Union minister of state for environment and forests and the BJP's unofficial candidate for the chief minister of Chhattisgarh, today denied the charge and rejected calls for his resignation.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who returned from a three-nation tour tonight, said a probe was underway. "If found guilty, he has to go," he added.

After Bangaru Laxman was shown accepting cash in a sting operation by Tehelka, he had to quit as BJP chief.

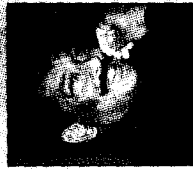
A combative BJP made it clear Judeo will campaign and "boldly answer the charges".

Photographs from the video CD were splashed in *The Sunday*

WHAT THE CD SHOWS

SCENE OF INCIDENT: A hotel room

PRESENT: Dilip Singh Judeo (picture on left), his secretary Natwar Rateria and a man called Rahul, who appears to be acting on behalf of a foreign mining company



- Rahul says the company needs help in getting mining rights in Chhattisgarh and Orissa
- Rateria promises help in Orissa and says after polls there will be no problem in Chhattisgarh
- A bundle of notes is given to Judeo who raises it to his head

As reported in *The Sunday Express*

Express today, showing Judeo accepting a bundle of cash from a person called Rahul.

The transcript quoted Judeo as saying: "*Paisa khuda to nahin, par khuda ki kasam khuda se kam bhi nahin* (Money isn't god but, swear on god, it's no less than god)." The deal takes place in Delhi and is preceded by a conversation in which Rahul is heard asking for mining lease rights in Chhattisgarh and Orissa.

Judeo's assistant personal secretary, Natwar Rateria, who

appears in the footage, replies that once polls are over in Chhattisgarh, "there will be no problem". As for Orissa, he is quoted as boasting that the government is indebted to Judeo as his ministry had cleared relief projects worth Rs 9,000 crore for the state.

The BJP dismissed the charges, heaping scorn on the Congress and Chhattisgarh chief minister Ajit Jogi. Spokesperson Prakash Javadekar said the party had "information" its rival was "up to nasty things". "Our

hunch was proved right today."

"Jogi is a past master in all this. He is a master of forgery, he produced a fake income-tax certificate, a fake caste certificate and now he has produced a fake CD. His ship is sinking, so he has resorted to dirty tricks," he said.

Javadekar demanded an Election Commission probe into the tape's veracity. "The EC's code of conduct is clear there can be no character assassination without conclusive proof. The allegations in the tape are serious enough to constitute character assassination. So let there be an inquiry by the EC."

A decision on this count is expected tonight after party president M. Venkaiah Naidu returns. In the evening, a mob gathered outside the house of *The Indian Express* correspondent in Chhattisgarh capital, shouting threatening slogans. They fled when he called the police.

Explaining the BJP's recalcitrant response, a source said: "It is election time and a defensive reaction will give weight to the Congress' campaign." (See P 6)

SC seeks Centre's response to 'single directive' in CVC Act

By Rakesh Bhatnagar
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The supreme court on Monday sought the Centre's response on the controversial "single directive" provision in the CVC Act. The provision restrains the CBI from investigating high officials without the Centre's prior permission.

It was not without some irony that the court's notice came on the same day that Youth Congress activist Sushil Sharma was found guilty of the murder of Naina Sahni eight years ago. It was after the diabolic killing that the demand for making the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) an 'autonomous' body and the CBI accountability gained judicial strength.

During the Tandoor blaze when Sushil Sharma was in hiding, the issue of criminalisation of politics which had been exposed in former Union home secretary N.N. Vohra's report, was brought before the supreme court in the form of a hawala case.

During the hearings of the hawala cases, chargesheets were filed against one prime minister, various Union ministers, governors, politicians and bureaucrats. That they were acquitted later was another matter.

It was then that the government had to reveal the contents of the Vohra committee report substantiating the charge of existence of a diabolic nexus between the underworld and politicians, bureaucrats, businessmen, the media and some members of the judiciary. For several years the report had been kept under the wrap.

"Be you ever so high, law is above you", was the watchword that a Bench headed by then Justice J.S. Verma coined to enthuse the politically oppressed investigating agencies such as the CBI and the Directorate of Revenue Intelligence.

While disposing of the petition, the court asked the Centre to make the CVC an autonomous body with powers to monitor the appointments of heads of key investigating agencies. The CBI ceased to be a flank of

the home ministry.

It was a gigantic exercise. For many years, the government did not enact a law and the CVC remained a creation of the ordinance. Parliament approved the CVC Bill in February, 2003, which provides for the CBI to obtain prior approval of the government "before conducting any inquiry into an offence committed by officers of the rank of joint secretary or above in any government department or public sector undertaking".

This was challenged and the supreme court on Monday sought the Centre's response on the controversial "single directive" provision in the CVC Act. The provision restrains the CBI from investigating high officials without the Centre's prior permission.

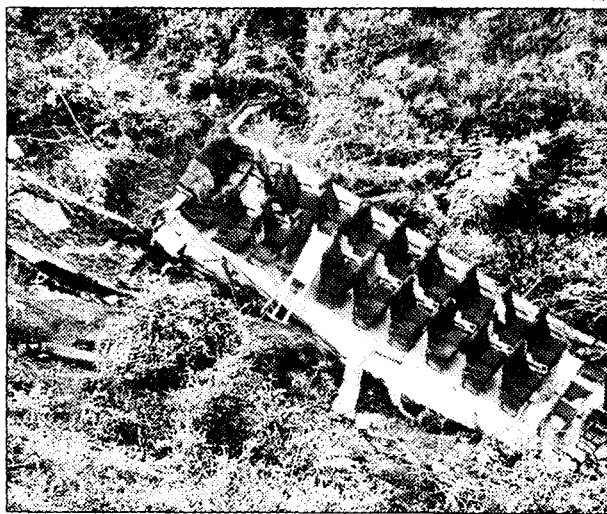
Petitioner's counsel Anil B. Divan said when the single directive was challenged earlier, attorney general Soli J. Sorabjee had said that he would advise the government to drop the clause to bring it in consonance with the 1997 judgment in the hawala case.

Vatva victims skip riots probe hearing

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Ahmedabad: None of the witnesses from the Vatva area of the city who were scheduled to depose before the Nanavati-Shah inquiry commission probing the post-Godhra riots turned up before the commission on Monday.

The 15 witnesses, whose deposition could not be recorded during the Divali break, and were listed to depose this morning, did not turn up before the commission, comprising Justice (retd) G.T. Nanavati and Justice (retd) K.G. Shah. The commission, however, agreed to admit the affidavit of a riot victim from Vatva, who had approached the probe panel only on Monday but said they would not record his statements as it would be a trend that they would have to follow at each instance when victims come late.



The wreckage of the tourist bus which plunged into a gorge near Mahabaleshwar in Satara district on Sunday killing 24 people and injuring 30.

Peace moves aimed at Pak doves: PM

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: With less than a year of his tenure left, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee clearly wants to make one last effort to resolve some unfinished business. On Saturday, he said he wanted to "encourage" those elements in Pakistan "who recognise the folly of permanent hostility towards India", and added that the new peace initiatives should emphasise people-to-people interaction, cultural exchanges and economic cooperation.

Simultaneously, referring for the first time to the boundary dispute with China, he spoke of the need to take "some pragmatic decisions" to reach the "strategic objective of a final resolution of the boundary dispute".

Addressing the combined armed forces commanders' conference here, Mr Vajpayee said, "We will continue to deal firmly with cross-border terrorism. A meaningful dialogue with Pakistan is only possible when we see sincerity in their efforts to stop cross-border infiltration and to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism."

The armed forces, he said, should evolve a comprehensive counter-terrorism doctrine through enhancing their manpower capabilities and acquiring high-technology equipment as the Russian retreat from Afghanistan had released thousands of armed jihadis whom Pakistan had redirected to Jammu and Kashmir.

On China, Mr Vajpayee said the two governments had decided to appoint special representatives to discuss the boundary question from a political perspective. "A final resolution of the boundary

question will release considerable military energies and finance for other more purposeful activities."

Dismissing Pakistan's "implied claim" to Afghanistan as an expansion of its strategic space, Mr Vajpayee said Afghanistan and Central Asia were of great importance to India's larger regional interests, including energy security. India would, therefore, withstand the "crude threats" being made against its Kandahar and Jalalabad consulates while continuing with economic assistance and other cooperation initiatives with Afghanistan. India would also expand cooperation in all areas with Central Asian countries, he said.

Dialogue must start, says Gen

Beijing: Stating that an



Indo-Pak dialogue "must start", Gen Pervez Musharraf has said that he does not expect any immediate major breakthrough in bilateral ties.

"We are not expecting an immediate breakthrough or solution. But meaningful dialogue must start," he told *China Daily* prior to his five-day visit to China beginning Saturday. "I would like to see relations between Pakistan and India improve at a faster pace," he was quoted as saying in a front-page article. PTI

● Detailed report on Page 9

Unification banners greet Vajpayee

H/A 28/10

Rahul Karmakar
Kohima, October 27

THE TRICOLOUR had never fluttered so vigorously in Nagaland in more than 50 years. Armed with the flags, schoolchildren had lined up the streets since 11 am to greet Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, all the way from the helipad to the Raj Bhavan.

But a thick fog forced a change of plan: Vajpayee, who was scheduled to arrive by chopper around 1.30 pm, had to take a bumpy 75-km ride on NH-39 from Dimapur to reach here around 4.30 pm.

By then, the children had all left, and the flags they had been waving lay trampled, perhaps unwittingly. And the only flags that remained aflutter were the red-white-blue flag of the Naga Peoples' Front, the dominant partner in the ruling coalition, and the green-and-saffron of the BJP.



Atal Bihari Vajpayee
Keeping 'em guessing

TALE OF 2 STATES

Some 5,000 Nagas from the four hill districts in Manipur braved the rains to make it to Nagaland to convey to the PM that there was no alternative to unifying Naga-dominated territories

Manipur, on the other hand, was apprehensive that the PM might agree to integration of Naga areas

the state capital to drive home their point — there's no alternative to unification of all Naga-dominated territories.

As the PM's convoy snaked into Kohima, the scene of the worst World War II battle on Indian soil, the Naga Students' Federation

(NSF) put up a banner reading 'Welcome Eno (Mr) Atal Behari Vajpayee, Ato Kilonser (PM) to Naga Homeland', thanking him for recognising the uniqueness of Naga political history.

Other organisations like the Naga Mothers' Association and United Naga Council from Manipur were more blunt. 'Unification of all Naga areas a must for political settlement', 'Naga issue agenda No. 1' read their banners.

The United Committee, Nagaland, notably, had raked up a storm in Manipur by asking all the 12 Naga legislators there to sign a declaration supporting unification of Naga-dominated areas.

Nagaland has pinned a lot of hope on Vajpayee's visit, the second by a Prime Minister since the Centre signed a ceasefire agreement with the NSCN(IM) in July 1997. The first was by I.K. Gujral.

"We expect the Prime Minister

to expedite the political talks and help arrive at a settlement to the Naga unification issue before the parliamentary elections," NSF president Achumbeno Kikon told *Hindustan Times*.

"It is almost six years since the process began, and an early settlement is due." But as Nagas had reasons to feel elated with Vajpayee's visit — he will be here until Wednesday — Manipur was apprehensive that the Prime Minister might agree to the integration of Naga-inhabited areas.

Later in the day, Vajpayee formally launched BSNL's CellOne mobile service, thereby opening the floodgates for the expansion of cellphone services beyond Guwahati and Shillong in the North-east.

Vajpayee also held a routine meeting with the council of ministers headed by Chief Minister Neiphiu Rio.

New Delhi offers Pakistan a dozen peace proposals

HT Correspondents
New Delhi/Islamabad, Oct 22

INDIA SPRUNG a surprise on Pakistan on Wednesday by announcing 12 peace proposals with a view to taking forward Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's April 18 Srinagar initiative.

All the proposals announced by External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha at a press conference here are aimed at increasing people-to-people contacts. The minister said the proposals were part of the "normalisation process" to take the Indo-Pak relationship back to the pre-December 13, 2001 situation.

"There is a groundswell of support for the Prime Minister's initiative at the people's level," said Sinha. "Whatever the type of regime, people in authority have to respond to popular will. We're hopeful that Pakistan will be persuaded to give up the path of cross-border terrorism and come to the negotiating table."

The most significant of the dozen proposals — approved by the Cabinet Committee on Security on Wednesday morning and conveyed to Pakistan in the afternoon — is a trans-LoC bus link between Srinagar and Muzaffarabad, the capital of PoK.

Asked if the bus offer amounted to giving up India's claim over PoK and accepting LoC as the international border, Sinha said the LoC was the "existing reality".

The other proposals involve resumption of air and rail links, as also India-Pak sporting encounters, including cricket. New Delhi also suggested a Mumbai-Karachi ferry service and the linking of Rajasthan and Sindh with a bus or rail service.



Advani to lead Hurriyat talks

THE CABINET Committee on Security (CCS) on Wednesday designated L.K. Advani as the Centre's interlocutor in the first-ever direct dialogue with the All-Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) headed by Maulana Abbas Ansari. The decision was taken at a two-hour-long meeting of the CCS chaired by the Prime Minister.

Details on Page 3

Sinha said resumption of the rail link could take place only after the successful completion of talks to restore air links. And there was no question of India capitulating to Pakistan's insistence on a guarantee that it would not slap an airspace closure on Pakistani flights again, the minister said.

A senior government source in Islamabad told *HT* that Pakistan would respond to the latest Indian peace initiatives after a meeting between President General Pervez Musharraf and Prime Minister Zafarullah Jamali on Friday.

Related reports on Page 4

Go easy on VHP, Advani tells UP govt

Do not adopt confrontationist attitude, Mulayam advised

TIMES NEWS NETWORK
AND AGENCIES

Ayodhya\New Delhi: The Centre's efforts to do a "balancing" act in Ayodhya appeared to be coming unstuck on Wednesday when it succumbed to pressure from the VHP, which has refused to give a written undertaking that its October 17 programme will be peaceful.

As the UP police arrested VHP activists, including senior leaders like Acharya Giriraj Kishore, laid siege to VHP offices and ordered a flag march by paramilitary forces in Ayodhya, deputy PM L.K. Advani himself spoke to UP chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav over the phone to express his unhappiness at the turn of events.

Clearly, things can no longer be dealt with through minister of state for home Swami Chinmayananda, who was appointed "mediator" on Tuesday. Swami Chinmayananda also expressed concern about the "deterioration" in the situation and demanded the release of the arrested VHP leaders.

"A new situation has arisen in the wake of the arrests of the VHP leaders and sealing Ayodhya from all sides. All this has led to the creation of hurdles in talks with the VHP on the peaceful conduct of its programme. We did not expect that the leaders would be arrested," he said, adding that he had briefed Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Mr Advani about the latest developments.

Mr Advani, when asked whether he was surprised at the arrests and whether it would vitiate the atmosphere, merely said, "I really don't know. I hope the whole

thing will pass peacefully."

In a reversal of the assurance given by the then BJP chief minister of UP to the supreme court and the Centre in December 1992 that no untoward incident would take place in Ayodhya, Mr Advani assured Mr Yadav on behalf of the VHP activists that their programme in Ayodhya would be conducted peacefully.

Mr Advani told Mr Yadav that since the RSS brass, including its chief K.S. Sudarashan, had given an assurance that no untoward incident would take place, the state government should not adopt a confrontationist attitude. "VHP workers should not be stopped from going to Ayodhya," he told Mr Yadav.

However, the VHP has refused to give a guarantee in writing as sought by the Centre that there will be no violence on October 17. "Swami Chinmayananda spoke to VHP general secretary Pravin Togadia on Tuesday on the phone and perhaps asked for a written undertaking that the Ram bhakts would remain peaceful. But the latter refused to comply, saying there was no need for it," VHP spokesman Vireshwar Dwivedi said in Delhi on Wednesday.

Mr Togadia, on the other hand, added a rider for ensuring a peaceful programme. "If all the Ram bhakts who have been prevented from reaching Ayodhya are allowed to participate in the programme, we assure you that it will be peaceful," he said.

Meanwhile, the VHP's much-hyped 'shobha yatra' on Wednesday remained a virtual non-starter with barely a few hundred Ram bhakts reaching the Saraswati Shishu Mandir, where the yatra was slated to originate.

Atal allows free run to Ayodhya

15/10
K.C. 1

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, October 14

ATAL BIHARI Vajpayee further cosied up to the Vishwa Hindu Parishad on Tuesday, saying the Parishad volunteers should not be stopped from going to Ayodhya for Friday's *sankalp divas*.

The Prime Minister and other BJP leaders said curtailing train services to Ayodhya would "unnecessarily" bring a bad name to the BJP-led government at the Centre, with the VHP dubbing the move "anti-Hindu". The Uttar Pradesh government had earlier issued an urgent message to the railway ministry to divert several important trains passing through Faizabad and stop others midway to prevent thousands of VHP activists from reaching Ayodhya.

Vajpayee had promised all help to Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav to ensure that VHP activists didn't flout the special court order on illegal assembly at the disputed site. But on Tuesday, he and other senior BJP leaders succumbed to the RSS leadership's pressure after they demanded that restrictions on *kar sevaks* be lifted.

Former RSS chief Sudarshan drew Vajpayee's attention to the Mulayam Singh government's restrictions on the movement of VHP members despite their "promise" of a peaceful *darshan* of the idols in the makeshift temple.

Sudarshan's discussion with Vajpayee on Tuesday came after VHP leader Praveen Togadia complained to senior Sangh leaders that VHP members couldn't enter Ayodhya because of the "joint action" by the UP government and the Centre.

BJP leaders at a meeting, attended among others by Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and party chief Venkiah Naidu, discussed the steps taken by the UP government to prevent a large gathering at Ayodhya. It was decided that Minister of State for Home Swami



WAR CRY: Ayodhya-bound VHP men shout slogans at Ahmedabad railway station on Tuesday.

FORTRESS UP arrests 5,800 kar sevaks. Ayodhya fortified with 60 companies of paramilitary forces, another 40 to arrive

Chinmayanand would coordinate with the VHP to ensure that the programme passes peacefully.

Later, RSS leader Ram Madhav met Advani with details of restrictions and arrest of VHP leaders by the UP government.

BJP spokesman Prakash Javadekar refused to comment on the steps taken by the Mulayam Singh government, saying that the party

STRATEGY Senior VHP leaders, including Giriraj Kishore, go underground ahead of Wednesday's Lucknow gathering

expected "everything to be sorted out by October 17".

Despite Tuesday's developments, the VHP continued its attack on the Vajpayee government.

Vajpayee on Tuesday praised Mulayam's observation on the need to respect divergent political ideologies if it was working for the welfare of the country. On his part, Mulayam commended the

BENGAL ALERT State cracks down on kar sevaks headed for Ayodhya. At least 124 arrested at Bandel station and 9 at Asansol

Vajpayee-led government for "actively cooperating" with his government in its efforts to maintain peace at Ayodhya.

This made Togadia furious, who accused the two leaders of working together to thwart the VHP's "peaceful" campaign for a Ram temple at the disputed site.

Related report on Page 4

Kar sevaks slip in despite arrests

HT Correspondent
Lucknow, October 14

DESPITE THE Centre's directive to go easy on *kar sevaks*, a tough-talking Uttar Pradesh government on Tuesday made it clear that under no circumstances would the Allahabad High Court orders on the disputed shrine be disregarded.

The police continued its crackdown across the state on the day, forcing Giriraj Kishore, who reached Ayodhya from Delhi on the day, to go underground. Most VHP leaders in Lucknow have also gone underground to dodge arrest ahead of Wednesday's function.

The state has received 60 companies of Central paramilitary forces, 40 more companies are expected soon. These units will be deployed in Ayodhya, which has already turned into a fortress by security agencies.

Despite tight security and heavy deployment of paramilitary forces and hundreds of checkpoints in and around the twin cities of Ayodhya and Faizabad, Ram bhakts have been pouring into Ayodhya through different routes. Only vehicles are being checked and not allowed to enter Ayodhya while there is no restriction on pilgrims entering the town by foot. In view of the escalating tension, all educational institutions have been closed from Wednesday to Friday.

Chief Secretary Akhand Pratap Singh said the government would not allow any large congregation of *kar sevaks* for the *sankalp divas* on Friday though it would not object to allowing *darshan* of Ram Lalla in small groups in accordance with High Court directives.

The chief secretary said 5,800 arrests had been made in different parts of the state on Tuesday. Of them, 1,862 arrests have been made in Ayodhya, he said, adding that the VHP is yet to seek any permission either for Wednesday's congregation in Lucknow or Friday's *sankalp divas* in Ayodhya.

CM Mulayam Singh Yadav urged the Prime Minister and his deputy to use their good offices to persuade the VHP to call off their Ayodhya programme.

The Allahabad High Court, meanwhile, asked the administration to provide food, water and proper shelter for *kar sevaks* who have been arrested en route to Ayodhya, stating that they are not criminals and cannot be denied basic amenities.

Amid the charged atmosphere, Mahant Gyan Das, an arch-rival of the VHP, took out a peace march in Muslim areas and assured them that all possible care would be taken to ensure their safety.

9. 10. 2003
M. S. A. 1510

Advani seeks another term for Vajpayee

Sudesh K Varma in Panipat

as elections approach. Mr Advani asked for another full term for Mr Vajpayee at a rally here. Although not an election gathering — Haryana Assembly elections are not due till mid-2004 — the size of the crowd "inspired" the Deputy Prime Minister, BJP leaders said, to make a pitch for his senior leader. The Prime Minister needs another term to make India a developed na-

tion by 2020, Mr Advani said. He told his audience that when he comes back for Lok Sabha 2004 campaigning, he will be asking for their votes on the "strength of the NDA government's achievements" and not "by attacking other parties". "We have dreamt of bringing India at par with the USA, Germany and Japan by 2020. There will be no scarcity of drinking water, roads,

housing and other needs. The country will come out of backwardness," Mr Advani said. Significantly, Mr Advani did not raise the issue of Mrs Sonia Gandhi and "foreign origins", despite the recent Congress-NCP spat. The BJP president, M Venkaiah Naidu, who also addressed the rally, briefly raised the topic, saying the Congress had to keep "silent" to keep its coa-

lition in Maharashtra going. Some other speakers, however, asked the crowd "to take a pledge" that a "person of foreign origin should never be allowed to become a Prime Minister". Mr Advani, while listing what he said were the BJP's commitments on electoral reform and better governance, said that he had "no problem" if the size of ministries is limi-

ted to 15 per cent of the size of the legislative House. The Cabinet has cleared a Bill limiting council size to 10 per cent. But Mr Naidu had recently proposed that the limit be raised to 15 per cent. This is seen as an anticipatory move — the Union council of ministers may be expanded by year-end and the government would not want to violate the terms of a law it has proposed.

THE STATESMAN
15 OCT 2003

BJP, Opp trade charges on IOC

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Oct. 4. — The Union Cabinet's decision yesterday to accord reservation to economically backward classes (EBCs) and the Cabinet Committee on Disinvestment's move to bring IOC into privatisation mode generated heat today, with the BJP and Opposition trading charges against each other on the issues.

While the BJP hailed the Cabinet's proposal for reservation as "historic, guided by the spirit of social justice and empowerment", it chose to remain silent on the CCD's move. The party didn't make any comments even in praise of the CCD's decision, fearing political repercussions.

The Congress described the decision on reservation as a "delayed move". Party spokesman Mr Jaipal Reddy said: "The Congress has always supported reservations for EBCs and made it publicly clear, but the Cabinet had been sitting

over it." The Prime Minister had said in Rajasthan that a Bill would be tabled in the monsoon session to amend the Constitution for providing reservations for EBCs, he said. "Had the Cabinet taken a quick decision, the Bill could have made its way into our statute-book now."

The BJP and the Congress vied with each other to take credit for the fresh reservation proposal. The Congress listed the Narasimha Rao government's aborted 1991 order, the party's 2002 UP Assembly poll manifesto, and the Ashok Gehlot Cabinet's recommendation to the Centre several months ago as instances of its consistent attempts to achieve the objective.

The BJP went back even further, claiming it has been championing the cause of reservations for EBCs since the Jan Sangh days and even during the 1985 BJP national executive meet in Bhopal.

The parties accused each other of being motivated by "political expediency" before the upcoming

Assembly polls, with each of them claiming their own support to the EBCs reservation as "genuine and socially affirmative".

On the IOC issue, the BJP's discomfiture was evident. But the Congress and the Left went hammer and tongs at the Vajpayee government. The Congress slammed the government for again making attempts to "bypass" Parliament over proposed divestment of profit-making oil PSUs. The Congress and CPI-M made it clear they were "totally opposed" to any decision aimed at privatising IOC.

Mr Reddy said the Congress' "consistent policy" has been against "the sell-off of oil public companies since they're all profit-making and belonging to the strategic sector".

The Congress demanded that the government should "reconsider" the CCD's proposal and place it before Parliament for its clearance.

■ Another report on page 12

Ahead of polls, poor get quota

Jay Raina
New Delhi, October 3

9/10
9/10
HPCL

WITH AN eye on the approaching Assembly elections, the Union Cabinet on Friday approved reservations for economically backward classes (EBCs) across the country. These reservations will be in addition to existing quotas for scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and other backward castes.

Before the reservation policy can be implemented, several constitutional amendments will have to be passed, followed by the setting up of a commission that will work out the modalities of the new quotas.

Clause (4) of both Articles (15) and (16) of the Constitution will have to be amended to enable economic reservations. The Constitution now allows reservations only on the basis of educational and social criteria.

A new clause, 4B, will have to be added to Article 16 to get around the 50 per cent cap on reservations imposed by the Supreme Court.

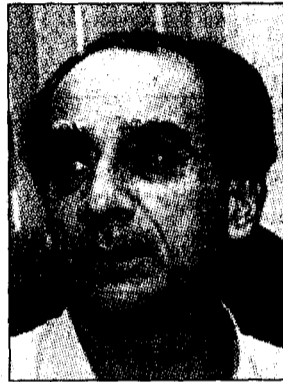
The amendments will be tabled in Parliament's winter session. Given the fact that the Congress and other Opposition parties are also committed to reservations for EBCs, the amendments, which will require a two-thirds majority in Parliament, are not expected to face any roadblocks.

After the amendments are passed, the commission will be constituted. Its main tasks will be defining the criteria for identifying economic backwardness and fixing the quantum of reservations.

Can't sell other oil PSUs, target IOC

THE GOVERNMENT'S plans to privatise HPCL and BPCL may have come unstuck because of a Supreme Court order, but it may have its way with another oil major — Indian Oil Corporation. The Cabinet Committee on Disinvestment on Friday decided to explore the option of splitting IOC (2002-03 sales: Rs 1,13,576 crore) into three entities.

The government will retain part of the *Fortune* 500 company while merging some of it with HPCL and BPCL. The petroleum and disinvestment ministries will work out the modalities for splitting IOC within the next three months. The decision overrides the earlier Cabinet decision not to divest government stake in GAIL (India), ONGC and IOC.



Divestment Minister Arun Shourie

But before taking such a step the government has to build a consensus in Parliament so that the Bill is passed easily. It is, however, doubtful if Petroleum Minister Ram Naik will fall in line, for he is opposed to the privatisation of oil PSUs.

HTC, New Delhi

The committee is expected to submit its report within a year of being constituted, after holding extensive consultations with states and union territories.

The committee will comprise judges and experts from relevant fields who are well versed with the socio-economic problems of EBCs. It will comprise four members and a member-secretary.

The Cabinet also cleared the following:

- Sale of equity in Tide Water Oil Co., STC, Engineers

India and Balmer Lawrie

- A 24-hour DD channel for news and current affairs from November 3 this year

- One-time assistance in sugar sector to some states; cess likely to make sugar more expensive by 6 paise per kg

- 6-month extension for Nanavati Commission, probing 1984 anti-Sikh riots

- National tax tribunal to make tax administration uniform

- Retrospective approval for Indo-French extradition treaty

Atal grabs court straw, Joshi jumps back



Joshi

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Sept. 30: Suspense over Murl Manohar Joshi's fate ended today when Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee rejected the human resources development minister's resignation and asked him to get back to work immediately.

"I will go to office tomorrow," Joshi said, 11 days after stepping down on moral grounds after the Rae Bareilly special court ordered framing of charges against him in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

Vajpayee's mind was made up once the Lucknow bench of Allahabad High Court today stayed proceedings against the

minister, pending disposal of his appeal. Joshi had filed a review petition yesterday. The Lucknow bench has summoned the case records from the Rae Bareilly court and will hold its next hearing on November 4.

The Prime Minister conveyed his decision to Joshi and congratulated him after the minister called to inform him about the stay order.

Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu also spoke to Joshi soon after. The special court had let off Advani while ordering framing of charges against Joshi and six others, including BJP leaders Uma Bharti and Vinay Katiyar.

Encouraged by the reprieve

for Joshi, Naidu has advised Bharti and Katiyar to move the high court. The BJP was concerned about the verdict's implication for Bharti, its chief ministerial candidate in Madhya Pradesh. Some felt the verdict could be used to question her claim to become chief minister if the party is in a position to form the government after the November elections.

A relieved Joshi told reporters that although he had resigned to "uphold the highest moral traditions", he agreed with the view that the demolition case was "politically motivated" and did not involve issues of "criminal and moral turpitude".

"Our stand from the beginning is that the charges are polit-

2 yoj gort
ically motivated," stressed Naidu.

Emphasising that the Ayodhya tangle should be sorted out at the earliest, Joshi said: "Though I never considered myself guilty in the December 6, 1992, incident, I tendered my resignation to honour the court ruling. The cases filed against me and others in this connection by the then government were motivated by political expediency and vendetta.

"I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to thousands of individuals and organisations who expressed their solidarity with me in my decision."

In a subtle dig at Naidu and his team who saw to it that the BJP turned its back on Joshi for

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allegedly going against the "official" line by resigning, he said: "I am indebted to those who called on me and sent messages expressing their support at this very decisive moment. They would always continue to be my support and strength."

The Joshi drama over, Vajpayee turned his attention on another minister in the thick of a controversy, M. Kannappan of the MDMK. Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayalithaa has demanded that he should be sacked for allegedly supporting the LTTE and has threatened to invoke the Prevention of Terrorism Act if he enters Tamil Nadu.

Vajpayee told an MDMK delegation he would consult law minister Arun Jaitley on the issue.

PM back, to decide on Joshi

9-23-03 HR-5 29/9

Press Trust of India
New Delhi, September 28

ATAL BIHARI Vajpayee said on Sunday night that his peace initiative with Pakistan had suffered a setback because of Pervez Musharraf's statements, but felt a fresh impetus was needed to bring about amity between the two countries.

"Yes, the peace process has suffered a setback", he told reporters in the capital on his return from Zurich at the end of his 13-day tour during which he visited Turkey and addressed the UN General Assembly in New York.

The Prime Minister said efforts should be made to resolve outstanding Indo-Pakistani issues through dialogue and in a peaceful manner.

Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi, who resigned as human resources development minister, after a special court in Rae Bareilly indicted him in the Babri Masjid demolition case, were standing side by side at the Indira Gandhi International Airport to receive Vajpayee. But they were not seen talking to each other.

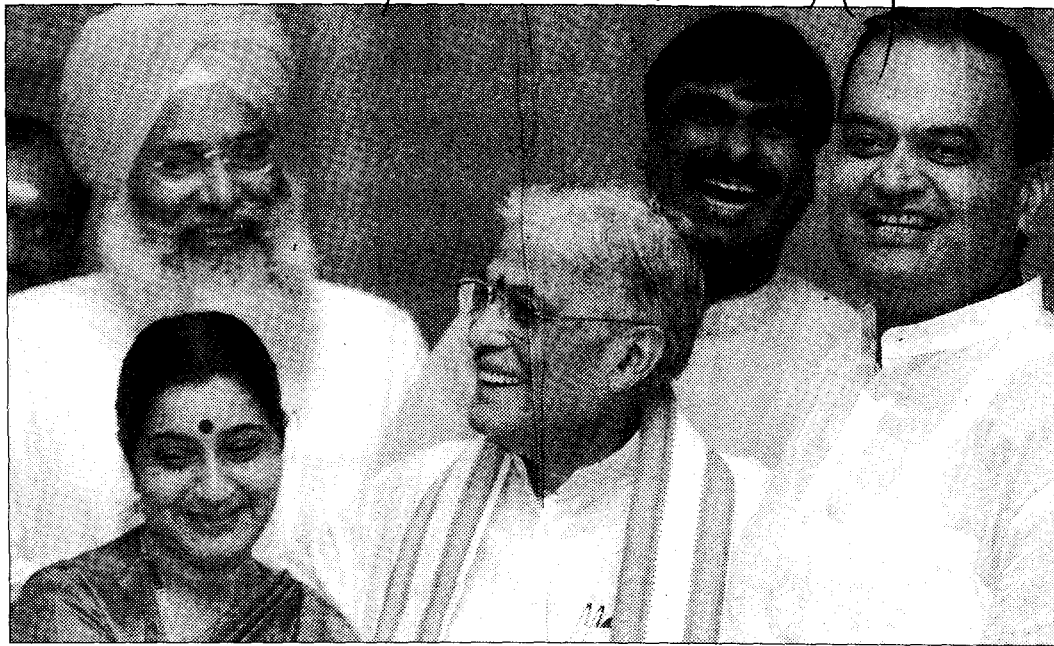
Vajpayee said he would discuss Joshi's resignation at his earliest. "I have just reached Delhi. I will sit down and discuss the issue."

How would he deal with Jayalalithaa's demand seeking Union minister of state for non-conventional energy Kannappan's resignation in the wake of Pota charges being levelled against him? Vajpayee said: "I will consider the issue."

Was he considering assigning a portfolio to Mamata Banerjee? The Prime Minister said he would also discuss the minister without portfolio's (Mamata's) issue with his senior party colleagues.

On the Iraqi crisis, he said developments in the war-ravaged

try were high on his agenda



M.M. Joshi (centre) poses with his Sushma Swaraj, S.S Dhindsa (back left) Ashok Pradhan (second right) and Digvijay Singh (right) while waiting for the arrival of A.B. Vajpayee at Delhi airport on Sunday.

Vajpayee delivers a stern message

(Continued from Page 1)

Having taken on board the General's vitriol, Vajpayee then raised the subject of cross-border terrorism with George W. Bush at lunch. When Bush admitted that the UN was also concerned about Pakistan's role, Vajpayee gave the go-ahead for the hard-

hitting speech that he finally delivered.

So, is the peace initiative dead in the water? The Indian side says it is not. Track II contacts continue and Vajpayee himself told the press that "while we regret what has happened, we do not believe that the initiative is dead."

The Indian side reckons that

with continuing American pressure, Musharraf will be forced to scale down on the training of terrorists.

Then, Delhi would be happy to talk to him. But even if he doesn't, India has made it clear that a desire for peace is not a sign of weakness. Try and provoke us and we will take you on.

of discussions with world leaders in New York but asserted that the UN needed to play a bigger role there. He said he had made India's position on Iraq ab-

solutely clear during his engagements at the UN. "The role of UN in Iraq is not clear and the world body needs to have a greater say," he said. If the challenges

facing the world were to be resolved then the UN would have to be reformed. He hoped the UN reforms process would "take shape soon".

20 suicide squads ready to cross over from Pak

Press Trust of India
Jammu, September 28

IN A bid to step up militancy in a big way in J&K, the ISI has revived support bases along the Line of Control and the international border. From these bases, which were closed after the September 11 terror attacks in the US, around 1,600 trained terrorists are set to infiltrate, security sources said on Sunday.

Most of the militancy support set-up, including 12 special operational intelligence units (SOUI), 13 launching pads and 25 arms training camps, have been revived in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Pakistan in the last three months, the sources said.

Around 1,560 to 1615 trained militants, including 20 suicide squads, are set to cross over into the country from these bases, the sources said citing intelligence reports.

The intelligence reports have been brought to the notice of the US as proof of Pakistan's direct involvement in militancy in J&K.

Revival of these bases is of concern to the security establishment here as SOUIs and launch pads are the main support system for highly trained militants for infiltration, sabotage activities and identification of specific targets, they said. Of the 1,600 militants set to be pushed into India, 1,110 to 1,140 were in 21 camps and launching pads along the LoC.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

29 SEP 2003

Atal ties troops to UN call

Agencies
Ankara, September 17

PRIME MINISTER A.B. Vajpayee on Wednesday held wide-ranging talks with Turkish Premier Recep Tayyip Erdogan on a host of issues, including ways of combating terrorism and the situation in Iraq. Vajpayee also told a Turkish newspaper that India would send troops to Iraq only if the UN played a "central rule" in stabilisation operations.

In an interview splashed across the front page of *The Daily News* — Turkey's largest English daily — Vajpayee said sending Indian troops to Iraq would depend on the UN assuming a larger mandate in Iraq as well as some domestic considerations.

Vajpayee is on a three-day visit to Turkey, the first by an Indi-



AMUSED: Vajpayee at a news meet in Ankara on Wednesday.

an Prime Minister in 15 years. The agenda of his talks with Turkish President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and Erdogan relates to issues of mutual concern, including the US draft resolution for a multilateral force in Iraq and the West Asian crisis.

Several agreements and protocols in various fields were signed, including one on setting up a joint working group on terrorism. Agreements relating to extradition, cooperation in the field of science and technology and information technology will be signed during the visit. The two countries also have a civil aviation agreement — Turkish Airways is likely to start a direct flight from Istanbul to Delhi soon.

On Thursday, Vajpayee will attend a ceremony to unveil a bust of Rabindranath Tagore before flying to Istanbul where he will call on Sezer. He will open an "Experience India Exhibition" in which 42 Indian companies will participate. He will also address a business meet in which 50 representatives of Ficci, CII and Assocham will take part.

Court stops HPCL, BPCL divestment

Oil selloff slips on legal ground

9-12-03 9:14

17/9

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, Sept. 16: Acts of the past visited the government with a vengeance today when the Supreme Court stalled the sale of Hindustan Petroleum and Bharat Petroleum on a legal point and not in an indictment of the policy of divestment, which it made clear.

It said the two companies — HPCL and BPCL — can not be sold because they were nationalised under acts of Parliament that only the legislature can repeal. The government was trying to sell its stake in the companies through an executive order on the advice of attorney-general Soli Sorabjee, a course the court had rejected.

The judgment does put the government in a bit of a spot because it had intended to raise Rs 13,200 crore in this financial year through divestment and the two oil companies were the crown jewels. The options (see chart) left before the government to counteract the judgment will be time-consuming.

Minister Arun Shourie, piloting the divestment programme, said: "We will consult the law ministry and the attorney-general (Soli Sorabjee) for available options and these will be put before the Cabinet Committee on Disinvestment on October 3."

Although Shourie saw the development as a "major setback"

OPTIONS

- Government can seek review of judgment but it will come up before the same bench
- It can request a larger bench contending that a constitutional question has arisen
- It can amend three laws on the oil industry
- An omnibus law can be brought to repeal similar clauses in various acts

to reforms, the Supreme Court took care to emphasise that it was not opposing divestment. The division bench of Justices S. Rajendra Babu and G.P. Mathur acknowledged that privatisation and changing social realities required change in policies.

Opposition parties resisting privatisation interpreted it as a victory. Worryingly for the government, the Congress said it would oppose any move to secure parliamentary approval. A bill to repeal the acts will have to be passed in both Houses and in the Rajya Sabha that cannot happen without Congress support.

Seen in that context, the options before the government could be limited.

Petroleum minister Ram Naik did not sound as elated as the Opposition but used the word "historic" to describe a judgment by "the supreme authority". He has been opposing

the divestment.

The court relied heavily on the preamble of the two acts acquiring the assets of the foreign companies, Esso and Burmah Shell, the original avatars of HPCL and BPCL.

It said the acquisition was being done "to ensure that the ownership and control of petroleum products, distributed and marketed in India by the said companies are vested in the state and thereby so distributed as best to subserve the common good".

The judges said the law contemplated that the two would be government companies.

"Here what is required to be seen is not which asset can be transferred or not, but whether the undertaking can change its character from a government company to ordinary company without parliamentary clearance in the light of the statute of acquisition," they added.

The answer is no.

The public interest litigation against the divestment was filed by the Oil Sector Officers' Association and the Centre for Public Interest Litigation.

Apart from going for a review of the verdict, the government could seek to amend three laws on the oil industry or bring a single legislation which will allow it to divest its stake in all companies that have been set up or nationalised through acts of Parliament.

■ See Business Telegraph

THE TIMES OF INDIA

17 SEP 2003

India not to send troops to Iraq

US not doing enough to stop Pak exporting terror, feels Centre

Vishal Thapar and Shekhar Iyer
New Delhi, September 11

INDIA HAS decided that it will not send troops to Iraq, even if the UN was to explicitly sanction multinational peacekeeping operations there, highly placed government sources disclosed. This is in concert with the decision not to send troops to Liberia, which was requested by the US recently.

New Delhi has taken this position amid reports that the US is lobbying support for the UN resolution it seeks to move on Iraq. The decision has been taken on the grounds of an adverse security situation in India.

Earlier, while politely turning down the US request for contributing a division strength of troops for stabilisation operations in northern Iraq, India had kept the door open for a reconsideration were there to be an "explicit" UN mandate for the purpose. India, which has a 1.1 million strong Army, is one of the highest contributors of troops for UN operations. Now, New Delhi has put forth the assessment that its internal security situation — as also the threat to its frontiers — does not allow it to spare troops.

The government's reluctance to send troops to Iraq may not be linked to just the

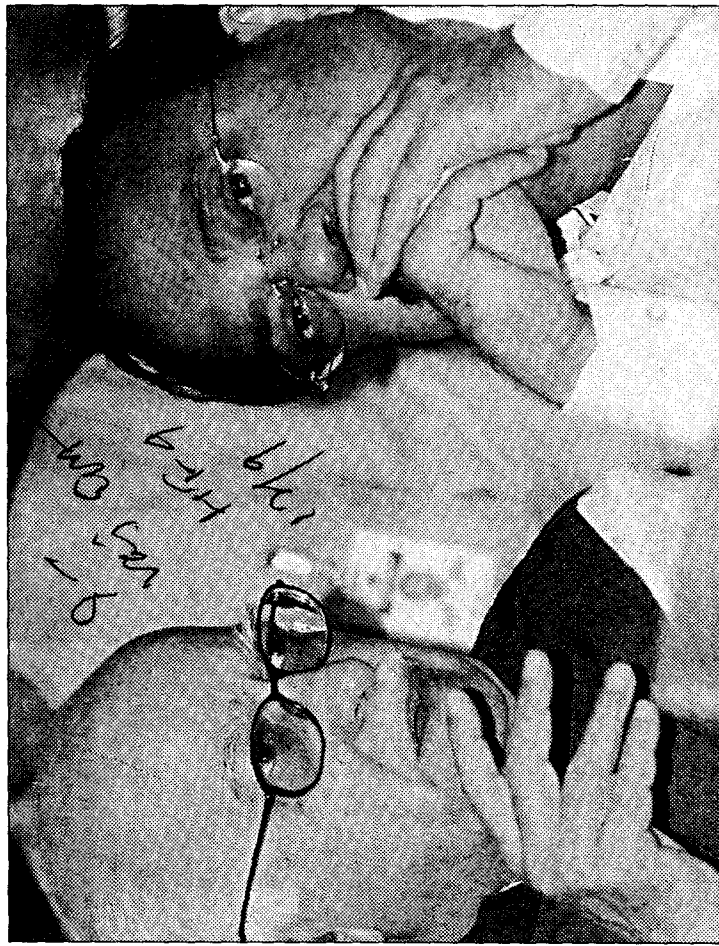
tants to the US, "but when India asked for 20 wanted terrorists to be handed over, Islamabad did not comply".

With the Opposition parties and the RSS brass dead against the idea, the BJP-led government is certainly not inclined if Advani's remarks are any indication.

Initially, Advani was seen as one of those favouring an early dispatch of Indian troops. But he says now that the media's perception about his stand is contrary to the truth. The government has not officially said a clear "no" on the issue. Even the latest interactions between US Assistant Secretary of State Rocca and Indian officials have seen Delhi emphasising on an explicit UN mandate.

But his remarks are significant. He says when India is still grappling with terror on its soil and blasts in Mumbai and other places showing that it's far from over, an issue like sending troops to Iraq is not an easy issue to decide on. "At such a time, one does wonder why India's request to Pakistan is pending," he said.

When asked about US President George Bush's bid to work on a new UN resolution for mandating troops, saying they wanted foreign troops soon because the killings of US soldiers eclipsed the good changes brought about by the war in Iraq, Advani said,



AFP
ALL EARS: Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani talks to BJP president Venkaiah Naidu during an Anti-Terrorism Day function in New Delhi on Thursday.

lack of a UN mandate, but also to what it thinks is inadequate US efforts to get Pakistan to take "real" steps to curb terrorism in India, including the handing over of 20 "most-wanted" terrorists.

This indication has come from none other than Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani during his interaction

with senior BJP leaders and others at a conclave in Bangalore on Wednesday. Since then, he has also publicly reminded the US about its commitment to curb terrorism in India, even if New Delhi knows it has to resolve the problem by itself.

At a youth convention organised by the BJP in Ban-

galore on Wednesday, Advani reminded the US Congress of its pledge after the September 11 attacks that it would not support nations that promoted terrorism.

Second, addressing an Anti-Terrorism Day meet in the capital on Thursday, Advani said Pakistan had handed over 500 al-Qaida mili-

Allies protest, cow Bill not tabled

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Aug. 21. — The government today could not table the Bill seeking a ban on cow slaughter following protests from not only the Opposition, but also BJP allies such as the TDP, Trinamul Congress and the DMK.

Agriculture minister Mr Rajnath Singh, who was to introduce the Bill in the Lok Sabha today, could not do so. Trinamul and TDP members had given notices to speak before the minister could seek permission to grant leave to introduce the Bill. The DMK too protested against the Bill.

(The DMK urged the government to drop the anti-cow slaughter Bill, a report from Chennai adds. The Bill, if enacted, would lead to communal disharmony, said DMK chief Mr M Karunanidhi.)

The government admitted that it didn't anticipate this kind of resistance from its partners. The reason being that the Bill, after its introduction, would

have been referred to a standing committee of Parliament.

Mrs Sushma Swaraj, parliamentary affairs minister, said the government would soon call a meeting of the NDA and parties supporting it such as the TDP. This'll be followed by a meeting of all parties to sort out differences on the issue.

On the Opposition's stand questioning the Centre's legislative competence, Mrs Swaraj said Parliament had the right to amend the Constitution and bring the issue of ban on cow slaughter on the concurrence list. The laws already enacted by some state governments on the subject would be superseded and there will be only one law on the ban all over the country, she said.

The BJP admitted that opposition from the allies on the Bill caused embarrassment to the government.

The Congress, on the other hand, said it was not in principle opposed to the ban on cow slaughter, but the government should keep in mind food habits of the people.

THE STATESMAN

22 AUG 2003

In George I trust: Atal

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 19: Atal Bihari Vajpayee certified that George Fernandes was "innocent", described the charges in the Tehelka sting operation as "baseless", called the Opposition's boycott of the defence minister "unjustified" and asserted that he was brought back into the cabinet because he, as Prime Minister, wanted it.

Vajpayee's clean chit came during the debate on the no-confidence motion, which had its roots in controversies around Fernandes.

The Prime Minister said: "One good outcome of these two days is that Fernandes' *vaavaas* (exile) is over. He is my colleague, he was a freedom fighter and a trade union leader. To behave like this with him, this boycott in Parliament, what on earth is going on? This is not the kind of attitude we in Parliament had towards one another. I want to congratulate Fernandes because he withstood the humiliation heaped on him but never shirked his responsibilities."

Wrapping up the debate, Sonia Gandhi said none from the ruling combine, including the Prime Minister, gave a convinc-

ing response to her nine-point chargesheet.

"When I talk about the country's interests, they question the style of my speech. They make personal allegations against me. But no one from the government has responded to our charges in the last two days," she said.

As expected, the motion was defeated — 312 against and 186 for — on the stroke of midnight.

Vajpayee's intervention, which came at the end of a day-long slanging match, was for the most part conciliatory. But when it came to defending Fernandes, he was on the front foot.

When he took a potshot at the CPM for staging a walkout when Fernandes spoke yesterday, CPM leader Somnath Chatterjee reminded Vajpayee that the defence minister had said he would not return to the government unless he was exonerated.

Unfazed, Vajpayee replied: "I brought him back, he did not want to return. It is the Prime Minister's prerogative to appoint his ministers."

"Whether it is going to a desert or the Siachen glacier, he has never shirked his responsibility. He was always there to boost the morale of our jawans. It is a grave injustice to, therefore, not allow him to speak without any proof to back the false charges levelled against him. Or is it that the Opposition is scared of Fernandes?" Vajpayee asked.



Sonia, Vajpayee



Vajpayee lashed out at the manner in which the motion had been phrased.

"In the leader of the Opposition's speech, she said the BJP-led government had proved itself to be incompetent, irresponsible and brazenly corrupt. Differences can exist but parties have worked shoulder to shoulder. Is this the way to show your differences? It seems the dictionary was carefully scanned and the words were chosen. But this is not word play."

Sonia expressed surprise that Vajpayee raised questions about the relevance of the no-trust motion and its wording. It is the Opposition's moral responsibility to "expose the government". About the wording, she said: "A no-confidence motion has to be worded to the Opposition's liking and not to that of the government."

Rejecting the Prime Minister's contention that her chargesheet was not backed by material evidence, she embarked on a point-by-point demolition job. Sonia said her charge that national security and defence were under threat had been borne out by the 19th report of the standing committee of Parliament on defence which BJP leader Madan Lal Khurana headed.

■ See Page 6

Caught between the brother and sister, what will the father do?

SPEAKER MANOHAR JOSHI reacting to parliamentary affairs minister Sushma Swaraj calling CPM's Somnath Chatterjee 'Somnathbhai' and Chatterjee addressing her as 'bahin'

Aar mein reh gaya Vajpayee, paar mein reh gaya Musharraf, beech mein George Bush aur hum sab khushi (Vajpayee on this side, Musharraf on that, Bush in the middle and all of us are happy)

PRIYA RANJAN DAS
MUNSHI

advising Vajpayee to choose between sentimental poetry and ethics of governance

Maybe the Prime Minister has advised the leader of the Opposition to bring a no-confidence motion

P.A. SANGMA

jesting about the 'perfect understanding' between ruling party and Opposition

PM GIVES A CLEAN CHIT TO FERNANDES

Govt. defeats no-confidence motion by a big margin

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, AUG. 19. As expected, the Vajpayee Government managed to defeat the Opposition's motion of no-confidence by an impressive margin of 312 to 186 votes. The AIADMK and the National Conference abstained, while the BSP voted with the Government.

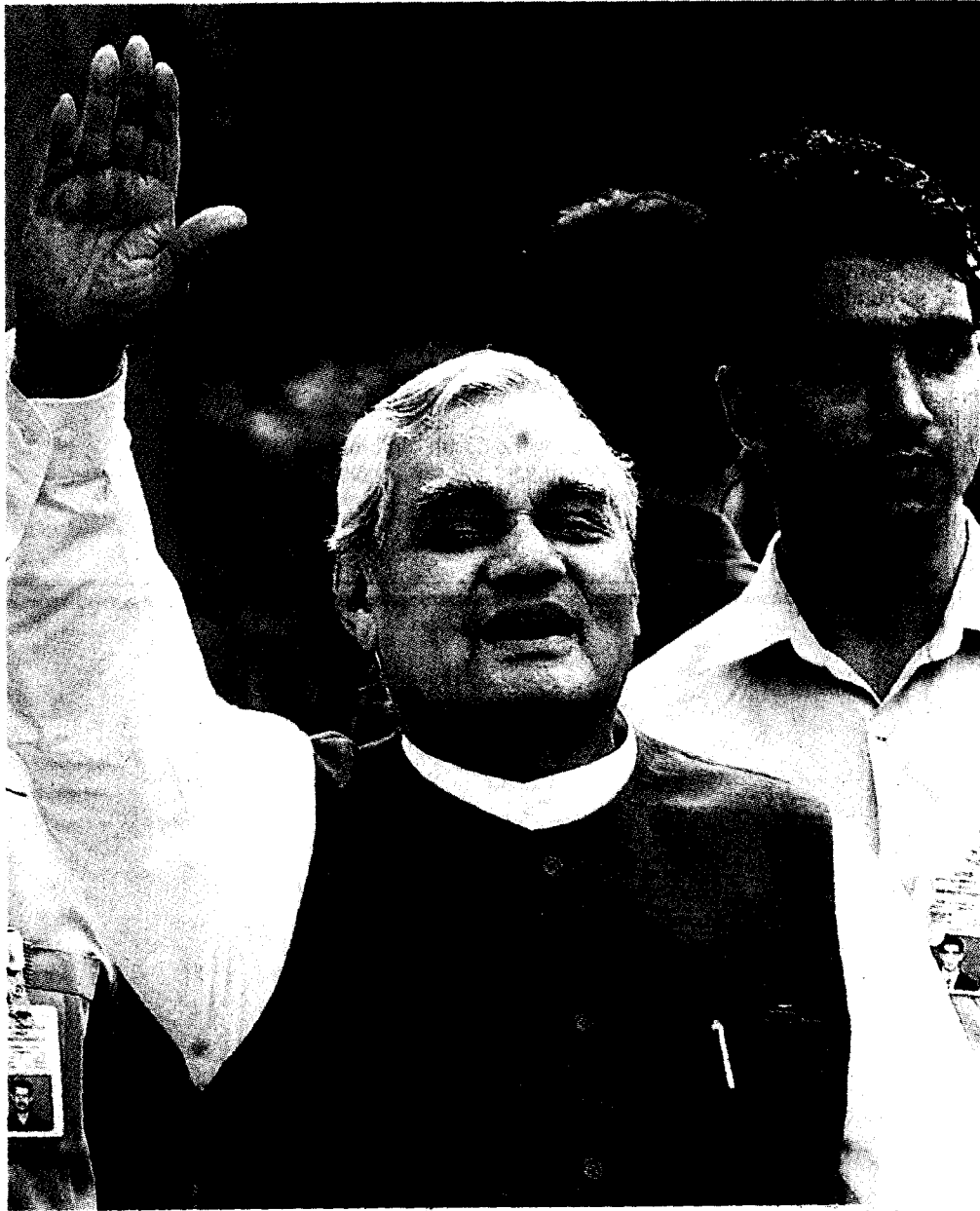
The vote came at the end of a two-day marathon debate when the Opposition insisted on a formal division. In fact, by the time the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, got up to speak, at 11 p.m., the Lok Sabha members had visibly lost the appetite for lengthy speeches.

With the desire to get over with it all too evident and the outcome of the vote also known, the Prime Minister put in a rather indifferent performance. Except for a stout defence of his decision to re-induct George Fernandes in the Union Cabinet, Mr. Vajpayee did not come anywhere near producing the kind of sparkling oratory for which he is so well known.

Instead of replying to specific charges of indictment made by the Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, while introducing the motion, Mr. Vajpayee chose to express himself to be pained at the very idea of the Opposition "charging" his Government when so much had been accomplished in the last five years.

The Prime Minister disputed the Opposition's contention that his Government had lost the mandate of the people, and challenged the Congress for an electoral bout in the Assembly elections later this year. But the Prime Minister was at his animated best in defence of his Defence Minister. He complimented Mr. Fernandes for stoically facing the Opposition's boycott, declared him to have been the best Defence Minister, and argued that it was he, as Prime Minister, who inducted Mr. Fernandes back in the Cabinet.

Addressing himself to the Opposition's charge that Mr. Fernandes was re-inducted before he got exonerated by the Tehelka Commission of Inquiry, the Prime Minister pointed out that there were no charges against Defence Minister, that he was



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, waves to mediapersons on his arrival at the Parliament House complex in New Delhi on Tuesday. — PTI

not an accused and that the Inquiry Commission had not sought any explanation from him.

The Prime Minister disapproved of the Opposition's charge that his Government had undermined India's foreign policy and had mortgaged our autonomy in external affairs; he challenged the Opposition to tell to whom and for how much our autonomy had been mortgaged. He maintained that unlike previous Prime Ministers, he did not allow himself to be

browbeaten by the international community when it came to Pokharan II.

Mr. Vajpayee was restrained in taking on Ms. Gandhi. He began by mocking her speech and wondered whether a thesaurus had been overused but told the house that a discourse of abuse was no solution to the country's problems. The only personal shot he took at Ms. Gandhi was to tell her that the days of one party overlordship were over and the country was no longer prepared to pay allegiance to

one leader. For most of the time, Mr. Vajpayee was caught between outright partisanship and responsible statesmanship. He was interrupted a number of times and each interruption appeared to provoke a combative streak in him; but most of the time, the Prime Minister contented himself with a "we-know-the-outcome" perfunctory attitude.

On her part, the Leader of the Opposition, in her concluding remarks, was equally uninspired. The only note of aggres-

sion in her 15-minute reply was her challenge to the Deputy Prime Minister to substantiate his charge that she had directed the Congress State Governments not to use POTA.

The NDA back-benches were in no mood to allow Ms. Gandhi an uninterrupted reply. Speaking in Hindi, she insisted that whatever accomplishments the Vajpayee Government was claiming credit for were a continuation of the Congress legacy. When the bitter and acrimonious debate came to an end with the vote, there were no gestures of parliamentary camaraderie. The two sides turned their back on each other.

Charges not answered: Sonia

NEW DELHI, AUG. 19. The Opposition leader, Sonia Gandhi, today said the Atal Behari Vajpayee Government failed to answer any of the nine charges put forth by her and it owed an explanation to the people.

Winding up the two-day debate on the motion of no-confidence against the Government, Ms. Gandhi, who spoke in both English and Hindi, said the no-confidence motion was aimed at exposing the Government and not replacing it.

Instead of replying to her specific questions, the speakers of the ruling coalition stooped to level personal attacks on her. "Main jab bhi logon ki dukh taklif ko uthati hoon to moojh par niji arop lagate hai" ("whenever I talk about the people's sorrows and hardships, they resort to personal attacks on me") she said.

"Whatever charges we made against the Government were based on proof drawn from official figures, statistics and parliamentary standing committee reports. The charges were regarding slack defence preparedness, faulty foreign policy, deteriorating state economy and increasing unemployment."

Taking a dig at the Prime Minister, she said, "Kavita ki panktion se daliton aur naojawanon ko rojgar nahi milega" (Merely reciting poems will not ensure employment to the unemployed). — UNI

CHIEF WHIPS ON BOTH SIDES BUSY

All set for no-trust motion debate

9:45 am
NDA

2
HOT
18/8

By Our New Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI, AUG. 17. With the National Democratic Alliance Government having a comfortable lead of over a hundred MPs, the no-confidence motion to be moved by the Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, against the Vajpayee Government on Monday is expected to result in sound and fury signifying nothing. But both sides are preparing for the debate of Monday and Tuesday in right earnest.

Going by the arithmetic in the Lok Sabha, the fate of the Government will not be decided when the motion is voted upon on Tuesday evening as there is no doubt about its survival, but the political divide in the country will be on display as the entire debate for two days will be televised live.

Tomorrow morning, meetings of party leaders and whips are expected to be held by both sides to give last-minute touches to their strategies before the start of Parliament and the start of the debate at noon. The Telugu Desam Party leader, Yerran Naidu, will attend the meeting to be chaired by the Prime Minister in the Central Hall of Parliament at 9.30 a.m.

The Opposition, it seems, wants to set the stage for the Assembly elections in five States later this year. The no-confidence motion will come in handy to it providing an opportunity to attack the Government, pinpoint its weaknesses, elaborate on its failures and reach the people through the televised debate. It may also help the Congress to establish that Ms. Gandhi's leadership is indeed accepted by other Opposition parties. The Congress spokesperson, Jaipal Reddy, said, "the tone of the Opposition's offensive will be set by Ms. Gandhi's speech when she moves the motion of no-confi-



Atal Behari Vajpayee ...
sitting pretty



Sonia Gandhi...
spearheading attack

dence against the Vajpayee Government".

The Lok Janshakti leader, Ramvilas Paswan, today made it clear that he would support the Congress motion and do whatever the Opposition jointly decided. Having left the NDA after the Gujarat riots, he was not in a mood to look back.

The Government will certainly use the opportunity to establish its superiority in numbers — all the NDA members have rallied behind it, including the DMK, which was reported yesterday to have expressed reser-

vations about seeking additional support from the AIADMK. Sources close to the Prime Minister categorically said that no one from the NDA had contacted the AIADMK chief, Jayalalithaa, for her support. But reports from Chennai suggest that the AIADMK may well decide to add its strength to that of the NDA when its executive committee meets tomorrow.

In fact, the Government plans not only to use the occasion to flaunt its numerical strength and showcase its achievements but also to launch a direct counter-attack on Ms. Gandhi. It could try and expose the differences of opinion within the Opposition on the continuing "boycott" of the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, for he is reportedly one of the Ministers listed to speak on the no-trust motion.

The Opposition is expected to take a final view tomorrow morning on what it will do when Mr. Fernandes gets up to speak during the debate.

An informal meeting of Bharatiya Janata Party leaders was held here today at the residence of the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, where plans were finalised and, on the other side of the fence, consultations among leaders took place at Ms. Gandhi's residence. A strategy meeting was also held at the residence of the Congress Deputy Leader of the Lok Sabha, Shivraj Patil, where some senior party workers got together to plan for Monday.

Throughout the day, the chief whips on both the sides were busy ensuring that all their members turn up in the Lok Sabha in the next two days. All parties across the board will issue three-line whips to ensure their members are present and vote as decided by their party leaders.

Government to field Fernandes in no-trust debate

NDA flaunts its numbers

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STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug. 16. — Confident of his government's numerical superiority in the Lok Sabha, Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today asked NDA allies to "seize the opportunity of the Congress-sponsored no-confidence motion" to give a befitting reply to the Opposition.

NDA allies held a strategy session this morning at his residence to discuss the no-confidence motion, which is slated for debate on Monday and Tuesday. While Mr Vajpayee expressed satisfaction over NDA unity, Mr LK Advani wondered why the Congress took the initiative knowing that the motion would be defeated. Usually, the Opposition brings a no-trust when there are differences that can be exploited or the government makes major mistakes, he reportedly said. Neither has happened now.

Attributing the Congress' decision to its anxiety to get out of the logjam it is in, a BJP leader said some Congress leaders feared they would be blamed for stalling the House over a "non-issue" if the Speaker adjourned the Lok Sabha sine die.

Despite being taken by surprise by Ms Sonia Gandhi's notice, the NDA feels the

exercise will give it a perfect platform to tom tom its "achievements" over four years. The coalition also hopes to extract another "gain" by ensuring the "rehabilitation" of its convener and defence minister, Mr George Fernandes, in Parliament.

The NDA may rub more salt on the Opposition's injury by asking Mr Fernandes to even initiate the debate. Facing an Opposition boycott for over a year and being at the vortex of the recent storm over the PAC issue, Mr Fernandes said he's actually "waiting for the day". When asked if he holds himself responsible for this motion, he called the move a "meaningless exercise", and asked: "What crime did I commit?"

Expressing confidence, BJP Chief Whip Mr VK Malhotra said the NDA has the support of 323 members including 14 from the BSP, 29 from TDP and some Independents. This does not include the AIADMK. Mr Chandrababu Naidu and Ms Mayawati have already promised full support.

The NDA has issued whips to MPs to vote against the motion on Tuesday. The NDA will field senior ministers to rebut the Opposition's charges. Ms Mamata Banerjee attended today's NDA meeting.

■ More reports on page 10

← Sonia places notice to
crack PAC report impasse

No-trust to break PM silence

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, Aug. 14: The Congress has exercised the ultimate parliamentary weapon available to get Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee to explain on the Lok Sabha floor its allegations of irregularities in defence purchases during the Kargil conflict and reinduction of George Fernandes as defence minister.

This afternoon, the leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, submitted to Speaker Manohar Joshi a notice of no-confidence against the Vajpayee ministry. Since a notice of no-confidence takes precedence over all other business, it will be taken up when the House assembles next on Monday.

However, some pressing government business pending before the House will be cleared first. The business advisory committee of the House has decided to hold the debate on the no-confidence motion on Monday and Tuesday.

This will be the first no-trust motion against the Vajpayee-led NDA government since it assumed office on October 13, 1999, and, indeed, will be the first the Prime Minister will be facing as, on the two earlier occasions — in May 1996 and April 1999 — he had only sought a confidence vote. In 1996, he had left the House to tender his resignation without seeking the vote and in 1999, he lost it by one vote.

"It is the ultimate parliamentary weapon available to us to force a discussion that has agitated the Opposition in both Houses of Parliament for the last few days," Congress spokesman Jaipal Reddy said, announcing Sonia's move against the government.

Although it will be a "one-line no-confidence motion" against the government, Reddy dropped enough hints that the focus of the attack will be on Fernandes and some of the controversial defence purchase deals of his ministry. "The scope of the motion is extensive. But the immediate back-

ground of the developments in Parliament over the past few days will obviously dominate."

However, party sources said they did not expect to get enough support to carry the motion through. "But we will surely expose the government on the defence and security fronts."

The principal Opposition party's move was apparently discussed at a meeting of its political affairs committee two days ago as a section of the leaders was keen that a way out should be found to end the government-
Opposition deadlock over the Public Accounts Committee's controversial report on Operation Vijay, the Kargil war.

Sources said the no-trust option figured at a meeting of the floor leaders of various parties which the Speaker called this morning. Whereas the Congress has been insisting on a debate on the PAC report and the Fernandes boycott and a reply by Vajpayee, the government has been consistently maintaining that the response would come only from the defence minister.

But at the meeting today, a minister is believed to have put a poser to the Congress: "If you are so insistent on getting the Prime Minister to reply, why not then move a no-confidence motion?" That eventually turned out to be the method to try and end the deadlock, though the CPM was initially not impressed. In between, the House adjourned thrice during the day over the issue before the Opposition allowed private members' business in the afternoon. The next development was Sonia's tabling of the no-trust move.

While the Prime Minister will reply to the debate, the Congress also acknowledged that "Fernandes will have a right to intervene in the debate as a member of the House". Whether this will result in the end of Fernandes' boycott, which has

been on ever since his return to the cabinet after his resignation in the wake of the Tehelka revelations, was not clear.

■ See P 6, 8, 10

QUOTE

**It is the ultimate
parliamentary weapon
available to us**

JAIPAL REDDY

No-trust notice served on Govt.

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By Our New Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI, AUG. 14. The Opposition today served a notice of no-confidence on the Vajpayee Government, its ultimate weapon in Parliament.

This will be taken up at noon on August 18 and the debate will continue the next day when the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, will respond before voting takes place around 6

p.m. after a reply by the Leader of the Opposition, Sonia Gandhi, who will move the motion. This was decided by the Business Advisory Committee of the Lok Sabha this evening after the Speaker of the Lok Sabha, Manohar Joshi, revealed that he had received the notice from Ms. Gandhi. The Speaker accepted a Congress request for live telecast of the entire debate.

The Congress and the BJP have

already issued three-line whips to their members asking them to be present throughout August 18 and 19 and vote according to the directions given by their chief whips. Over the next three days hectic political activity is expected on both sides of the political divide — joint Opposition meetings and meetings of the NDA and the BJP.

The Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, conceded that the Speaker's disclosure had taken her by surprise, but "we are hundred per cent confident of defeating the motion", she added. And given the strength of the ruling NDA and the support it enjoys from other friendly parties outside the Government, there is hardly any doubt about the outcome.

Even the Opposition parties admitted that their strategy did not hope to, or even aim at, defeating the Government. It was meant to expose its wrongdoing. The Congress chief whip, Priya Ranjan Dasmunshi, said: "We began this session by exposing the Government's double-speak on Ayodhya and its misuse of the Central Bureau of

Investigation (in the Babri Masjid demolition case) and at the end of the session we focussed on the Government's cover-up of defence deals (related to the Kargil war purchases) leading to the no-confidence motion."

It was the Congress spokesperson, S. Jaipal Reddy, who announced that Ms. Gandhi had sent a notice of no-confidence in the Government to the Speaker. He indicated that the Government's unrelenting attitude over the controversy related to the Public Accounts Committee report led to the Opposition adopting this aggressive step which would now force the Prime Minister to respond to the Opposition's charges on a wide range of issues, including those relating to the Kargil-related purchases.

The Congress said it held consultations with "like-minded" parties in the Opposition. It is understood that Shivraj Patil spoke to Left party leaders, Mr. Dasmunshi got in touch with the Rashtriya Janata Dal while Ms. Gandhi spoke to the Samajwadi Party chief, Mulayam Singh Yadav.

GoM to study quota for poor among forward castes

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 11. The Vajpayee Government today took a series of important decisions — clearing a Bill for banning cow slaughter, setting up a Group of Ministers (GoM) on reservation for the economically backward classes among the forward castes and granting full Statehood for Delhi — all of which are being seen as “election-oriented” steps.

These decisions were taken at a Union Cabinet meeting today, ahead of the Assembly elections in Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Mizoram due by year-end.

by the three Congress Chief Ministers — Digvijay Singh of Madhya Pradesh, Ashok Gehlot of Rajasthan and Sheila Dixit of Delhi.

Mr. Digvijay Singh was the first off the blocks in demanding that the Government consider bringing in legislation to ban cow slaughter in the country, in response to a BJP-supported agitation pointing out that Madhya Pradesh already had a law in place.

The demand was apparently made to turn the tables on the BJP, which is gearing to deny Mr. Digvijay Singh a third term in office in the State. The move to introduce a Bill in the current session of Parliament is aimed at blunting Mr. Digvijay Singh's campaign and also forcing the Congress central leadership to take a stand on this issue. Equally contentious is the demand for reservation for the “poor” among the forward castes, spearheaded by a BJP leader in Rajasthan under the banner of the Social Justice Front.

Sensing a political opportunity in the wake of persistent demands, Mr. Gehlot endorsed the same with the rider that it was for the Centre to enact legislation on the issue which required an amendment to the Constitution.

The intensity of the demand was experienced by the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, in Jaipur on Sunday where he declared his Government's willingness to amend the Constitution to make provision for reservation for the poor among the unreserved categories.

However, he made it known that the issue could not be clinched without the Opposition's support. Clamour for full Statehood for the National Capital Territory of Delhi has been on for a long time. Aware of its potential as a poll issue, Ms. Dixit, got a resolution adopted by the Delhi Legislative Assembly seeking full Statehood. The move forced even the BJP to back it up publicly with Madan Lal Khurana lending his weight to it.

More reports on Page 11

CrPC to be amended

NEW DELHI, AUG. 11. The Centre today decided to amend the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) to make it obligatory for police to record the statement of a witness before a magistrate and not merely a police officer. The provision for making a statement before a magistrate was to prevent a witness from turning hostile. Once the witness has made a statement, he cannot go back on it and will have to face charges of perjury. — UNI

The GoM on reservation would be headed by the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, and comprise the Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, the Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, the Social Justice Minister, Satyanarayan Jaitya, and the Railway Minister, Nitish Kumar. It would hold consultations with other political parties and discuss the modalities such as whether to set up a Commission to examine the issue, the Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, told presspersons.

Incidentally, the Government's decisions appear to have been driven by the ‘agenda’ set

PM dangles quota carrot

Kicks off BJP's poll drive in Rajasthan

TIMES NEWS NETWORK AND PTI

Jaipur: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Sunday announced that all economically weaker sections, cutting across caste lines, could be in line for job reservations if the opposition cooperated with the government on a constitutional amendment.

Mr Vajpayee offered to introduce a bill to this effect in parliament on Wednesday itself, when the ongoing session of parliament resumes, but only if the Bharatiya Janata Party was assured that other parties, including the Congress, would not be against it.

"If other parties support us, we are ready to introduce a constitutional amendment bill, which requires a two-thirds majority in parliament...but first we should have the confidence that it will not be defeated," he told a rally of about 1 lakh people who had braved a heavy downpour to hear him speak at a public meeting here.

Mr Vajpayee was kicking off the BJP's campaign for the upcoming assembly elections in Rajasthan at the conclusion of the 'parivartan yatra', which deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani had flagged off from Delhi.

Skipping contentious issues like Hindutva and the Ram temple, the PM chose to highlight the reservation issue, which has become sensitive in Rajasthan following the Ashok Gehlot government's decision to provide a



Prime Minister Vajpayee with BJP leader Vasundhara Raje Scindia in Jaipur on Sunday.

quota in government jobs for the economically backward among upper castes.

Mr Vajpayee, who drew applause with almost every sentence, told the crowd that all people were not born equal and that "we have to create a level playing field for them". "Earlier, reservations were only given to SCs/STs, but later on it became known, especially in Rajasthan, that people who were economically poor needed reservations even if they were not socially backward," he said.

The forthcoming assembly elections in the states of Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh are considered especially important, since the results could set a trend that greatly influences next year's general elections.

Not influencing CBI: PM

By Javed M. Ansari

Q. Vajpayee
NEW DELHI, AUG. 5. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today denied the Opposition charge that his Government was trying to influence the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) to "drop" the conspiracy charge against the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, and his other colleagues. "Even though cases in the Ayodhya matter are pending against some of my own colleagues, we have neither withdrawn those cases nor taken steps to interfere with the

407
functioning of the CBI," he said.

Replying to a discussion in the Lok Sabha on the working of the investigative agencies, specially the CBI, Mr. Vajpayee, in his reply, told the Lok Sabha that the Government had done nothing to influence the investigation. The CBI was an autonomous body and "had the full authority to take any decision" with the regard to the investigations in the Ayodhya case.

The Prime Minister said the CBI had the powers to proceed with any case in a manner that it deemed fit. "It is not subject

618
to the control of the Government, and this is also true of the Ayodhya case."

Refuting that the CBI had been "forced to drop the conspiracy charge against Mr. Advani and Murli Manohar Joshi," Mr. Vajpayee said that it was for the CBI to decide how to proceed in the case. "Who is to be prosecuted, and under what section, is for the CBI to decide, the investigative agencies have full independence to proceed in the manner they want, no one can interfere."

See also Page 11

6 AUG 2003

No change in govt stand on Ayodhya, says PM

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Two days after he declared in Ayodhya that the Ram temple would be built at Ram Janmabhoomi sthan and all obstacles removed, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Sunday clarified that the tangle could be resolved either through a court order or by mutual agreement between Hindus and Muslims.



A.B. Vajpayee

"There is no change in the government's stand on the temple issue," Mr Vajpayee told a delegation of Delhi BJP leaders at his residence here on Sunday morning.

The PM's clarification is clearly aimed at defusing the opposition criticism of his remarks and reassuring the NDA allies that there would be no deviation from the coalition's National Agenda of Governance. The opposition was, in fact, planning to launch a personalised attack on the PM for the Ayodhya remarks in Parliament on Monday. The NDA allies like the DMK had

- Tangle could be resolved either through a court order or by mutual agreement
- Vajpayee's remarks are meant to reassure NDA allies that there would be no deviation from the coalition's agenda
- PM says that the other path is that the matter be left to the court and its verdict be acceptable to both sides

publicly disapproved of his remarks and sought a clarification from him.

Seizing the first opportunity to clarify his position, the PM said: "Some criticism is being made on my statement. I want to make it clear that there is no change in our stand. The temple should be built there and we have been saying this but it should be constructed with the cooperation of all."

Speaking to the party delegates, Mr Vajpayee said: "One way to resolve the vexed issue is that the two communities should unite to find a solution." He added: "Efforts are on in this direction and I am confident that they are moving towards success."

The other path, he said, was that the matter be left to the court and its verdict be acceptable to both sides. "There is no other way," Mr Vajpayee said. He said that when he spoke the other day, people thought that the government's stand on the issue had undergone a change. "There is no reason for a change in the stand. Our stand remains the same but in a single speech I cannot say everything," he said.

4 AUG 2003

Advani hints at simultaneous polls 'Hold LS, state polls together'

ALOKE TIKKU
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

ON BOARD THE SPECIAL IAF AIRCRAFT, Aug. 2. — In what appears to be a clear indication that the government could advance Lok Sabha elections to early next year, Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani today said the Cabinet was thinking of synchronising the central polls with that of the states. Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan and Mizoram are scheduled to go to polls by November this year.

In what could also be electorally significant, the Prime Minister today promised at a BJP's Kisan Morcha felicitation "more steps" for the welfare of farmers, saying he is ready for a one-and-a-half fold increase in support prices of pulses and oilseeds if production is hiked.

Mr Advani's remarks are being interpreted an indication of the NDA government's keenness to advance the general elections, scheduled for October next year, to some time in January or February and deferring Assembly elections in the five states by a few months.

The argument for simultaneous polls, Mr Advani said on board his flight to Pune, is that frequent Assembly elections have proved to be a "serious handicap to good governance" and a burden on the exchequer. "These days we are seriously thinking if somehow, either by rescheduling poll time-tables or by some constitutional amendment, the synchronisation of elections can be achieved."

But the ball, he made clear, was in the Congress' court. The government had informally sounded the Election Commission and a "key" NDA ally about this line of thinking. "There's a lot of appreciation ... people generally agree." Asked if the NDA would support the changes required, Mr Advani said despite the number of parties, "if the BJP and Congress agree on major approaches it would be easy to implement".

The Congress had said it does not prefer campaigning during Ramzan. Deferring state elections and advancing Lok Sabha polls would bring about the synchronisation that Mr Advani wants. Andhra Pradesh, where elections are due next year, may also join the list. Mr Chandrababu Naidu reportedly prefers facing the electorate simultaneously with the Centre as it would help the TDP handle, even if partially, the anti-incumbency factor.

To a specific query, Mr Advani said a suitable time to hold synchronised polls would be "the first quarter of the year". This synchronisation existed till 1971, when general elections were de-linked from state polls. Gradually, a situation has arrived when almost every alternate year has become a "mini-general election year", he pointed out.

3 AUG 2003

Govt concedes to discussion on CBI chargesheet

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, July 31. — After another day of disruption at Parliament, the government conceded to the Opposition's demand to discuss the CBI chargesheet in the Babari Masjid demolition case in the Lok Sabha next week. The decision was taken at the business advisory committee of the Lok Sabha presided over by the Speaker and attended by BAC members.

Prof. VK Malhotra, BJP chief whip in the Lok Sabha, first tried to block the proposal arguing that the issue had been discussed in Parliament over and over again, but Mr Shivraj Patil of the Congress reminded him that the Speaker had last week, while rejecting the Opposition's adjournment motion on the subject, said that the CBI charge-sheet issue could be discussed in the House under some other rule. The Speaker then agreed and asked the parliamentary affairs minister, Mrs Sushma Swaraj, to concede to the demand.

Finally it was decided that the issue would be discussed under Rule 193 at 4 p.m. next Tuesday.

The Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day after the Opposition raised a hue and cry over the CBI presentation of the audio and video tapes of 6 December 1992, the day of the Babari Masjid demolition. The tapes submitted to the trial court in Rae Bareilly yesterday, which were also screened for the benefit of the trial judge, did not contain any speeches by Mr LK Advani, Mr MM Joshi and Ms Uma Bharati.

The Opposition charged the government and the CBI with tampering with the evidence. The House was adjourned till 2 p.m. but the Opposition members again raised slogans demanding the arrest of Mr Advani and trooped into the Well of the House. The Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day.

The Congress, at its daily briefing, alleged that "there is a conspiracy to deliberately sabotage" the Babari Masjid demolition case. Congress spokesman Mr Jaipal Reddy also questioned the claim of the BJP that there was no criminal conspiracy case against Mr Advani and other senior leaders in the first charge-sheet filed by the CBI.

It may be noted that the BJP parliamentary board yesterday had rejected the possibility that the Ayodhya case could bring undue pressure on the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr LK Advani. Senior party leaders said the CBI case against Mr Advani and others was rather weak.

BJP president Mr M Venkaiah Naidu asserted today that "Ayodhya is a political movement" and the cases against the BJP leaders were politically motivated as well. "The BJP could have withdrawn the cases but it did not do so as it has faith in law and justice," Mr Naidu said. "The Congress effort to malign the BJP leadership would boomerang." The BJP spokesperson, Mr Vijay Kumar Malhotra, added that the CBI cases were prepared in 1992 when the Congress was in power at the Centre.

George boycott issue: The BAC decided to call a meeting of all floor leaders of the House next week to sort out the issue of Opposition boycott by Mr George Fernandes, and find some way out to let a discussion proposal be accepted on the Tehelka.

1 AUG 2003

End in sight to Fernandes boycott

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, July 24: All indications are that the year-and-a-half Opposition boycott of defence minister George Fernandes could end on Monday after the government conceded its long-pending demand for a discussion on the Tehelka sting operation.

However, the government only went half way to oblige the Opposition: it agreed to have the discussion only in the Rajya Sabha and not the Lok Sabha.

It is reliably learnt that Fernandes has sought time to make his statement on the *fidayeen* attack on the army camp in Jammu — listed on today's agenda of both Houses — on Tuesday because "he wants to add something". Once he makes this statement, the boycott would officially end.

The boycott has been on since October 2001, when Fernandes returned to the cabinet though the Tehelka probe panel had not cleared him. The defence minister had resigned after the sting operation exposed dubious defence deals in March that year.

Parliamentary affairs minister Sushma Swaraj said: "The Opposition wants to have a discussion (on Tehelka) to end the impasse. The government never opposed a discussion, it only had a problem with the language (in which the motion was phrased)."

Swaraj said the upper House would take up for discussion a motion filed by the Congress' chief whip, Suresh Pachauri, under rule 176, which asked about the progress in the Tehelka investigation and why no action has been taken by the government so far against the guilty.

While the Opposition hoped the motion would cover the area of its specific interest — why Fernandes was re-inducted within months of his resignation when the Venkataswami Commission was still probing the Tehelka expose — the BJP was keen to avoid a reference to the Prime Minister's Office.

Swaraj said the Pachauri motion was deemed to be a "no-day-yet motion" — meaning it could be admitted on any date — but if the government agreed, the Rajya Sabha chairperson could bring it on Monday. She said home minister L.K. Advani would reply to the discussion.

The apparent thaw on both sides was believed to be the result of the efforts of Rajya Sabha chairperson Bhatron Singh Shekhawat and Lok Sabha Speaker Manohar Joshi, who informally met leaders of various parties in both Houses.

It was learnt that while the Congress, the Left and the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) were willing to resolve the impasse in this session, the Samajwadi Party and the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) were not. "Therefore, the leaders were approached separately," political sources said.

Congress sources said the party had an "open mind" and had weighed the use of the boycott against the realisation that critical defence issues — the MiG crashes, the Kargil coffin scam and the *fidayeen* attack — were getting swept under the carpet because the Opposition was unwilling to hear out Fernandes.

"We will be able to lift the boycott of Fernandes provided there is an opportunity to have a full-fledged debate on Tehelka," Congress spokesperson Jaipal Reddy said, adds PTI. Reddy said talks were on with the government and the Speaker.

Part of the Opposition's softening had to do with the government's insistence that on defence issues, only Fernandes would reply. "We are clear that it is improper for someone else to reply," government sources said.

At a dinner hosted last night by Shekhawat for Rajya Sabha MPs, BJP sources said the Prime Minister shared his concern about the Opposition boycott of Fernandes with the deputy Prime Minister. At that point, Shekhawat informed him that eff-



George Fernandes arrives at Parliament on Thursday. (PTI)

George to fly past fear

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, July 24: He has sailed in a submarine, braved the icy winds of Siachen and flew in a Sukhoi. Now he's ready for the ultimate take-off — on the "flying coffin".

With pressure mounting on the government in the wake of frequent fighter jet crashes, defence minister George Fernandes tried to allay fears about the MiG-21 when he told Parliament he would fly on the twin-seater at the earliest opportunity.

Fernandes said he would have flown in a MiG-21 — dubbed as the "flying coffin" because of the plane's highest casualty rate in the air force — even before he flew in the multi-role Sukhoi recently. "I had raised the matter with the air chief and a date was fixed, but the flight could not materialise because of some engagements," he told the Lok Sabha today during question hour.

The minister was responding to a query from National Conference leader Omar Abdullah, who had described his flight on a Sukhoi as a "safer option" and asked him to fly MiG-21s. "I want to assure my young colleague that I will take the flight at the earliest opportunity. It will be in a MiG-21."

Abdullah also asked him to take a few of his MP colleagues along with him, but Fernandes said this may not be possible as there would be only a pilot and a "passive pilot" and no passenger. The minister said the government may be close to finalising a deal for third generation advanced jet trainers for the air force.

His ministry's proposal on the purchase of British Hawk AJTs was awaiting the Prime Minister's clearance, he added.

This morning, when the Opposition walked out of the Lok Sabha as Fernandes stood to reply, the Speaker said: "I once again appeal to the leaders of the (Opposition) parties that in the interest of decorum of the House, this issue be closed... I am hopeful that the issue will be closed next week and wisdom will prevail."

The question on fighter-jet crashes was listed on the request

of the Congress' V.M. Sudheeran and the BJP's G.J. Javaya. But when the time came to ask the question, Sudheeran refused to do so.

Javaya, however, went ahead with the question, prompting Fernandes to answer. The resultant walkout pushed the Telugu Desam Party's Yerran Naidu to draw the Speaker's attention to the boycott.

ports were afoot at his end to solve the imbroglio.

The government's refusal to hold a Tehelka discussion in the Lok Sabha could be a sticking point with the Opposition.

But influential sections of the government were reportedly keen to give in to the Opposition on this demand as well so that both Houses could function smoothly for the rest of the session.

The question on fighter-jet crashes was listed on the request

3

Walkout over 'misuse' of CBI

By Our New Delhi Bureau

NEW DELHI, JULY 23. The Opposition today staged a walkout in both the Houses of Parliament protesting the alleged misuse of the Central Bureau of Investigation to exonerate the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, and others from charges of conspiring to demolish the Babri Masjid.

Replying to a short-duration discussion in the Rajya Sabha as well as in the Lok Sabha, the Union Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, accused the Opposition of trying to create an environment "prejudicial to the holding of a fair trial in the Ayodhya case". There was an attempt to subsume the chargesheet of the

case involving Mr. Advani and others into the larger chargesheet at a Lucknow court, he said.

As the State was then under President's rule, the Adviser to the Governor had given detailed reasons in September 1993 that the two chargesheets could not be clubbed because the accusations were different.

It was for the court to decide under the due process of law if any charge was made out or not or if any other charge could also be levelled based on the evidence presented before it. "Whether Section 120-B is warranted or not, the CBI can state in the chargesheet. It is still for the court to decide," he said.

The Shiv Sena's Sanjay Nirupam said there was no question

of criminal conspiracy in the case.

While V.V. Raghavan (CPI) said that recent events raised doubts over the CBI's independent functioning, Kuldip Nayar (Nominated) said that over the years it had become a mere "rubber stamp" of the Government in power at the Centre.

The Information and Broadcasting Minister, Ravi Shankar Prasad, termed as "absurd" allegations that the Vajpayee Government was influencing the CBI. "We have been in Government for the past five years. We could have withdrawn the cases but did not do so because we wanted a fair trial," he said.

Nilotpal Basu of the CPI(M)

took exception to the absence of the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, during the discussion and said he must tell the nation why after filing the conspiracy charge, the CBI now felt there was no conspiracy.

Kapil Sibal (Cong.) wanted the Government to consider setting up an independent office of prosecutor to avoid allegations by whichever party happened to be in the Opposition. "The rule of law is being besmirched by the foul hands of the executive," he observed.

Speaker disallows Opposition move

In the Lok Sabha, the Speaker, Manohar Joshi, disallowed an Opposition-sponsored adjournment motion seeking to censure the Government on the same issue. The Opposition walked out in protest, accusing the Government of misleading the House.

Mr. Joshi said the discussion was being disallowed because if it "takes place by way of an adjournment motion, culminating in a decision, the possibility of the court being influenced cannot be ruled out". But he was prepared to allow a short duration discussion, as it would not entail a decision from the House.

Earlier in the day, the Lok Sabha witnessed an animated discussion on the admissibility of the Opposition-sponsored motion. Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M), Priyaranjan Dasgupta (Cong.), Ramvilas Paswan (Lok Janshakti Party), Raghuvansh Prasad (RJD) and Ramjilal Suman (SP) argued in favour of the motion being admitted.

The Opposition asked the Government to clarify whether the CBI had ever asked for the inclusion of Section 120-B against Mr. Advani and others. "How was the conspiracy charge omitted, who is in charge of the CBI," they asked.

Verdict An Embarrassment For Parivar, Muslim Board Happy SC rejects govt plea to lift stay on 'undisputed' land

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 31 MARCH

THE Sangh Parivar's Ram temple campaign, on Monday, suffered a severe setback with the Supreme Court turning down the VHP-inspired plea of the Centre to allow religious activities at the undisputed site in Ayodhya.

The verdict comes as a major embarrassment to the Vajpayee government, which had said the court's ban on religious activities at the undisputed area was out of step with the spirit of the 1994 order of the Supreme Court. The government took the matter to a larger bench contending that a two-judge bench of the apex court had misinterpreted the 1994 verdict when it clamped the ban in February last year in the wake of the VHP's threat to take matters into its hands.

To that extent, the verdict will have the effect of legalising what the government considered to be a misinterpretation of law and extinguished all hopes of the VHP getting to construction at the undisputed site before the Allahabad High Court decided the title suit. On Monday, the five-judge Constitution Bench, comprising Justice S. Rajender Babu, Justice S.S.M. Quadri, Justice M.B. Shah, Justice N. Santosh Heg-de and Justice Doraiswamy Raju was unanimous on the need to maintain status quo at the acquired land till the Allahabad High Court disposed of the title suits.

"We are of the opinion that the Supreme Court's March 13-14, 2002 order should be operative till Allahabad High Court disposed of the title suits," the bench said. "This is not only to maintain communal harmony but also to fulfil other obligations," it said.

Currently, the Allahabad High Court is hearing rival suites claiming ownership of the 2.77 acres of disputed land and has ordered excavation by the Archaeological Survey of India to determine whether a temple existed beneath the demolished disputed structure.

The NDA government had contended that as per the 1994 order of the Supreme Court, the Centre was free to hand over the manage-



DIVINE BATTLES

ment of the undisputed land to a trust or a registered body after making adequate provisions for access to the disputed site. However, all Muslim bodies — All India Muslim Personal Law Board, Babri Masjid Action Committee and Babri Masjid Movement Co-ordination Committee — had opposed the Centre's application saying it has not pointed out any change in the ground situation at Ayodhya to seek alteration in last year's status quo order.

Meanwhile, the RSS acknowledged that the Supreme Court's rejection of the Centre's plea for lifting the freeze on the transfer of undisputed land to the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas was a setback to the efforts to resolve the temple issue. "We respect the judgement but we are disappointed. The undisputed and disputed land should have been treated as two separate issues and a decision should have been taken on the undisputed land. It appears the court thought otherwise," RSS spokesman Ram Madhav said.

He said the organisation will ask the government to explore other options for settling the issue. "The government should explore other options like mobilising support of the political parties and trying to arrive at some kind of amicable solution. It should use its legislative powers after securing the support of all political parties," Mr Madhav said.

Sangh circles unhappy at court ruling

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 31 MARCH

THE Supreme Court's order rejecting the Centre's plea for allowing worship on the undisputed land at Ayodhya evoked predictable reactions. While the Opposition parties, the various Muslim organisations and even a section of the BJP's allies welcomed the verdict, a pall of gloom enveloped the Sangh circles. Though the BJP tried to mask its despondency by reiterating its resolve to respect the judiciary, there was disappointment that the court had failed to correct what the party sincerely believed to be a mistake "by treating the undisputed land as disputed." There was also a realisation in the party that Monday's development could again goad the VHP to take to the streets with temple cries, but blamed the temple activists for prejudicing the court's mind by their beligerent and provocative statements.

The BJP's and, by extension, the government's fears appeared to be coming true with the VHP threatening "direct action" for the temple construction and said the apex court verdict disallowing religious activity on the undisputed land in Ayodhya had "shut down any scope for compromise on the issue."

"We should have got the undisputed land so that we could begin construction of the temple. Now it will be direct action and we will not rest till we get the whole plot, including the disputed land," VHP international working president Ashok Singhal told reporters here this afternoon.

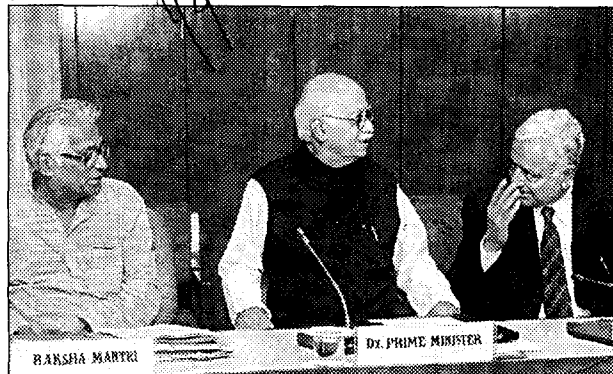
But the Opposition felt the apex court's ruling had vindicated their stand by handing out a severe snub to the Vajpayee government for its attempts to facilitate temple construction "through the back door."

Govt gives Mufti pat on the back

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 31 MARCH

JUST when the BJP is sharpening its attack on the Congress-PDP coalition government for being "soft" on terror, the Centre has gone on record for its appreciation of chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed's efforts to reach out to the people.

The appreciation which contrasted sharply with the BJP's campaign against the coalition government came at a high-level meeting convened here on Monday to take stock of the security scenario in the terror-ridden border state. "The changed atmosphere amongst the people of J&K following the conduct of free and fair elections was noted as were the recent efforts of the present



SINK DIFFERENCES: Deputy prime minister L.K. Advani (centre) with defence minister George Fernandes (left) and Jammu & Kashmir chief minister Mufti Mohammed Sayeed (right) in New Delhi on Monday — AFP

state government at providing better governance and at winning the hearts of the people,"

said a release issued by the ministry, summing up the proceedings.

Those who participated in the meeting included deputy prime minister L.K. Advani, defence minister George Fernandes, J&K governor Girish Chandra Saxena, chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, the chief of Army staff, Union secretaries of home and defence, representatives of intelligence agencies as well as senior officials drawn from the Union ministries concerned as well as the state government.

The meeting saw the J&K police chief confirming that the gruesome massacre of Kashmiri Pandits on Monday last was carried out in collusion with the local police personnel.

This was disclosed here on Monday by Union home secretary N. Gopalswamy, giving a new twist to the incident.

National Parties Prepare For Another Round Of Political Slugfest Today

CBI clean chit to Advani rocks House

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 21 JULY

THE monsoon session of Parliament got off to a predictable start. The Lok Sabha was adjourned for the day without any business being transacted as the Vajpayee government stonewalled the Opposition's efforts to move an adjournment motion against the CBI's alleged move to drop charges of criminal conspiracy against Union ministers L.K. Advani, Murli Manohar Joshi and six others in the Babri Masjid demolition case.

In keeping with the strategy worked out at Congress president Sonia Gandhi's residence on Sunday night, the entire Opposition was up on its feet as soon as the House assembled for the day. They trained their guns directly on Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, alleging that he had pressured the CBI into dropping conspiracy charges against Mr Advani and seven other senior leaders of the Sangh Parivar.

They demanded that the Question Hour be suspended, and urged Speaker Manohar Joshi to take up their adjournment motion. With the Speaker refusing to yield, the Opposition trooped into the Well of the House, chanting slogans against the Centre and demanding that the two union ministers be dropped.

With the House unable to transact any business in the din that ensued, the Speaker was left with no choice but to give his ruling on the issue. Quoting from a letter written to him by Union law minister Arun Jaitley in response to the notices of adjournment motion, Mr Joshi said: "Besides dealing with a subject matter which is sub-judice, the CBI has not diluted any case, dropped any charge against any accused person. Section 120-B was never a charge in the Rae Bareilly charge-sheet, and the question of dropping it does not arise."

The Speaker then went on to observe that since the matter had not been dropped by the government, the information with the members was not correct. "Therefore, I do not agree to suspend the Question Hour," he said, amidst vociferous protests from the Op-



FAMILY AFFAIR: Parliamentary affairs minister Sushma Swaraj presents a bouquet to Prime Minister Vajpayee in New Delhi on Monday. — AFP

position. As the House continued to witness uproarious scenes, the presiding officer first adjourned the House for two hours and then for the day after a repetition of the scenes in the post-lunch session.

The government clearly is no mood to oblige the Opposition by agreeing to its demand and has, it appears, decided to brazen it out. It fielded Mr Jaitley at the BJP briefing later in the day to project its side of the story. "A matter which is sub-judice cannot be debated in Parliament," he argued, adding, "Our friends in the Opposition have moved their adjournment motion without going into the facts. We believe that the CBI works independently. It is actually the Congress which has to answer why Section 120 (B) was not added in February 1993."

Asserting that there had been no interference by the Centre or dropping of any charges by the CBI, the Union law minister, while presenting a brief history about the case, said an FIR (198/92) against Mr Advani and seven others was registered at Lalitpur soon after the demolition of the Babri Masjid.

A chargesheet was, subsequently, filed by the CBI on February 27 next year at Rae Bareilly. The government at the Centre then was led by Mr P.V. Narasimha Rao and Uttar

Pradesh was under President's rule. "There was no charge of criminal conspiracy in this chargesheet. On March 1, the special judge took cognizance of this," he pointed out.

In between, Mr Jaitley said, this chargesheet was transferred to Lucknow without the consent of the Allahabad High Court and merged with a chargesheet that had been filed at the special court there against 41 other accused persons. On February 12, 2001, on a subsequent revision petition, the Allahabad High Court, in its ruling, said the transfer of the chargesheet was "void and bad in law" and sent it back to the Rae Bareilly court for further proceedings. The CBI, the Union minister said, in May this year revived the original chargesheet of February 27, 1993, under which Mr Advani and others had not been charged with complicity in any criminal conspiracy.

"In short, on the basis of the evidence and the chargesheet which is continuing in Rae Bareilly, we can say that there has been no such addition or deletion. The factual premise that charges have been dropped is erroneous," he asserted.

But the Opposition has decided to press on with the motion, if only with a different set of wording on Tuesday.

Cong accuses PM of 'misusing' CBI

New Delhi
21 JULY

CONGRESS, on Monday, accused Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee of "misusing" CBI to drop the charge of "criminal conspiracy" against deputy prime minister L.K. Advani, human resource development minister Murli Manohar Joshi and some others in the Babri Masjid demolition case. It also sought an "adequate and convincing" reply from him on the issue.

"All was done by the BJP-led coalition government. The Prime Minister must be held responsible for all these. We, therefore, want the government to come forward with an adequate gesture. The Prime Minister should offer a convincing reply in the Parliament and to the nation," party spokesman S. Jaipal Reddy told reporters.

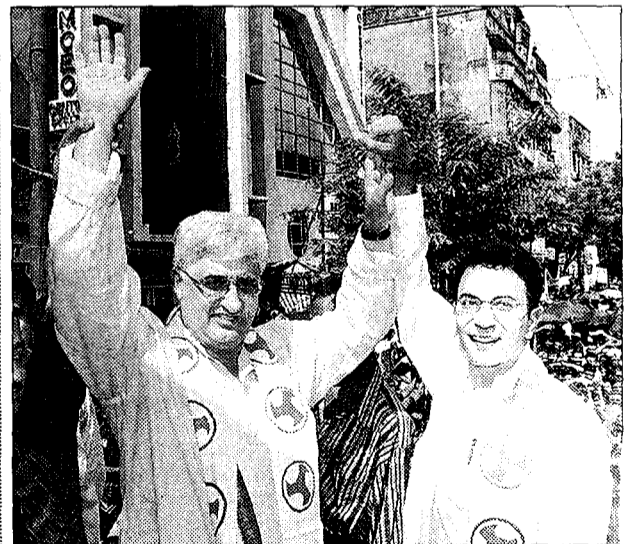
Demanding dismissal of Mr Advani and Mr Joshi, he said the Congress has been arguing for the last five years that continuation of Mr Advani, Mr Joshi and

others in the government, in the face of chargesheet filed by CBI, will not be only "detrimental to the norms of public charge but would eventually be detrimental to justice itself."

"Our fears have been abundantly proved as the CBI dropped charges against Mr Advani, Mr Joshi and their ilk," he said, adding that any amount of explanation will not wash the face of evidence collected "sedulously."

Refuting the BJP's and government's explanation that Section 120 (B) (conspiracy) was not mentioned in the CBI chargesheet, the party spokesman said the agency had filed two chargesheets — one in 1993 and the other in 1997 and the latter one did mention it.

"The chargesheet filed by CBI contained in it remains which showed how Mr Advani and others were involved in the demolition. How they made inflammatory speeches. How they conspired from the residence of party leader Vinay Katiyar in Ayodhya," he said. — PTI



YOUTH POWER: Congress leader Salman Khurshid (L) and Youth Congress general secretary Jitin Prasad attend a rally in the city on Monday. — Mona Chowdhury

22 JUL 2003

PM massages VHP, but sticks to talks

Atal balances on temple trapeze

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

9-20-03 9:11 20/7

Raipur, July 19: Hours after the BJP national executive passed its resolution on Ayodhya, which was high on tokenism and low on promises, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee asked the Vishwa Hindu Parishad to end its slanging match with his party.

Vajpayee said he would welcome "constructive" suggestions from the VHP and held out an olive branch. "It is nobody's intention to humiliate the VHP by keeping it out of any negotiation that could lead to a solution," he said.

But this sop was followed by the assertion that on Ayodhya, he would do what he thought was "right" and would not compromise. "*Phir bhi jo sahi samajhte hain, vah karte rahenge, us se peechhe hatenge nahin* (Even so, whatever we think is right, we will keep doing that and we will not budge from that)," he was quoted as saying in a press hand-out of his address.

The "right" direction, Vajpayee indicated, was a negotiated settlement. "We passed a resolution on Shri Ramjanmabhoomi. It would be nice if a temple was built on Ram's birthplace. We wish that this issue is resolved in a spirit of communal harmony. In this endeavour, negotiation is the most important path to take and we will continue walking on that path."



Vajpayee in Raipur. (PTI)

Gently rebuking the VHP, the Prime Minister said nobody wanted to "humiliate" it by keeping it out of the Ayodhya talks. "There is a chance that differences can arise. But we should not allow allegations and counter-allegations to be levelled. We are always open to constructive suggestions. But by making unnecessary allegations, the whole atmosphere gets vitiated."

Vajpayee's submissions on Ayodhya — his first after the Kanchni Sankaracharya embarked on the latest round of talks with the All India Muslim Personal Law Board — indicated that like his party, he was forced to walk a tightrope between keeping the RSS in good humour and not allowing it and the VHP to dominate the Ayodhya agenda.

In the Ayodhya resolution passed by the BJP, the party said the legislation option should be explored but added that this would be "fruitful" only if the NDA allies and the Opposition supported the move.

The Prime Minister underlined the importance of keeping the NDA intact before the next Lok Sabha polls and asked the BJP to induct those parties that wished to join the coalition. "Making the NDA and sustaining it has been a unique experiment.... New people are willing to join the coalition, they must be brought in."

At the same time, Vajpayee stressed the importance of making the BJP stronger and, from that perspective, the Raipur meeting was significant.

That elections were on the Prime Minister's mind was evident in his call to imbue the country's economy with a "human face". He packaged his government's economic achievements in a swadeshi wrapping.

Referring to the economic resolution adopted by the executive, Vajpayee said: "Our economy is polevaulting ahead. There is progress on the development index. Those living below the poverty line are fewer in number. New enterprises are coming up in hitherto unexplored sectors. Employment opportunities are growing. In one sense, the objective of swadeshi order has been successfully met."

■ See Page 6

No troops for US, wait for UN

PRANAY SHARMA

New Delhi, July 14: After three months of thought, India today shut the door on America's request for troops to Iraq, but left a window open saying it would still consider sending them if there was an "explicit mandate" from the UN.

The Cabinet Committee on Security chaired by the Prime Minister did not come out with a categorical 'no' to the US request this afternoon. But it preferred to walk the tightrope than despatch troops solely on the request of President George W. Bush.

If the US was disappointed by the decision, it tried not to show it. "Our position has been clear on this. While we had hoped India would take a different decision, the transformation of US-India relations will continue as before," a spokesman for the US embassy in Delhi said. "India remains an important strategic partner for the US."

Rising opposition from the Congress and some of its own allies, including the Samata Party, appears to have spurred the government's decision. Besides, polls to five assemblies are scheduled for the year-end and there is speculation that next year's general elections could be advanced if the BJP fares well in the states.

The Indian stand has left room for the conclusion that Delhi might have second thoughts if the Iraqi people make a request. But sources said even this would have to be accompanied by a UN Security Council resolution authorising a "stabilisation force", along the lines of what happened in Afghanistan.

"India remains ready to re-

BETTER TO STAY AWAY FROM THIS MESS



A US soldier takes position on the roof of a building during a protest in Baghdad by Iraqi soldiers loyal to Saddam Hussein. Around 300 soldiers and officers took part in the standoff on Monday, demanding payment of their first salaries in four months. (AFP)

spond to the urgent needs of the Iraqi people for stability, security, political progress and economic reconstruction," Yashwant Sinha told reporters outside the Prime Minister's Race Course Road residence.

The foreign minister said the Centre had carefully weighed the pros and cons. "Our longer-term national interest, our concern for the people of Iraq, our long-standing ties with the Gulf region as a whole as well as our growing dia-

logue and strengthened ties with the US have been key elements in this consideration," he read out from a statement.

Although India has ruled out troops, it is ready to contribute to the restoration of infrastructure as well as medical, health, educational, communication and other civilian needs of the Iraqis, Sinha said.

"As a concrete gesture of our support to the Iraqi people, we are already planning to set up jointly with Jordan a

hospital in Najaf."

The question of sending troops to Iraq has been a tricky one for the government since it was first put forward nearly three months ago. Over the weeks, deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, defence minister George Fernandes and national security adviser Brajesh Mishra are all reported to have changed their stand from supporting the move to opposing it.

In most of the meetings, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vaj-

payee did not air his views. But there were clear indications that he was in no mood to rush into anything. Foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal has always been against sending troops.

Sinha was non-committal most of the time. Finance minister Jaswant Singh was said to be the only person boldly pushing the move.

The argument in support of sending troops stressed that it would help India establish itself as a key power beyond

TOO MANY ODDS

- Without UN mandate India will be seen as doing US bidding: Not a palatable thought at any time, poison in an election year
- Strong political opposition, from Congress as well as allies: Samata Party passed a resolution on Sunday
- Even BJP is divided and RSS opposed to the idea: Talk of an Iraq-Ayodhya deal with Sangh
- Doubts about role of Indian troops: Will they end up shooting Iraqis?
- Fear of hostile reaction at home if Indian soldiers die on duty in Iraq: Given the daily US casualties, chances are high
- Public opinion in US and UK turning against governments: They find it hard to justify war, what will Delhi say?
- Troops option is not closed though: If UN asks for India's help, it'll be easy to agree
- US understands: That's why mild reaction to Monday's decision

South Asia and bring it closer to the Americans. The case against centred on the adverse reaction it could arouse at home if India were to commit its troops without a proper mandate.

There were fears that Indian troops killing Iraqis and getting killed in Iraq under US command would give a strong political handle to the government's detractors ahead of the Assembly elections.

■ See Page 4

Nitish quits, Vajpayee ^{Q. Vaj} says stay on ^{15/7}

Rajnish Sharma ^{HPI}
New Delhi, July 14

NITISH KUMAR resigned as railway minister on Monday — not because of the spate of train accidents but because of problems within his own party. The Prime Minister has rejected his resignation.

Nitish decided to quit after being lambasted at the Samata Party's national council earlier in the day. As Samata president George Fernandes looked on, MPs Prabhunath Singh, Renu Kumari and Arun Kumar attacked Nitish for refusing to let two expelled MPs back into the party. The rebel MPs, Raghunath Jha and Brahmanand Mandal, had been very critical of Nitish: Mandal had even accused him of graft.

Nitish was tightlipped over whether he would take back his resignation.

PM will lead BJP's victory march: Advani

Party slams Pawar's Sonia stand

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Nagpur: Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani asserted on Sunday that the Bharatiya Janata Party would retain power at the Centre in the next elections and Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee would "continue to lead the party and the country for many more years". Mr Advani repeated his remarks in all his three public speeches during his day-long visit, effectively burying the recent controversy over who would lead the BJP in next year's general elections.

At one of these functions, BJP general secretary Pramod Mahajan lambasted the leaders of the National Congress Party for showing willingness to strike an alliance with the Congress.

Hitting out at Sharad Pawar, Mr Mahajan said the Maratha strongman had formed his party in 1999 solely on the issue of Sonia Gandhi's foreign nationality and wondered why the NCP had not thought of 'stopping communal parties' at that time.

If the NCP was ready to give up the contentious issue of Ms Gandhi's foreign origin, he said, Mr Pawar should first resign from the Lok Sabha and the NCP should step down from the ruling DF coalition in Maharashtra.

At a function to mark the inauguration of the Nagpur Union of Working Journalists' new building, Mr Advani pointed out that from 1988 to 1998, the country had had seven prime ministers. Mr Vajpayee had become the first non-Congress PM to complete a term. "What's

more, he did this as the head of a 24-party coalition. I am confident that we will win the next elections and Mr Vajpayee will remain PM for many more years," he said.

Addressing a meeting of erstwhile Jan Sangh associates and senior members of the RSS and the party, Mr Advani recalled his association with the RSS since 1941, and said it was a tribute to K.B. Hedgewar, who founded the organisation in 1925, that a 'swayamsewak' was the country's prime minister. In the afternoon, Mr Advani visited the RSS headquarters at Rashimbagh, where Hedgewar's memorial stands.

Later in the evening, addressing a joint convention of Shiv Sena and BJP workers from eastern Vidarbha, Mr Advani again reiterated the hope that Mr Vaj-

payee would "lead us for many more years after winning the Lok Sabha elections".

BJP president Venkaiah Naidu's 'loah purush' appellation for Mr Advani some time ago had lead to speculation that the deputy PM would be the party's next prime ministerial candidate. At the conclave, Sena president Uddhav Thackeray exhorted his party activists to work shoulder-to-shoulder with the BJP. Attacking the Congress and its plan to project Ms Gandhi as a prime ministerial candidate, Mr Thackeray asked Sainiks to ensure that "the tricolour does not go into the hands of a person of foreign origin".

The two parties have decided to fight the next assembly polls in Maharashtra and the Lok Sabha elections on a joint manifesto and a common campaign.

Yes, Prime Minister



A.B. Vajpayee



L.K. Advani

RSS rejects VHP demand for Vajpayee's resignation

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 4 JULY

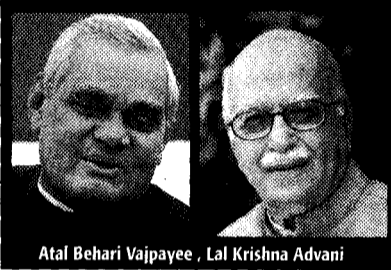
A bellicose VHP on Friday got a rap on its knuckles when the family elder, the RSS, rebuffed its demand for the resignation of the Vajpayee government for its "failure to bring a legislation for temple construction at Ayodhya."

In a public disapproval of the VHP leadership's attack on Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee and deputy prime minister L.K. Advani, the RSS said it appreciated the fact that the government had a limited manoeuvring space in Ayodhya.

"There is no question of feeling let down by the government as we understand difficulties of a coalition government, which is bound by a different agenda from that of the BJP," RSS spokesman Ram Madhav told reporters in Kanyakumari. In his interaction with the media, the RSS spokesman also made it clear that his organisation has no intention to intervene in the affairs of the government.

"Who should be the Prime Minister is

LEADING MEN: BACK IN CONTROL



Atal Behari Vajpayee, Lal Krishna Advani

not to be decided by the RSS. We respect the authority of the BJP to decide on such things," Mr Madhav said. The RSS' statement should soothe the frayed nerves of the government leaders, who are uncomfortable with the unilateral aggression of the VHP hot heads.

This is sure to be seen as a sign of the saffron elders' unhappiness with the VHP's attempts to re-arrange the equations within the Sangh Parivar. In any case, the BJP has been maintaining that the VHP was trying to exercise an influence disproportionate

to its actual strength and clout within the parivar.

The RSS intervention was not unexpected as the VHP-BJP feud has assumed civil war proportions. Angered by the persistent attacks on its leaders, the BJP had on Thursday hit back at the VHP and made it clear that government's governance impulses and not the protest movement's agenda would dictate the prescriptions of the Ayodhya settlement.

BJP general secretary Pramod Mahajan also criticised the VHP's demand for the resignation of the Prime Minister and his deputy. "The VHP appears to favour a Rome rajya over Ram rajya," he said.

The BJP leader also said it will not like to impose its temple agenda on its allies. "We do not have a majority in Parliament.

The Prime Minister and the deputy prime minister came to power on the solemn promise of the 'national agenda of governance', which only talks of the resolution of Ram temple issue through mutual negotiation or a court verdict and not legislation," he said.

Review

Early bird

31-8
18/6

Foreign policy is not the worm

That the BJP is musing about early elections is not surprising. Thoughts of all ruling parties stray that way as they approach the end of term. It is interesting that the Prime Minister is reportedly not keen on elections in February 2004, the date generally preferred by BJP leaders. If Atal Behari Vajpayee is actually reluctant it stands to reason that he thinks the months between February and October 2004, by which time elections must be held, will add some value to his premiership and his government's record. Second guessing a shrewd politician like him is hazardous but some aspects can be ruled out, miracles apart, as likely inspiration. Economic policy is one. Of big ticket reforms, labour laws and privatisation are officially on the agenda. Labour law is still a holy cow. Disinvestment may have received a boost from the initial Maruti public offering. But if the oil PSUs, HPCL and BPCL, are put on the block again, government should expect another bruising battle. Arun Shourie may be game for it. Almost no one else is. River interlinking is a big Vajpayee policy. But the PM cannot be expecting the project to yield dividends any time soon. In fact, the first couple of years may be spent, as elsewhere, in fighting state governments, green groups and political egos. The project may in fact create political problems for the BJP itself, if state satraps feel hard done. There are any number of social welfare and infrastructure schemes being "run" by the Centre; many bearing the PM's name. But Vajpayee would know that few are running well; the roads project, for example, would benefit the party whether in February or October 2004. As for those being executed in classic administrative style, they cannot be refashioned in six months.

Ruling all these possibilities out leaves one — if Vajpayee is not keen to hold elections in February it may be if he thinks his Pakistan peace effort may yield some dividend by October. Although both sides of the subcontinent have said that any negotiation will be painfully time consuming, one never knows if there's a plan up someone's sleeve. Supposing that summer 2004 does see a dramatic and even diplomatically successful Indo-Pak initiative. Does that mean Vajpayee would be tactically right in not holding elections in February? Perhaps. On the other hand, translating foreign policy successes into votes is a notoriously slippery business, more so in India where elections are fought mostly on core, bread and butter issues. If there are political indications that early elections will be better for the BJP, and even if foreign policy looks promising, the Prime Minister should opt for advancing people's examination of his government. Foreign policy is not likely to be the most important paper he takes.

Atal and seer stuck in Ayodhya divide

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, June 9: The Prime Minister's and the Kanchi Sankaracharya's proposed solutions to the Ayodhya dispute have come under fire from both Hindu and Muslim organisations.

Unlike Muslim organisations that stuck to a court verdict as the only solution, the Vishwa Hindu Parishad rejected Atal Bihari Vajpayee's proposal of a negotiated settlement or a court verdict — or both — in favour of a Central law.

VHP working president Ashok Singhal said in Ayodhya: "If political parties are keen to solve this issue, they should enact a law in favour of Ram temple construction. At this juncture, this seems to be the only plausible solution."

Vajpayee had yesterday said at the Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam's golden jubilee celebrations here that a solution was likely only when the controversy was

freed from politics, without counting gains or losses.

The Centre, which had reposed faith in the Sankaracharya's mediatory skills, distanced itself from the seer's claims after facing heat from outfits that mattered in the temple movement.

Minister of state for home Swami Chinmayanand, a former VHP member, said the Sankaracharya's views were his own and the Centre had nothing to do with his initiative.

At the programme yesterday, Swami Jayendra Saraswati had claimed that Hindu and Muslim leaders were working out a joint appeal to be unveiled next month.

Muslim leaders, he said, were ready to hand over the disputed site to Hindu religious leaders, not political outfits, in exchange for 100 mosques now under the charge of the Archaeo-

logical Survey of India.

VHP's vice-president Acharya Giriraj Kishore ridiculed the suggestion, saying "the Kanchi seer's proposal to allow Muslims to hold prayers in 100 mosques protected by the ASI in lieu of Ayodhya settlement is totally unacceptable".

Taking a dig at the Sankaracharya's comment against political outfits, Kishore sought clarification on the status of members of Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas such as Mahant Ramchandradas Paramhans and Nriya Gopal Das. "Both are revered religious leaders. Let them (Muslims) hand over the land to these leaders," Kishore said.

Like the All India Muslim Personal Law Board and the All India Muslim Majhlis-e-Mushawarat, the VHP, too, wondered which organisa-

tions and leaders the seer was speaking to for the joint appeal.

"I can say that he (the Sankaracharya) is not holding talks with any responsible or authorised organisation or individual," Majhlis-e-Mushawarat chief Syed Shahabuddin said.

"Whether a temple should be built at the site or a mosque can be decided only by the Supreme Court as the title suit is being heard by it. Muslims have already declared that they would accept the court verdict even if it went against them."

While the board rejected the Sankaracharya as a mediator and slammed the door on a negotiated settlement, VHP sources said in private that the seer should leave the Ayodhya solution to the political establishment.

The Congress preferred a court verdict as the final solution, though the BJP — according to party chief M. Venkaiah Naidu in Chennai — decided to stick to Vajpayee's proposal.

■ See Page 6

QUOTE

We will get the people's mandate once again and Vajpayee will continue to rule India for years

L.K. ADVANI

Vajpayee keen on Ayodhya solution before LS polls

By Smita Gupta
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Vajpayee government is making a final bid for a solution to Ayodhya with the help of the Shankaracharya of Kanchi, Jayendra Saraswati, which it hopes will lead to a parliamentary resolution before the general elections of 2004, highly placed sources said on Thursday.

The government does not plan any legislation, as has been suggested by the RSS and the VHP. Instead, it wants the solution to come through a private member's resolution—not a government-sponsored one—which will be moved only after the assembly elections later this year.

Like the Kashmir issue, the PM, the sources said, was keen on a settlement of Ayodhya during his current tenure.

The Shankaracharya's efforts may have been cold-shouldered by the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board, but they have found support from two religious leaders, Lucknow's Maulana Kalbe Sadiq and Nagpur's Maulana Abdul Pariq. On the Hindu front, BJP sources said there were efforts to divide the VHP and get the Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas on board.

The reason for the effort to sideline the VHP, sources added, was that its chief Ashok Singhal had insisted that the proposed parliamentary resolution should be a government-sponsored one. The BJP leadership would prefer it be a private member's resolution, so that if it fails, it will not affect it that much.

The formula, the sources said, en-

'Demolition was an unplanned act'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Centre's counsel asserted before the Liberhan Ayodhya Commission on Thursday that the demolition of Babri masjid on December 6, 1992, was an "unplanned act".

The Centre's counsel, Lala Ram Gupta, said there was no proof that the demolition was an act of conspiracy. He pointed out that the white papers issued by the Centre and the BJP on Ayodhya had called the demolition a sudden act.

Mr Gupta also told the commission that not only was it difficult to put the blame on any single organisation for the demolition, it was also outside the commission's purview to inquire into the relationship between different outfits, including the VHP, the RSS, the Bajrang Dal and the BJP. "The relationship issue is irrelevant to the commission," Mr Gupta said.

visages an agreement on a Ram temple at the disputed site in Ayodhya, a mosque within a ten km radius, Hindu organisations renouncing claims to Kashi, Mathura or any other site, and several defunct mosques currently under the care of the ASI being thrown open for worship. The success of the formula, the sources said, would be contingent on Congress support.

No US pressure over Iraq troops: Advani

S. Rajagopalan
Washington, June 11

DEPUTY PRIME Minister L.K. Advani has denied any American pressure on India to deploy troops for stabilisation of Iraq and said New Delhi will take an appropriate decision on this matter "after taking all aspects into account".

The Centre will hear the Pentagon team being dispatched by George Bush next week, but thereafter it is free to take any decision that is deemed fit, he told reporters at a news conference here.

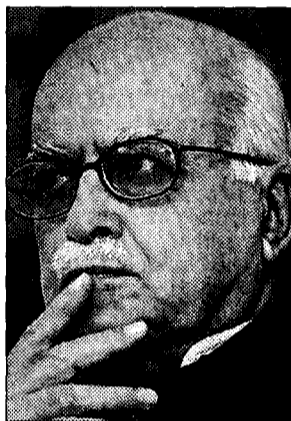
"I can only say the Bush government was keen that India participate in this process... and the reasons are understandable. But I did

not see pressure of any kind," Advani said.

He, however, said there need be no surprise about the US decision to send a team to New Delhi. India has been wanting clarifications on several points, which only an American team can provide. So what has happened is "a natural corollary".

While declining to spell out the parameters for an Indian decision, Advani said the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS) has kept the issue open until after it gets responses from the US side to a series of questions.

Advani said when the US first mooted the proposal, India responded by saying that the request should come from the UN. After the UN



L.K. Advani

adopted a resolution in this connection, the CCS held two inconclusive rounds of discussions that have thrown up a number of questions.

CABINET OKAYS FERRY SERVICE TO COLOMBO

New castes to be included in OBC list

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JUNE 5. The Union Cabinet today cleared a proposal to include new castes and communities in the Central List of Other Backward Classes in respect of Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Delhi, Chandigarh, Haryana, Orissa and West Bengal.

The maximum number of inclusions of new castes relates to Orissa with Gop, Sadgop, Dumal Gouda, Rangani, Tanti, Pandara Mali, Muni, Kalar, Kalar and Raula in Ganjam district being added to the list.

The second highest number of additions is in respect of Delhi with Julaha-Ansari (excluding those in the SC list), Idrishi, Naddaf, Mansoori and Salmani included in the list.

As regards the other States, the additions are: Andhra Pradesh, Turupu Kapu of Vizianagaram; Karnataka, Gouda or Gowda (only for rural areas); Rajasthan, Shawat (except Sompura Murtikar); Haryana, Lodhi; Chandigarh, Yadav/Ahir and West Bengal, Nashya-Sekh and Shershabadia.

Announcing the Cabinet decision, the Government spokesman said the inclusions had been made on the basis of the recommendations of the National Commission for Backward Classes. "Under the law, the advice of the Commission is ordinarily binding on the Central Government."

The Cabinet also decided to ratify the SAARC Convention on Regional Arrangements for the Promotion of Child Welfare in South Asia, which was signed by the Foreign Ministers of the region at the SAARC summit in Kathmandu on January 5 last year.

The long-pending proposal to have a passenger ferry service link between India and Sri Lanka

got a major shot in the arm with the Cabinet giving its nod for signing a memorandum of understanding with the island nation in this regard.

The spokesman said to begin with the ferry link would be provided between Tuticorin (in Tamil Nadu) and Colombo, which would be followed by similar services between other ports on either side with mutual consent. The frequency and the service provider shall be decided later.

The MoU would also have provisions to address the security concerns of the two countries. It would provide for discontinuance of the services in case either country made a request in this regard on security grounds. A joint committee would be set up to ensure effective implementation of the MoU.

Establishment of ferry services has been engaging the attention of the two countries ever since December 1998, when at a meeting here of the India-Sri Lanka Sub-Commission on Trade, Finance, and Investment, the two agreed to examine the possibility of such a linkage. The ferry service is envisaged to promote low-budget passenger movement between the two countries and also enhance tourism, trade and cultural ties.

The Cabinet also approved the signing of a framework trade agreement with the Latin American trade block, MERCOSUR, comprising Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay. The pact is expected to pave the way for entering into a Preferential Trade Agreement as the first step and a Free Trade Agreement eventually and thus give a boost to trade with MERCOSUR in particular and Latin America in general. In 2000-01, the value of India's exports to the region was \$626.5 million, which accounted for just 0.83 per cent of the total value of imports made by the region during the year from across the world.

CRYPTIC STATEMENT CAUSES FLUTTER; PARTY RALLIES BEHIND PM

Vajpayee passes poll baton to Advani

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, June 4. — In a statement that took everyone, including his own party, by surprise, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today said the BJP would fight the next general elections under the leadership of Mr LK Advani. "Advani ke netretiva mein vijay ke live prasthan" (march to victory under Mr Advani's leadership), he said while concluding his speech at a felicitation function by the BJP at his residence.

The Prime Minister was "extremely serious" when he gave the terse message. Interestingly, Mr Vajpayee told leaders that he is "neither tired nor retired", but the next elections should still be fought under Mr Advani. After virtually setting the cat among the pigeons, a visibly-relaxed Mr Vajpayee moved to the lawns and quizzed journalists: "What are you going to write?" When told they had enjoyed his speech, he quipped: "At least, I have that much satisfaction."

Senior BJP leaders are linking this prime ministerial observation with recent party pronouncements that both Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani will lead the party's campaign in the next general polls. The Prime Minister was said to be a "little upset" at what seemed a "virtual declaration of the limits of his public life".

In public statements, however, BJP leaders have said ad nauseam that Mr Vajpayee will be the prime ministerial candidate. As happens when Mr Vajpayee muses on

giving up the mantle, there was an immediate rallying round by senior colleagues. Mr Advani reportedly said that Mr Vajpayee's image as national leader is "unparalleled". Mr Venkaiah Naidu, the party president, immediately clarified from the dais that Mr Vajpayee is "our leader".

"We want to be under your leadership. You are not only the leader of the BJP, the NDA, India but also Venkaiah and even Advani," he said. He later described Mr Advani as the one who would lead the party's poll campaign. "He will be our *sarathi* (charioteer)". It was Mr Naidu who had said at the party's Hyderabad office-bearers' meeting that both Mr Vajpayee and Mr Advani would be projected in the poll campaign. Subsequently, Mr Naidu and other BJP leaders had to face media queries on whether it implied that Mr Vajpayee's retirement was imminent and/or a section of the party wanted Mr Advani to be projected.

During his recently-concluded European tour, Mr Vajpayee had been quoted in the German media as having said that he might retire if the peace process with Pakistan did not succeed. PMO officials subsequently said that Mr Vajpayee had not talked about retiring from public life. The party later said Mr Vajpayee would continue to be the Prime Minister even after the next elections as he was the party's "undisputed" leader.

A visibly-embarrassed Mr Advani refused to comment on Mr Vajpayee's statement.

No NDA without Vajpayee: Trinamul, page 4



Mr Advani and Mr George Fernandes felicitate Mr Vajpayee on his return from his three-nation tour in New Delhi on Wednesday. — AFP

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QUIT PRO QUO 116
Vajpayee must stay even if peace fails

THE Prime Minister's interview to a German newspaper is, in many ways, vintage Atal Behari. He says he'll retire if the current Indo-Pakistani peace process fails. What did he mean? That he'll not make any more efforts towards peace if this round fails? Or that he'll leave the public field if Pakistan refuses to play ball? There's a delicious vagueness here — the Prime Minister's trademark. Also the tactical motive. Solemn ruminations on retirement focuses the minds of party and government leaders — they all know for the next general elections they need Vajpayee, who remains the most respected and liked politician in the country. Still, this is the second time since he extended his "hand of peace" across the border that the Prime Minister has spoken of staking his career on neighbourly good relations. We must, therefore, take it seriously, and assume that he may be talking about quitting premiership and politics. Our recommendation, plainly put, is the Prime Minister should not resign if the peace process fails. Even if it fails spectacularly, say, through a horrible act of terrorism. There will undoubtedly be sniggers and well-meaning criticism — the latter, for example, from this newspaper, which was and is sceptical of Pakistan's willingness and capacity to change. But as the Prime Minister, with a long and distinguished public career, should be the first one to know, these come with the job. Governing India is a far bigger job than making peace with Pakistan.

First, Vajpayee is needed to ^{g. v. m. & w. r.} balance between the pro and anti-reforms groups in his government. Many policy changes have been stalled. But many more would be still-born if the Prime Minister had not used his authority. Reformist ministers like Arun Shourie survive intense party hostility only because of prime ministerial backing. Second, Vajpayee remains the most convincing articulator of the BJP's sensible political line. Ayodhya is a good example. Every time the sants and the VHP have become restive, a combination of small assurances and a firm lid on the status quo have diffused the situation. Third, if the BJP is best voted to power in a coalition and not by itself, there is no one in the party so far who comes close to the Prime Minister's abilities in coalition politics. It is a remarkable feat in a noisy, fractious and regionally varied democracy to keep a portmanteau collection like the NDA going for four years, which will almost certainly extend to the full term. Most of the credit goes to the Prime Minister. Look at Sonia Gandhi's inept handling of the coalition issue to see why the BJP's political aspirations depend on Vajpayee. Of course, the Prime Minister may retire because of age, health or if his party, ill-advisedly, chooses another leader before the next elections. Those are facts of public life. But he must not hang up his gloves simply because the General refuses to take his hand. This is, of course, assuming we know which hat is involved.

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J ves 9 m

'MORE CBMs WILL FOLLOW'

We want talks with Pak. as soon as possible: PM

NEW DELHI, MAY 27. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today declared that India wanted to start talks with Pakistan "as soon as possible", but made it clear that for a meaningful dialogue cross-border terrorism should end and the terror infrastructure dismantled.

Before embarking on a three-nation tour, Mr. Vajpayee said that India would take "more" confidence-building measures to carry forward its peace initiatives with Pakistan.

"Some steps have already been taken and more will be taken," he told reporters at the Indira Gandhi airport here, a day after India announced its decisions to resume the Delhi-Lahore bus service and release 130 Pakistani prisoners in the Indian jails.

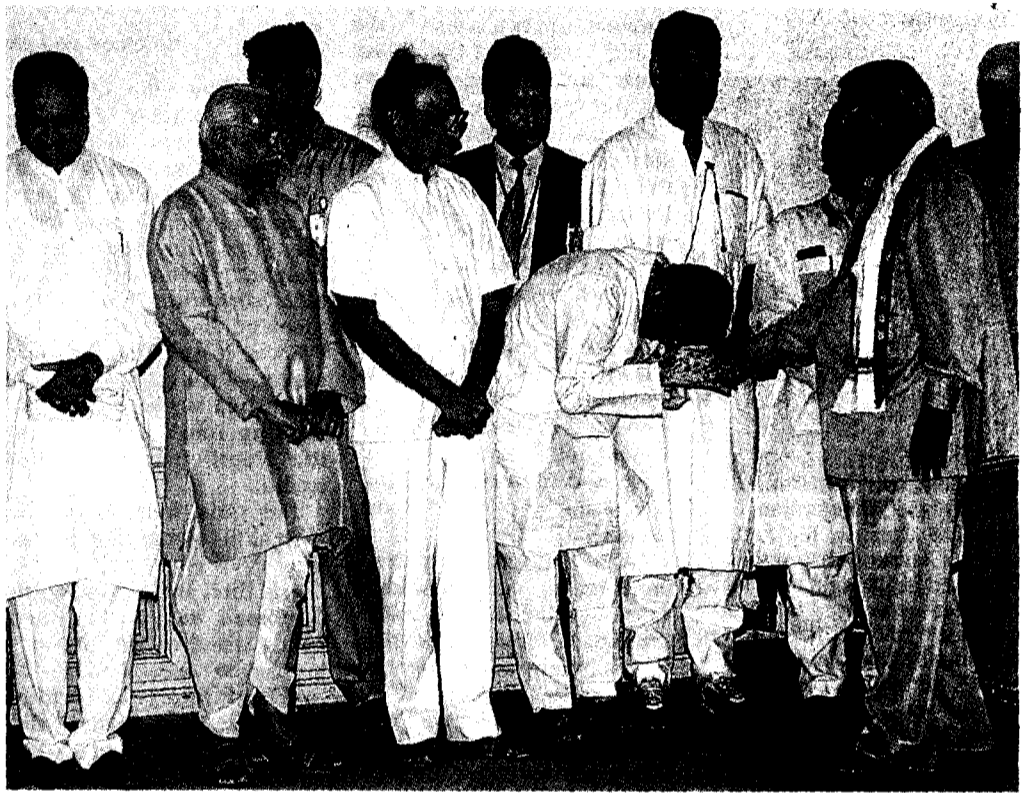
Replying to questions on when the two countries would resume talks in the wake of several peace initiatives taken by New Delhi, Mr. Vajpayee said "we want it to be as soon as possible". Mr. Vajpayee, who left for Germany on the first leg of his eight-day tour that would also take him to Russia and France, said he was confident that an atmosphere would be created for Indo-Pak talks to begin.

Mr. Vajpayee, who has been specially invited by the French President, Jacques Chirac, for a "broader dialogue" on June 1, ahead of the G-8 summit in the French Alpine town of Evian on the Franco-Swiss border, will hold bilateral meetings with various heads of State and Government there.

Asked whether he would be meeting the U.S. President, George W. Bush, either in St. Petersburg in Russia or in Evian, he said "I do not know about any such meeting at the moment".

Amit Baruah reports from Berlin:

"My bilateral visit to Germany is pursuant on the agreement between Chancellor (Gerhard) Schroeder and me that we have regular summit meetings," Mr. Vajpayee said on his arrival here. He is heading a high-pow-



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, being seen off by his Cabinet colleagues before he left for the three-nation tour at the Indira Gandhi International Airport in New Delhi on Tuesday. — Photo: V. Sudershan

er delegation including the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, the Commerce Minister, Arun Jaitley, and senior officials.

"I hope to discuss with Chancellor Schroeder and other representatives of the German leadership concrete measures to strengthen our political and economic cooperation and our collaboration on global issues

like international terrorism and WTO," he said.

Apart from keeping the focus on international terrorism, Mr. Vajpayee's visit is expected to give a boost to Indo-German trade ties, especially German investment in India.

Referring to the June 1 "informal summit" meeting in Evian, with the G-8 and 12 developing countries, Mr. Vajpayee said

this was the result of a progressive initiative of the French President, Jacques Chirac, to create a framework for dialogue between the G-8 and select countries from the developing world. "I hope this meeting would promote a meaningful interaction between these two groups of countries on a number of political, economic, social and environmental concerns which are now being discussed in different international fora."

"I have often said that we need a forum for a global dialogue on development, which would enable the developing and developed countries to discuss issues of concern in a cooperative rather than confrontational manner and would result in a reconciliation of differing perceptions and harmonisation of approaches. ..."

Plane takes detour

BERLIN, MAY 27. Pakistan's silence over resuming over-flight facility to India, forced the Air India plane carrying the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, to take a detour on his flight to Berlin on the first leg of his three-nation tour today, taking two-and-a-half extra hours of flying time.

Due to the mutual ban on over-flying that was clamped in the aftermath of terrorist attack on Parliament in December 2001, the Air India One 'Samudragupta' aircraft flew over Udaipur, Ahmedabad, the Arabian Sea, Oman, Iran, Turkey and over Eastern Europe before landing in Berlin's Tegel airport. —PTI

'SEARCH FOR PEACE WILL CONTINUE'

No lowering of guard: Vajpayee

Press Trust of India

BERLIN, May 27. — The Prime Minister today declared that the search for peace with Pakistan would continue without relent, though there would be no lowering of guard by Delhi for the sake of peace. "Shanti ki khoj jari rahega. Lekin shanti ki raksha bhi karega," Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee said while addressing the Indian community at a reception here hosted by ambassador Mr TCA Rangachari.

Explaining his latest peace overtures with the neighbour, Mr Vajpayee said there could be an apparent contradiction between efforts for peace and preparations for defence. "Shanti ki aradhana karte samai shanti ki raksha chod nahi sakta hun (while we are campaigning for peace, we cannot give up security for peace)."

India, he said, wants to live in peace with Pakistan and it is not impossible for the two countries to have friendly relations. Many cannot understand how efforts for peace and preparations for defence can go together. "We want peace, but if it is not possible then we

have to be prepared. The search for peace will go on. But if it is needed, we won't give up defence for peace," he said.

While referring to his "third and last" attempt for peace with Pakistan, Mr

Detour

BERLIN, May 27. — Pakistan's silence on restoring overflight facility to India forced the Air India plane carrying Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee to Berlin to detour, taking two-and-half hours of extra flying time. Samudra-gupta flew over Gujarat, Ahmedabad, Arabian Sea, Oman, Iran, Turkey and over Eastern Europe before landing in Berlin's Tegel airport. Cruising over Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran would have taken a flying time of seven hours. — PTI

Vajpayee recalled his first and second initiatives. "I went to Lahore with a message of peace. The peace bus crashed against Kargil mountains... Even their Prime Minister (Nawaz Sharief) had to go. But I did not give up. I invited Gen. Musharraf to Agra. He came but put forward conditions that could not be fulfilled and the talks broke down. But, we did not sit quiet at the failure," Mr Vajpayee said. It's possible for the two countries to resolve problems through dialogue. "The kind of destruction that humans are capable of inflicting showed that humanity has power but not reason."

In a lighter vein, he referred to a newspaper report that said "Vajpayee's bus service to resume" and asked: "When did it become my bus?... But this time, the bus will not break down."

G-8 talks can bring Third World closer: PM, page 4

28 MAY 2003

THE STATESMAN

Sudip's induction into ministry put on hold as Trinamul chief protests

Mamata stays away

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, May 24. — With resignations on corruption charges and the "revolt" by Miss Mamata Banerjee forming the backdrop, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee's 11th Cabinet reshuffle since he took office appeared to lack any message for better governance.

Bringing a touch of drama to the reshuffle exercise, Miss Banerjee decided not to join the Cabinet in protest against the decision to induct her party colleague Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay without consulting her.

Mr Shahnawaz Hussain, who was to be dropped, managed to retain his job but was divested of the charge of civil aviation following reports of irregularities in the ministry. However, the man given charge of civil aviation, Mr Rajiv Pratap Rudy, MoS with independent charge, is not known for his competence. Mr Hussain has been shifted to textiles.

Mr Kanshiram Rana gets charge of rural development from Mr Ananth Kumar who retains his urban development charge and gets one more department — poverty alleviation.

Maj.-Gen. (retd) BC Khanduri was elevated to Cabinet rank and retained his department of surface transport, which has now been rechristened the department of road transport and highways.

Mr Rajnath Singh of the BJP returns to the Cabinet with the charge of agriculture, replacing Mr Ajit Singh who resigned last night.

Another Cabinet minister who took oath — Mr Subodh Mohite of the Shiv Sena, a first time MP — gets charge of heavy industry and public en-



Events of the day overtook these Mamata supporters seen here cheering their leader on Saturday morning. — AFP

terprises. Swami Chinmayanand, a VHP activist and MP from UP, is a new face in the government as MoS for home. He is committed to building the Ram Temple in Ayodhya and is also reported to be close to Mr LK Advani.

Mr Vijay Goel has been shifted from parliamentary affairs to sports and youth affairs as MoS while Mr Santosh Gangwar has been made minister of state for parliamentary affairs and labour.

Petroleum minister Mr Ram Naik gets a junior — Mrs Sumitra Mahajan is his new MoS. Mr Karia Munda, coal minister, also gets a junior: Mr Prahlad Patel, a new entrant from Madhya Pradesh.

PM promises one more

NEW DELHI, May 24. — Miss Mamata Banerjee's refusal to join the government and withdrawal of the invitation letter to Mr Sudip Bandopadhyay to take the oath as a MoS caused considerable embarrassment to Mr Vajpayee today, though he promised "another minor reshuffle".

But Mr Vajpayee with his characteristic humour tried to defuse the situation by saying: "Mamata naraaz ho jati hain kyonki kabhie kabhie Samata garbadi kar deti hai" (Mamata gets angry when Samata creates confusion).

Mr Vajpayee told journalists that he was in touch with Miss Banerjee and confident that the Trinamul would join the ministry. On Miss Banerjee's insistence that she would not allow the entry of Mr Bandopadhyay, the Prime Minister hinted that Mr Bandopadhyay would be included and the Trinamul might be offered three posts instead of two. "Trinamul will get more," he said.

The non-inclusion of Dr Farooq Abdullah or his son Omar is a setback for the BJP as the ruling alliance will lose its political face in J&K. — SNS

There are now two ministers of state in charge of social justice and empowerment: Mr Kailash Meghwal (Rajasthan) and Mr Nagmani (Bihar), both first-timers in the Vajpayee government.

President Dr APJ Abdul Kalam administered the oath of office and secrecy to the three Cabinet rank ministers and the five MoS.

After the swearing-in, Prime Minister Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee had a "one-to-one interaction" with him at Rashtrapati Bhawan. Presidential aides described the meeting as "regular".

■ More reports on pages 5, 7 and 10

PM starts talks on reshuffle

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, MAY 20. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today initiated the consultations on the proposed reshuffle of his Cabinet. He discussed the issue for over two hours with the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, the Union Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, and the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu.

As of now, the likely dates for the proposed reshuffle are May 23 or May 24. And consultations will continue till the last day.

Though the Prime Minister had "announced" last Sunday (in Himachal Pradesh) that he was thinking of a Cabinet expansion, he once again deemed it necessary to have formal consultations with senior Cabinet and party colleagues.

Today's consultations have consecrated a new format for the exercise of prime ministerial authority. The last expansion/reshuffle, in January last had also witnessed similar collective discussions.

Since the administrative rationale for yet another expansion/reshuffle is not clear, the proposed exercise appears driven mostly by Mr. Naidu's political activism.

Political considerations, rather than administrative competence, are likely to influence who stays in and who stays out and in what ministerial slot.

For now, only the return of Mamata Banerjee to the Cabinet is a certainty. The name of Farooq Abdullah of the National Conference is also being talked about as a possible entrant, though the former J&K Chief Minister's usefulness in the present political context is judged to be rather limited.

Finding ministerial portfolios to suit their political high profile may force a chain reaction.

Whereas the Prime Minister indicated (in Himachal Pradesh) that some of the Ministers were overburdened and that their workload would need to be lightened, Mr. Naidu has been hinting that the two Aruns — Arun Shourie and Arun Jaitely — would not be disturbed. Both have two portfolios each, and both have given an excellent account of themselves.

That leaves Ananth Kumar and Sushma Swaraj among the "overburdened" Ministers. Both are

known to be Mr. Advani's proteges but, by her sheer stature and competence, Ms. Swaraj can hope to retain her current dual charge (of health and parliamentary affairs).

Ananth Kumar, in dual charge of urban development and rural development, may be asked to shed the rural development portfolio.

In that case, Mr. Naidu would want the portfolio to go to a BJP nominee, so that the BJP president can continue to monitor the progress of the schemes he began when he presided over that ministry.

There seems to be a run on Syed Shahnawaz Hussain's portfolio of civil aviation. The Shipping Minister, Shatrugun Sinha, is reported to be making a bid on this rather glamorous portfolio. But the Syed, the only Muslim Minister in the Vajpayee Government, is known to be enjoying Mr. Advani's protection.

The BJP's collective preference appears to be for the ouster of Ajit Singh, the Agriculture Minister. Sources close to Mr. Naidu have been openly dropping hints that Mr. Singh has to go.

However, the Prime Minister has not yet bought the argument. A possible compromise being talked about is a change in Mr. Singh's portfolio. Mr. Singh is believed to have made it clear that if his portfolio is changed, he would prefer to resign.

Though Ajit Singh represents only one Lok Sabha seat, his departure is not without possible costs to the BJP.

As a Jat leader who is not without some influence in pockets of Rajasthan, estrangement with him could cost the BJP a few crucial votes.

Similarly, he is not without his usefulness in Uttar Pradesh. Mr. Singh's party, Rashtriya Lok Dal, has 16 MLAs and it was Mr. Singh's letter of support for Ms. Mayawati that persuaded the U.P. governor to invite the BSP leader to form the Government.

Should the RLD be constrained to withdraw its support from the Mayawati Government, Uttar Pradesh could be in for a spell of uncertainty. On the other hand, the BJP managers appear confident of splitting Mr. Singh's legislative flock in Uttar Pradesh.

The Shiv Sena and the DMK too are making a case for a larger share in the ministerial berths.

21 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

MAMATA BANERJEE MAY GET A PLACE

PM to reshuffle Cabinet, to take in new faces

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MANALI, MAY 18. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said there would be a reshuffle of his Ministry "soon" in which the Trinamool Congress leader, Mamata Banerjee, might be inducted along with some new faces.

He also said the extra burden on some of the Ministers would be lightened.

"Soon, there will be changes in the Council of Ministers. Some new Ministers will be added. Some of the Ministers are overburdened. Their burden will be lightened," he told reporters at the end of his six-day sojourn here.

Asked whether Ms. Banerjee will be re-inducted, he said: "The possibility is there."

On when the exercise would be carried out, the Prime Minister said: "It will be at an auspicious moment".

Asked whether anyone from Himachal Pradesh will be taken into the Government, Mr. Vajpayee said he could not reveal everything "right now".

There has been media speculation that the former Union Minister Shanta Kumar, who hails from Himachal Pradesh, could get back into the Government.

Mr. Vajpayee said the change of guard in Himachal Pradesh after the recent Assembly elections, which saw the BJP's ouster by the Congress, would not affect the Centre's relations with the State.

'Pak. must take more steps'

On India-Pakistan relations, Mr. Vajpayee asserted that cross-border terrorism must end to create an "appropriate atmosphere" for talks. He said Pakistan must take "more steps" to stop it. "Our position is this and we stick to it."

"There is no compulsion to talk," he said when asked why India was taking peace initiatives when cross-border terrorism continued.

"We are making efforts to see an end to cross-border terrorism so that an appropriate atmosphere is created for talks," he said and insisted there was no change in New Delhi's position on this.

When recent steps taken by Pakistan, includ-

ing the release of 17 Indian prisoners, were cited, the Prime Minister said "several steps have been taken and more must be taken."

"A process has begun. Let us see how these steps are linked with ending cross-border terrorism," he said.

Asked whether he would be travelling to Pakistan for the SAARC meeting, Mr. Vajpayee said he had not received any invitation.

To a question whether he would be meeting the Pakistani President, Pervez Musharraf, in St. Petersburg during his upcoming visit to Russia, he said the Pakistani leader was not going there.

"Shall we arrange for his visit too?" he quipped in a lighter vein.

The State faced financial problems and the Centre had been extending help to overcome these, he said and announced that Himachal would be given additional financial assistance of Rs. 553 crores this year too like last year.

Trinamool happy

A report from Kolkata said the Trinamool Congress today expressed happiness at Mr. Vajpayee's remarks that Ms. Banerjee may return to the Union Cabinet.

"We are happy at the prospect of Mamata re-joining the Cabinet", the senior TC leader and party legislator, Saugata Roy, told PTI here.

Mr. Roy, a former Union Minister, said: "Mamata's joining the Union Cabinet will strengthen our hands in fighting the CPI(M)'s terror because nobody can fight them in West Bengal without the backing of the Central Government".

"There has been talks of Cabinet reshuffle for some time and it was generally known that she might be re-inducted into the Cabinet. Now that the Prime Minister himself had said it, it only reconfirmed what we have been hearing," he said.

The State BJP also welcomed the Prime Minister's move to take Ms. Banerjee back into the Union Cabinet. "We definitely welcome it in the interest of West Bengal," the State BJP general secretary, Badal Bhattacharjee, said. — PTI

19 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

PM sounded deputy before peace move

Big Two speak in one voice

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SEEMAGUHA

New Delhi, May 9: Amid speculation about perceived differences between Atal Bihari Vajpayee and L.K. Advani over peace overtures to Pakistan, **The Telegraph** can reveal that the two leaders had a two-hour meeting a day before the Prime Minister launched his initiative from Srinagar.

Officials in the home ministry, under Advani's charge, and sources in the Prime Minister's camp confirm that Vajpayee did consult his second-in-command before offering the "hand of friendship" to Pakistan.

Home ministry officials go a step further to say the deputy Prime Minister fully supported Vajpayee's move.

But, as the minister in charge of internal security, Advani wants Pakistan to "dismantle the terrorist infrastructure it funds and operates before there can be any meaningful dialogue", an official said.

Rumours about differences between the two have been in currency for some time and received a fresh lease of life from Advani's absence from the Lok Sabha when Vajpayee spoke on his initiative yesterday.

"I had informed the Prime Minister that as I was busy with work in the ministry, I would not be present in the House. I watched the entire proceedings, including the reply by the Prime Minister, on television," he said at the BJP headquarters today.

Advani added that Vajpayee's remarks on Pakistan were only a reiteration of India's position.

"Our stand is the same — you

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have to stop cross-border terrorism. But we have definitely said that when we insist that cross-border terrorism must end we don't mean that there can be no friendship," he said.

Vajpayee has said much the same thing. Sources close to Vajpayee said while Advani was certainly aware of the broad thrust of the peace initiative, he could not have known the language the Prime Minister would couch it in when he spoke in Srinagar.

Defence minister George Fernandes and finance minister Jaswant Singh had queries about the Prime Minister's move, but gave in to "the superior wisdom of their leader".

Advani may have borne the same misgivings, but is keen on backing Vajpayee all the way. "Friendship is in our interest, Pakistan's interest, in the interest of the world," he said.

For now at least, there is no insistence from the deputy Prime Minister on Pakistan handing over the 20 individuals named on a list that had been given to Islamabad.

"It's not that we don't want to give peace a chance, but we must learn from experience not to rush into situations with our eyes closed. Remember what happened after Agra. We need to be doubly careful not to be taken for a ride," a home ministry official said.

When US deputy secretary of state Richard Armitage meets Advani tomorrow, the deputy Prime Minister is likely to stress that Pakistan shows it really means business.

■ See Page 6

10 MAY 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

PM makes third and final call for peace

Islamabad to reciprocate resumption of diplomatic ties

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Promising to make a decisive "third and final attempt" at improving relations with Pakistan, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee said on Friday that India would send its high commissioner back to Islamabad and restore civil aviation links "on a reciprocal basis". The move is likely to set in motion a number of confidence-building measures and lead, eventually, to the initiation of a dialogue process.

The PM's remarks came during a discussion in parliament on the government's latest peace initiative. Responding to a clarification sought by MPs, Mr Vajpayee said, "We wanted to give peace another chance." He said "cross-border terrorism and bloodshed" should be brought to an end. Meanwhile, PTI reported from Islamabad that Pakistan will reciprocate by sending its high commissioner to New Delhi.

Giving details of his phone conversation with Pakistan premier Mir Zafarullah Khan Jamali on April 28, Mr Vajpayee hinted that the "change in the international situation" was also a reason for the new initiative.

Speaking in an emotional vein, the PM told the Rajya Sabha that although he knew that he had the support of all members, he was also aware that there were many who opposed him. "Main jaanta hoon main katghare mein hoon (I know that I am in the dock)," he said in a reference to the failed Lahore and Agra initiatives. "But this will be my third and final effort at improving bilateral relations with Pakistan. Now, whatever happens will be decisive."

At the same time, he added, "I am confident I will succeed. Even for me, it is a decisive and conclusive step. We want to give peace another chance."

Terming the response by Mr Jamali "encouraging", Mr Vajpayee said, "I felt there should be some way out. When there is darkness, nobody stops us from burning a lamp. There is darkness. But I see brightness and I have the courage of conviction."

Striking a personal note, Mr Vajpayee said, "Some people say, 'This fellow is a poet'. But sometimes, a poet can do what many others can't." On the Pak premier inviting him to Pakistan, the PM said that he was unable to accept the invitation. He declined to give details.

Asked about the government's response to Pakistan's threat to raise Kashmir in the UN Security Council, the PM said Pakistan should be aware of the council's decision that the Kashmir issue should be resolved bilaterally on the basis of the Simla Agreement. There was no place for international mediation, he said.

On reports of retired US General J. Garner, the US viceroy in Iraq, saying that the Kashmir issue should be resolved by 2004, Mr Vajpayee said, "Much importance should not be attached to such statements."

Asked what had made the government offer its hand of friendship despite continued cross-border terrorism, Mr Vajpayee said, "Although terrorism persisted, the government wanted to give peace one more chance." Stating that many jawans had been martyred in 50 years of confrontation, he said this bloodbath should come to an end.

The Prime Minister said inviting Gen Pervez Musharraf to Agra despite Kargil should be construed not as "weakness", but a genuine effort to bring about peace between the two countries. Now, he said, he was extending the hand of

friendship to give peace yet another chance. "I do not know what is going to be the result. This is a new beginning." To the demand of members for an early resumption of cricket ties between India and Pakistan, Mr Vajpayee said the matter should be left to the sports administrations of the two countries.

Comment: The return of the Indian high commissioner to Islamabad should be the first step in a choreographed international strategy to put the onus of making and maintaining peace squarely on Pakistan, whose export of terror has been the major source of instability in the region.

● See Sacred Space: Meaningful Dialogue, Page 14

Time to bury the past..



"Now whatever happens will be decisive.. We want to give peace another chance. When there is darkness, nobody stops us from burning a lamp"

'Antyodaya' scheme to be expanded

By Gargi Parsal

NEW DELHI, APRIL 30. Even as the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, plans to soon convene an all-party meeting to discuss the "faulty" Public Distribution System, the Centre today announced expansion of the "Antyodaya Anna Yojna" to cover 1.5 crore 'poorest of the poor' families with an additional subsidy burden of Rs. 2640 crores. The total food subsidy bill now stands at Rs. 24,000 crores.

Announcing the decision during his reply to a calling attention motion in the Rajya Sabha, the Union Minister for Food and Consumer Affairs, Sharad Yadav said that under the "Antyodaya" scheme 35 kg of foodgrains would be provided at a subsidised rate of Rs. 2

per kg for wheat and Rs. 3 per kg for rice.

So far the scheme covered one crore 'poorest of the poor'. The expanded Yojna will now cover 23 per cent of an estimated 6.52 crore BPL families in the country.

After facing three hours of Opposition onslaught for the failure of the PDS resulting in "malnutrition and hunger deaths", the Minister said in his reply that the expanded "Antyodaya Yojna" would now cover the most vulnerable sections such as old people, widows, disabled persons without families or societal support and the destitute sections of society.

While Opposition members pressed for a meeting of Chief Ministers to discuss the PDS policy pursued by the Government, the Minister said he

would request the Prime Minister to convene such a meeting as reaching subsidised foodgrains to the poor was a joint responsibility of the Centre and the States.

While associating himself with the members' concern at diversions, recycling and corruption in the PDS delivery system, Mr. Yadav said the system was 80 per cent functional. But it had to be reviewed and monitored from time to time for which the Ministry had set up a Task Force.

"We do not make the findings of the Task Force public, but discuss it separately with the Chief Ministers and it has made a difference. Not a single death from malnutrition has been reported from any State in the last three months nor has any State complained about the quality of

foodgrains delivered to them," he said.

Initiating the discussion, Suresh Pachauri (Cong.) charged the Government with pursuing a PDS policy that had resulted in malnutrition and starvation deaths despite burgeoning stocks of foodgrains in FCI godowns.

When the Deputy Chairperson, Najma Heptulla remarked that instead of rats eating foodgrains in godowns, it could be given to children, Mr. Yadav intervened to assert that the mid-day meal had faced some problem but was now running smoothly.

A. Vijayaraghavan (CPI-M) said lofty schemes like the Antyodaya Yojna were announced on the Prime Minister's birthday but they were not implemented as they should be.

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Vajpayee Govt. a role model, says Advani

By Sunny Sebastian

CHARBHUJA (RAJASTHAN), APRIL 27. The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, today termed the Vajpayee Government a model of good governance and appealed to the people to help install such governments in all the States going to the polls this year.

The Vajpayee Government had successfully completed five years in power and "we are proud of our achievements during all the five years," he said, flagging off the Rajasthan BJP's pre-election road show, "parivartan yatra", from this pilgrim town, 105 km from Udaipur. It would go round all the 200 Assembly constituencies for the next 70 days.

Mr. Advani said the 50 years of Independence did not bring about any "parivartan" (change) in the country. "I have come here to see off Vasundharaji. This is the beginning of change for the whole country. Let the process start from Rajasthan."

The State unit president, Vasundhara Raje Scindia, who would lead the yatra, said "my effort would be to understand the people's problems and empathise with them," while charging the Ashok Gehlot Government in Rajasthan with forgetting its "rajdharm" after coming to power with a "brute majority".

"It is our aim to make India a developed nation by 2020. For this each State needs good governance, a good leader and a corruption-free administration," Mr. Advani said, steering clear of all controversial issues, including the recent crack-down on the "trishul diksha" programme by the Rajasthan Government. He did not touch upon 'Hindutva', Indo-Pak. relations or Kashmir, while addressing a predominantly tribal audience, which started leaving the venue in small groups after sitting under the sun for over four hours. Instead, he concentrated on drought and development and was also reminiscent on his own rath yatra. "Rath yatras bring you closer to the people. You come across their problems," Mr. Advani said, recollecting his four yatras, which pitch-forked the BJP into national dominance in the past.

On drought, Mr. Advani said the Centre had been very helpful to the States for combating the calamity. "Never before the Centre gave so much assistance and so much grains to the affected States as we did in 2002," he said.

However, the dream package for Rajasthan in the eyes of the BJP leadership seemed to be the linking of rivers. The theme was mentioned by Mr. Advani and also by the party general secretary in-charge, Pramod Mahajan, who briefly addressed the crowd.

28 APR 2003

THE HINDU

SIZE OF MINISTRIES TO BE RESTRICTED

Cabinet okays steps to curb bulk defections

By P. Sunderarajan

NEW DELHI, APRIL 23. In a politically-important decision, the Union Cabinet today decided to put a limit to the size of both Union and State Councils of Ministers and to put down the problem of political defections more firmly by removing the present provision under which 'bulk defections' were possible in the form of splits by one-third members.

The Cabinet, which met here this evening, also decided to change the basis for delimiting Assembly and Parliamentary constituencies from the 1991 census to the 2001 census to ensure more representation for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes.

As regards the decision on the size of the Council of Ministers, the total strength would be restricted to 10 per cent of the total strength of the legislature, irrespective of whether it was unicameral or bicameral in respect of States, and 10 per cent

of the total strength of the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha in the case of Parliament.

In the case of smaller States such as Goa, Sikkim and Mizoram, which had 40, 40 and 32 seats respectively, there would be some relaxation in the rule. There would be a proviso that they could have up to seven Ministers.

As regards amendments to the Anti-Defection Act, the decision is to delete Part 3 of the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, under which exemption from disqualification was granted in case of splits in the parties.

Announcing the Cabinet's decisions, the Union Minister and Cabinet spokesperson, Sushma Swaraj, said the restriction in Cabinet size and the changes to the Anti-Defection Act would meet a long-felt demand of all political parties. A Constitution Amendment Bill to incorporate the changes would be brought in the current session of Parliament itself, she added. Once the amendments

are in place, members of political parties would have to resign their seats from the legislature or Parliament and seek re-elections on a new symbol if they defied the whip of the parent party.

Delimitation of constituencies

As regards the decision on changing the basis for the delimitation exercise, Ms. Swaraj said a major advantage would be a substantial increase in the number of seats for Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes. If the 1991 census had been the basis, the increase would have been eight seats across the country compared to the present set-up.

With the 2001 census becoming the basis, the increase would be almost double, at 15 seats.

The change, she said, had the approval of all political parties. The idea, she said, had also been approved by the Delimitation Commission.

PM's amity offer

The fine print is significant

A part perhaps, from a welcome toning down of rhetoric not a great deal should be expected immediately from Vajpayee's offering the hand of friendship to Pakistan. And not merely because a day after he spoke of negotiations without the rider that cross-border terrorism must end he clarified that there was no major shift in the Indian stance. The Kashmir issue is much too complex to be resolved within months, or even years, but if what the prime minister said in Srinagar suffices to prevent further deterioration in Indo-Pak relations it will be a move worth the making. In the short run it will dispel the impression that India is intransigent, it will also facilitate a stepping up of international pressure on Musharraf to keep to his word about ceasing to provide support to terrorism.

That offer may have made the headlines, the fine print reflects a welcome change in attitude. Vajpayee's declaration that if he saw a positive response he would lose no time in sending an officer to Islamabad points to a realisation that bus trips to Lahore and summits in Agra amount to nothing more than grandstanding unless preceded by adequate groundwork. The recourse to officials to try and shed the baggage of history and try to clear a pathway to progress is the correct approach. The task before the bureaucrats will not be easy but they do have substantially more staying-power than politicians, and the majority of them are not particularly bothered about creating waves in the media. It will have to be a brick-by-brick approach and it will be premature to float balloons about the end result — such as converting the Line of Control into the mutually recognised border — until conditions build up to that. Or any other possible framework of settlement.

The time is ripe to revive dialogue at the officials' level. High-pitched rhetoric and military posturing has run its course. Vajpayee's visit to the Valley has been generally welcomed and the Centre realises that the climate for that was created by the healing-touch approach of Mufti Mohammed Sayeed's government — even if the Sangh Parivar continues to wear its blinkers. The mission undertaken by NN Vohra might build on the hope that Vajpayee has generated. If some fresh winds are blowing in the state it must be New Delhi's endeavour to ensure that they flow across the frontier too. Speedy restoration of diplomatic exchanges to the highest level would be in order, lifting of travel restrictions could follow and then perhaps positive action to bolster people-to-people contact — on the cricket field for example.

India's previous bid to keep Kashmir on the back-burner and deal with less contentious issues did not work, nor did Musharraf's insistence that Kashmir was the core issue. A middle path will have to be found and the best prospects of finding it lies with officials. Their ability to "muddle through" is, sometimes, a genuine asset.

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... have issued two of President Hussein's palaces in and near Baghdad. — AFP

Opp. fails to bend govt on Iraq

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, April 7. — Despite strong pressure from the Opposition to condemn the US-led war on Iraq, the Centre today appeared reluctant to budge from its stand. It has not approved the military action and has agreed to pass a parliamentary resolution criticising the war, but is yet to utter the word 'condemn'.

The government may try to create a consensus on the resolution in Hindi, using the word "ninda" (which can be translated as 'to criticise' or 'condemn') and leave the English version open to interpretation.

Foreign minister Mr Yashwant Sinha said at the all party meeting in the Speaker's chamber today that India

had never used the word 'condemn' or 'condemnable' on other equally serious issues. At the most, the language of diplomacy allowed the government to use the word 'deplore'. Mr Sinha reportedly told the meeting that no parliament in the world had passed such a resolution, "condemning" the war on Iraq.

It was clear that politics had again scuttled efforts for a unanimous parliamentary resolution meant to criticise the war. After two adjournments of the Lok Sabha and four of the Rajya Sabha, and a nearly 90-minute all-party meeting, both sides are still at a "war over words". The leaders will try once again tomorrow to hammer out a consensus on the wording of the resolution.

At the meeting, the government side was represented by Mr Sinha, Mrs Sus-

hna Swaraj and Mr Vijay Goel. They circulated a draft resolution which, while 'deplored' the US-led action, expressed agony over the war and called for an immediate end to it. It expressed sympathy with Iraqis, underlined the need for sending humanitarian aid, and pledged India's readiness to shell out \$20 m for that. The government also asked the Opposition not to take an 'extreme position' when Iraq is fast losing out on the battlefield.

NDA allies such as the TDP, which were vociferous in the House, settled for 'deplore' at the meeting. But the Opposition insisted on 'condemn'. Congress leader Mr Pranab Mukherjee had earlier moved a resolution in the House which did not contain the word 'condemn', but the party later decided to be with the rest of the Opposition.

... of a presidential

Neo-imperialism and its perils

HAVING won in Iraq, the temptation for the USA to have a permanent presence there is great, in fact irresistible, because of the country's huge oil reserves, the second largest in the world, after Saudi Arabia. For Americans, it is crucial to break the Saudi stronghold on oil supply because it creates a feeling of helpless dependency on a country that spewed 15 of the 19 terrorists on 11 September 2001. With Russia too entering the oil market in a big way and post-Saddam Hussain Iraq opening up its oil fields to Western companies, it is possible that the Saudi-led OPEC could be broken. But I hope there is much more on the Bush Administration's Middle-Eastern agenda than oil and if so, the Arab Street has yet to be persuaded.

British financial historian Niall Ferguson, professor at New York University, argues that the USA may not have much choice but to assume the imperialist mantle to maintain peace in the world. "True, the war against terrorism has a novel character — it is remote both geographically and technologically. It will nonetheless be Clausewitzian in principle, the wholehearted pursuit of a legitimate political objective by, regrettable but necessarily, violent means," he wrote sometimes ago in the Times Sunday Magazine.

Karl von Clausewitz (1780-1831) was a Prussian general, whose posthumously published treatise, *On War*, advocating a policy of total war, had a transformative influence on European military thinking, especially in Germany, with terrible consequences for Europe and rest of the world.

Ferguson believes that the USA should do what the British did during its Victorian heyday when Britannia ruled the waves. In fact Americans could do better, he believes. While old Russia and Britain failed to achieve their goals in Afghanistan, for example, the USA speedily defeated the Taliban and established its military and political presence in the region, as it is trying to do in Iraq.

The neo-imperialist view of the world political situation is that a most dominant political power, in this case the sole superpower, the USA, whose GDP is more than the total GDP of the next three economic powers combined, must maintain world peace at all costs. "Since 9/11 there has been an unmistakably Clausewitzian flavour to US foreign policy," according to Ferguson, especially when you consider the Bush doctrine of pre-emption. "Liberals, most prominently will fret about the violation of national sovereignty, enshrined in the UN charter. But it worked for the British," he opines. No; it did not work always. Consider the French-British-Israeli (1956) attack against Egypt to wrest back the control of the Suez Canal, which ended in disaster. Or the Vietnam War. The Rumsfeld doctrine might have helped to win a quick victory but I doubt if it would work in more complex situations.

30 APR 2003

THE STATESMAN

Vohra can talk to Hurriyat, says Advani

By Rajat Pandit
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Panaji: Stressing that the Union government firmly believed in devolution of powers to all states, deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani on Sunday said he had given the go-ahead to the Centre's interlocutor on Jammu and Kashmir, N.N. Vohra, to hold talks with all separatist groups, including the Hurriyat Conference.



"There is no harm in talking to people who subscribe to separatism but are not engaged in violence. I told Vohra that there was no objection in talking to the Hurriyat if they are willing," said Mr Advani, while talking to mediapersons on his way to the country's solitary aircraft carrier, INS Viraat, off the Goa coast.

Incidentally, this comes a day after former Hurriyat chairman Mirwaiz Umer Farooq and Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front chief Yaseen Malik met Congress president Sonia Gandhi in a bid to create some political space for themselves.

Mr Advani, however, made it clear that the Centre would not agree to any proposal that such talks be trilateral with the inclusion of Pakistan, as the Hurriyat Conference had been repeatedly demanding.

Holding that the people of Jammu and Ladakh also had the long-standing legitimate grievance that all the power in Jammu and Kashmir was concentrated in Srinagar, Mr Advani said if there was a "re-arrangement in the Delhi-Srinagar relationship, then the rearrangement in the Srinagar-Jammu and Srinagar-Ladakh relationship should be considered simultaneously".

He said, "This government is of the view that over the

last few decades, the Indian federation has become over-centralised and there is a clear case for devolution of powers to the states. Some states like J&K and Nagaland have a special history which needs to be recognised."

The Centre has demonstrated its "commitment to democracy by holding free and fair elections in militancy-affected states of Jammu and Kashmir, Nagaland, Tripura and Meghalaya", said Mr Advani. He then went on to take a swipe at the Congress for a "fragile commitment" to the three "cardinal planks of national security, namely democracy, secularism and national unity" and "surrendering to vote-bank politics".

"They now talk of cow slaughter and Bhojshala. By constantly harping that Pota is anti-minority, they are virtually dubbing the minorities as terrorists," said Mr Advani, who was at pains to point out that there was not a

single allegation against the Centre for misusing Pota. Instead, the state governments were in the dock for it.

Bowing to pressure from political parties, the Centre recently announced the setting up of a review committee to check the misuse of the provisions of Pota. Incidentally, Gujarat and Jharkhand, both BJP-ruled states, have taken recourse to a large number of arrests under this very law.

Be that as it may, Mr Advani said, "We would not like an extraordinary law enacted by the Centre through a joint session of parliament to be misused by anyone. The terms of reference of the review committee are being drafted and the two other members of it will be announced in the next 10 days or so." The committee will take a comprehensive view of the use of Pota in different states and give suggestions to remove shortcomings in its implementation.

Mr Advani said he had held consultations with the

law ministry on this aspect. "(But) in all democracies, including the US, UK, France and others, there are strict anti-terrorism laws the Pota," he said.

17 MAR 2003

THE TIMES OF INDIA

LOWER INTEREST ON LOANS FOR GOVT. STAFF

Jaswant Singh rolls back fertilizer price hike

By Our Special Correspondent

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HD-1*

NEW DELHI, MARCH 11. The Union Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, today rolled back the increases in fertilizer prices he had announced in the Union budget on February 28 but did not yield on the additional cess he had imposed on petrol and diesel.

In another additional measure, he announced further sops for Government employees by reducing 100 basis points (one per cent) the interest on loans taken by them for housing, computers or purchase of transport vehicles. The States too will get the benefit of one per cent lower interest on fresh loans from the Centre.

These concessions came in the course of Mr. Singh's reply to the general debate on the budget in the Lok Sabha. Throughout the three-day debate, there had been demands from all sections of the House, including the BJP and allied party members, for reversing the increase in fertilizer prices while the Opposition also demanded a rollback of the additional cess on diesel. Mr. Singh declined to touch the issue of interest rates on small savings, despite a vociferous demand from the Opposition.

The rollback of fertilizer prices came towards the end of the speech with the Minister not making much of the issue. Having

explained the complex factors involved in fertilizer subsidy which he said was mostly going to high cost fertilizer factories, he said that if all sections of the House were against the increase in fertilizer prices, then let them not be raised. In fact, the decision was announced in such an innocuous manner that many members missed the import of the announcement and demanded that Mr. Singh make a categorical statement on it.

Mr. Singh then obliged them by standing up again and making a formal announcement that "I take back the increases in fertilizer prices that I had announced in the budget."

He utilised the early part of his response to the debate to dispel "the misconceptions" of the members about various aspects of the budget. Starting with the criticism that the fiscal deficit target next year would not be maintained, he said the Government had made realistic projections of revenue receipts and that there was no underfunding of the budget proposals which could lead to runaway expenditure. Also, agriculture was expected to pick up in the coming fiscal, resulting in a higher growth in gross domestic product (GDP). Mr. Singh explained the rationale behind the special focus areas of the budget — health, textiles, gems and jewellery and tou-

rism. While the Re. 1 a day scheme for medical cover was "the most outstanding scheme ever announced, he said the idea to push the health sector was to make India a major health destination in the world. "If our people can make such a mark on the international health scene, why can't it be done here? After all, they are from the same stock and all that we need is better health infrastructure and improved post-operative care."

Eight of the 48 identified road schemes had already got their detailed project reports ready and tenders would be announced soon. The Rs. 2,000-crore funding in the budget was mainly for the railways and airports as roads and ports had their own revenue sources.

Mr. Singh detailed out the measures taken to boost agriculture, including the provision of cheap credit for farmers. He said that from April 1, a new prime lending rate (PLR) would be announced by the Reserve Bank and agriculture and the small scale sector would then get credit at rates two per cent below the PLR.

The rollback of fertilizer price increases was expected to cost the exchequer about Rs 700 crores. The House later passed by voice vote a vote-on-account.

Making light of a hard decision: Page 11

12 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

PM puts up a stiff defence of his govt

Advocates middle path on war against Iraq

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Alerting the country about an imminent war in Iraq, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee sidestepped pointed questions about India's stand on this issue in the Lok Sabha on Monday, stating cautiously that "a middle path" be charted to find a solution to this delicate situation.

Mr Vajpayee said people should be prepared for any eventuality, sought the full cooperation of members and, at the same time, assured the House that in case of a war, the Centre would make all arrangements for the safe return of the 40 lakh Indians working in the Gulf region. Mr Vajpayee made these remarks in the course of his 35-minute reply to the debate on the motion of thanks to the President's address, which was subsequently adopted by voice vote.

Referring to Indo-Pak relations, he emphasised that India, while possessing nuclear weapons, was a responsible nation, and added that the same could not be said about its neighbour. He said if the US was unable to persuade Pakistan, it was a reflection of its weakness but added that this did not mean that "we should not trust anybody as that would not be proper".

The Prime Minister also dwelt on several domestic matters, specifically the points raised by leader of the opposition Sonia Gandhi in her opening speech. He rejected her charge that his government had discriminated against opposition-ruled states in the distribution of drought relief, quoted official figures to disprove the allegation that the Centre had not kept its promise on job creation and took strong objection to her remark that the BJP was using the issue of terrorism as a pretext to polarise the country.

Surprisingly, Mr Vajpayee was silent on the issue of Ayodhya although most opposition members who participated in the debate had referred to it at length.

He appeared a little agitated over Ms Gandhi's criticism of his government's functioning and made it a point to respond to all the issues raised by her. He put up a stiff defence of his government and took refuge in reeling out statistics and figures to make his case.

He noted that 1.5 crore people living below the poverty line had been covered by the Antyodaya scheme, adding that from April 1, the beneficiaries of this scheme would get 35 kg of food-grain per month against the present 25 kg. Giving details about the drought relief provided to Rajasthan, he said it had received as much as 44 per cent of the total relief given to the drought-hit states. However, he admitted that consecutive bouts of drought had brought down the growth rate, which was a matter of concern.

On the positive side, the PM said the country's foreign reserves were at an all-time high and the climate was conducive for foreign investments, a fact acknowledged by investors and international organisations.

Mr Vajpayee took strong objection to Ms Gandhi's remark that his government was seeking to polarise the country and described this as "unfortunate and regrettable". Hitting out at the Congress president, he said that "there were different ways of practising politics" and that his government would never deviate from the path of "sarva dharam sambhav".

Comment: Atalji is stating the obvious. If Washington lends a helping hand in reining in Islamabad's terrorist excesses, well and good. But we have to learn to deal with difficult neighbours on our own.



A.B. Vajpayee

THE TIMES OF INDIA

4 MAR 2003

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'U.S. UNABLE TO MAKE PAK. DELIVER'

4/3

We have kept our word on providing jobs: PM

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, MARCH. 3. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today insisted that his Government was neither partisan in the matter of drought relief nor divisive in fighting terrorism at home. Also, his Government had more or less fulfilled the National Democratic Alliance's promise of providing one crore jobs a year.

Replying to the debate in the Lok Sabha on the motion of thanks on the President's address, Mr. Vajpayee said India's stance of confrontation, vis-à-vis Pakistan, had achieved its "objective", without the country having to go to war.

It was Mr. Vajpayee's first major speech in this budget session. And for the most part, he was on the backfoot, speaking as he was a day after the BJP's rout in the Himachal Pradesh Assembly election. The Himachal verdict's psychological shadow could be discerned, as the treasury benches were decidedly subdued while the Congress members were in a buoyant mood.

Interestingly enough, the Prime Minister provided no aid or comfort to the "mandir crowd", as he did not make any reference to the Ayodhya controversy. Nor did he say anything on the issue of banning cow slaughter — an issue on which some BJP leaders had been itching to challenge the Congress.

It seemed that Mr. Vajpayee was out to refute the criticism that the Centre was "discriminatory" towards the non-NDA State Governments in helping them to cope with the severe drought situation. In particular, he dealt adequately with the

Congress leader, Sonia Gandhi's charge of "step-motherly" treatment to Rajasthan. He told the House that Rajasthan had been given 29 lakh tonnes of foodgrains, about 44 per cent of the entire Central assistance to all the States. He asserted that the mode of assistance under various schemes to Rajasthan was as per the "special package" demanded by the State Government. He hastened to add that it was not an act of charity on the part of the Centre; for him, this "non-discriminatory approach" was a matter of political honesty.

On the economic front, Mr. Vajpayee patted his Govern-

ment for the foreign exchange reserve of \$75 billion, a figure higher than that of France or Germany. He said this bespoke of a "climate conducive for international investment".

The climate was attractive to foreign investors despite the tension with Pakistan, which was "not of our making". It was necessary for India to flex its muscles after the attack on the Parliament House complex, he said and bemoaned that the U.S. had not been able to make Pakistan deliver on its promise of ending cross-border terrorism. Significantly, Mr. Vajpayee added that India had "noted" this American "weakness" and

it would be factored in while assessing in future Washington's word.

Challenged by the Opposition benches as to what happened to his promise of "decisive war" (*aar-paar ki la-rai*), the Prime Minister gave a literary spin to his December 13, 2001 words. He clarified that all that he had said was that "it would be a decisive war, if it came to fighting". Mr. Vajpayee claimed that the "objective" had been achieved even without a war.

Referring to the recent Non-Aligned Summit in Kuala Lumpur, Mr. Vajpayee told the House that India's stand on terrorism was widely endorsed. He quoted at length from the Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad's formulation on terrorism, which rejected the clash of civilisations thesis as well as debunked the thesis that the Muslims were synonymous with terrorism.

Mr. Vajpayee picked up an argument with the Opposition on his Government's performance on employment creation. Refuting Ms. Gandhi's charge that the NDA had failed to keep up its promise of creating one crore jobs a year, he challenged the Opposition for a debate and argued that the promise was not to create one crore "government jobs" but jobs in public and private sectors.

Finally, Mr. Vajpayee rejected the Opposition charge that the Government was using terrorism to polarise the society. He cautioned against making such sweeping allegations, which could be used by external forces to the country's disadvantage.

After the Prime Minister's reply, the motion of thanks was adopted by a voice vote.

A magnificent obsession?

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, MARCH. 3. The veteran parliamentarian that he is, the Prime Minister seems to be having a magnificent obsession when it comes to joining issue with the Opposition. Invariably, he seems keen on taking on Sonia Gandhi, a first-term member of the Lok Sabha.

This obsession was very much evident again today when Mr. Vajpayee replied to the debate on the motion of thanks to the President's address in the Lok Sabha. He began by acknowledging Ms. Gandhi's institutional role as the Leader of the Opposition and lauded her concern about the "homeless". But then he cited for refutation her letter on the Rajasthan drought; took offence to Ms. Gandhi's habit of describing his Government as the "BJP-led Government"; and chided her for suggesting that the Government was using "terrorism" to polarise society.

So personal did Mr. Vajpayee appear in his reply that he ended up extracting from Ms. Gandhi her first-ever, impromptu parliamentary intervention. Mr. Vajpayee spoke as if he was personally stung because Ms. Gandhi had questioned his Government's claim of creating one crore jobs a year. This personalised attention prompted Ms. Gandhi to join issue, as much to the treasury benches' consternation as to the pleasant surprise of the Congress members. Did the Prime Minister trigger something in the Leader of the Opposition who, in her short parliamentary career, has been described as being text-bound?

Centre tells VHP to pipe down

Shekhar Iyer

New Delhi, February 12

THE CENTRE has told the VHP in clear terms that its current initiative before the Supreme Court and outside to sort out the temple tangle is specific only to the undisputed site at Ayodhya. No amount of sabre-rattling by Praveen Togadia and other Parishad leaders would make it change course.

HRD Minister Murli Manohar Joshi, engaged by Prime Minister Vajpayee as the government's pointsman, called up VHP chief Ashok Singhal on Tuesday to say that the government was upset over Togadia's

demand that the disputed site in Ayodhya too must be handed over to the Parishad along with the undisputed areas.

Joshi told Singhal that any VHP bid to raise its pitch would send the government's plans haywire. The government was serious about handing over the undisputed area by getting the Supreme Court to lift its ban on religious activities in both the areas. But for this to happen, the government must be in a position to convince the Court that there was peace in the town, leaving no scope for untoward incidents, Joshi told Singhal. Togadia's remarks would undermine the court's confidence.

The court would probably take up the matter on February 21 with just two days go before the VHP deadline, Joshi added.

He also told Singhal that the VHP ought to keep its mouth shut on Iraq. Togadia's exhortation that India should back the US plan to attack Iraq was at variance with the government's position that Washington must not make any unilateral move, he pointed out. The Prime Minister, Joshi, opposed any action against Iraq before exhausting all the means at the UN's disposal. In the United States, he said, the UN Security Council chief K.S. Sudarshan had criticised the US war cry and endorsed New Delhi's

support for Iraq, saying that the US plans could not be read as a campaign against terror, Joshi told Singhal. Singhal assured Joshi that VHP leaders had not discussed Iraq at any forum and that the Parishad at this juncture was only waiting for the government to move on the undisputed land in Ayodhya.

Joshi's reprimand triggered a prompt VHP retreat on both issues. Senior leader Giriraj Kishore said the Parishad wanted possession of the undisputed land before February 23, and nothing more for now. He hastened to clarify that Togadia's views on the US-Iraq face-off were his own and were neither

shared nor endorsed by the VHP. "It's true that most Islamic countries are supporting terrorists. But the US aim in my view is not to end terrorism, but to take over Iraq's crude oil reserves," he added.

Joshi later issued a statement saying, "Statements which are not in the interest of the present initiative (on Ayodhya) should be avoided and the area of conflict should not be widened."

He said, "I have told the VHP leaders that the (present) matter before the Supreme Court concerns only the undisputed areas. The issue of the disputed area would be resolved as per decisions of the court."

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Muslim Board to oppose Centre's plea on Ayodhya

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 9. — The All India Muslim Personal Law Board today decided to oppose the Centre's plea to the Supreme Court to vacate its stay on religious activities on the undisputed land in Ayodhya, but said it would welcome any fresh move by the Kanchi Shankaracharya to resolve the issue.

"The board considers the Shankaracharya one of the great Hindu religious leaders," spokesman Mr SQR Ilyas said. But the board will oppose the Centre's petition in the Supreme Court that seeks vacation of last year's order. It will, however, not oppose the government's plea for an early and expeditious hearing in the Ayodhya case. The board met here to discuss the issue.

This is the second time that the board

has agreed to consider any peace proposal by the Shankaracharya. The seer had proposed a peace formula last year, before VHP's *shiladaan* programme in March, but the board rejected it on the ground that it was "incomplete".

The board has kept its doors open to consider any new proposals because the "dispute can be solved either by a court verdict or an amicable mutual discussion. The board has never declined to welcome a consequential dialogue," Dr Ilyas said.

BJP president Mr M Venkaiah Naidu criticised the board's decision to oppose the Centre's plea to the Supreme Court. The board, he said, should desist from making such comments because it has no stake in the matter. The Centre has approached the Supreme Court only in regard to the undisputed piece of land which was acquired by the government.

Opp suspicious of govt's Ayodhya move

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 6. — The Opposition has become restless and suspicious of the Centre's renewed efforts to resolve the Ayodhya dispute.

The Congress, with high stakes on the coming Assembly polls and aware of the Sangh Parivar's Hindu-card calculations behind the moves, is blowing hot and cold. The party spokesman, Mr Abhish-ek Singhvi, said the government's latest plea before the Supreme Court was a "repetition" of its earlier plea which the court rejected in March 2002. He, however, said the Congress would "wait for the Supreme Court's decision" on the fresh application. "One also has to wait for the analysis of the five-judge Bench" especially on the issue of the acquired land as according to the earlier order even the status quo of the acquired land was not to be altered before a final settlement of the case.

He said the Congress always stood for an amicable settlement to the dispute either through legal course or a consensus through negotiations. With an obvious reference to the Himachal Pradesh elections, Mr Singhvi said: "Whenever major elections were held during the past five to 10 years, we find a deliberate attempt to rake up the Ayodhya issue to a new peak."

The CPI alleged that the Centre's decision to move the Supreme Court to "expedite" the judicial process in the Ayodhya dispute to "facilitate the handing over of the acquired land in Ayodhya to the VHP trust is yet another attempt to distort the judicial process and make a mockery of the rule of law". A statement by the party central secretariat said: "Come election time, the Sangh Parivar and the Vajpayee government rake up the Ayodhya dispute and rouse communal passions." It said: "The so-called three-pronged strategy devised by the Prime Minister to remove hurdles in the way of spe-

Uncalled for, say Muslim bodies

NEW DELHI, Feb. 6. — The Centre's decision to move the Supreme Court on the Ayodhya issue "uncalled for", several Muslim organisations have said. They have termed it as a "panic reaction" under "tremendous pressure" from the Sangh Parivar and the VHP. NDA allies have also been warned by some of these organisations of severe consequences if they remain silent on the issue.

The All India Muslim Personal Board Committee on Babari Masjid spokesman, Dr SQR Ilyas, said the organisation would pursue its application for intervention in the court. The organisation is likely to hold an internal meeting on Saturday to discuss various legal aspects as a consequence to the Centre's step.

All India Muslim Majlis-e-Mushawarat president Syed Shatabuddin said by approaching the Supreme Court, the Centre had "reopened the question of transfer of the undisputed land in the acquired area at Ayodhya to the Ramjan-mabhoori Nyas Trust in a panic reaction to pressure from the Parivar." He alleged the Centre was "siding" with the VHP. — SNS

dy construction of the temple at the disputed site is nothing but an affront on the judicial process and calculated move to allow construction of the temple at the site where the Babri Masjid stood till 6 December 1992."

The statement said status quo should be maintained and no construction or handing over of the land to any organisation should be done till the court gives its final verdict on the dispute.

Calling for status quo at Ayodhya, the CPI-M politiburo member, Mr Sitaram Yechury, said the Vajpayee government had gone to court to politically exploit the issue ahead of the Assembly polls in some states this year. He said the Centre had filed an application in the Supreme Court for an early hearing of the Ayodhya dispute almost a year after the court stayed 'bhoomi poojan' at the acquired land. He said this is because the government wants to keep the issue alive to capitalise on it during the elections.

Govt. move on Ayodhya draws all-round flak

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, FEB. 6. The Centre's appeal to the Supreme Court to get last year's March 13 stay on religious activities on the acquired 67 acres of land in Ayodhya vacated has once again heated up the political atmosphere with various political parties, Muslim organisations and others joining issue.

The battle lines have once again been drawn — the CPI sees in this latest ploy an attempt to "bypass the judicial process," the main Ayodhya title suit in the Allahabad High Court; the Congress said the "timing" of the appeal suggested that the Government's eye was firmly on the election timetable; the Bharatiya Janata Party welcomed the attempt to "expedite" the proceedings while admitting that the NDA agenda had called for a "moratorium on contentious issues;" and the Samata Party, BJP ally, was comfortable with a court order but did not want the transfer of any part of the acquired land through an executive order. The Union Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, is reported to have said in Shimla that approaching the court was in tune with the NDA's commitment to finding a peaceful and speedy solution to the Ayodhya question and that it could not be described as "communal politics."

Muslim organisations expressed doubts over the Government's intentions, pointing out that the Vishwa Hindu Parishad had been "pressuring and blackmailing" the Government. The All-India Muslim Majlis-Mushawarat felt that the Centre was trying to reopen the question of transfer of the so-called undisputed but acquired land. The Government was "openly siding with the VHP" and had "dropped its mask of neutrality." The AIMMM president, S. Shahbuddin, wanted the Muslim Personal Law Board to oppose the Government's stand and place the "correct constitutional and legal position" before the Supreme Court. An organisation of Imams of mosques demanded police action under POTA against some VHP leaders and warned the BJP allies in the NDA against maintaining silence on the critical issue.

If the Government did not want to use Ayodhya politically, why did it move the Supreme Court when elections were due in three weeks, the Congress asked. It wanted an "amicable" settlement of the issue but with the consent of all the parties involved.

The BJP spokesperson, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, claimed that the Government wanted to "resolve the issue peacefully" and find a "just solution" at the earliest, but it appeared that none of the other political parties, not even the BJP's allies, were entirely convinced that the move was impartial. In fact, most political parties are convinced that if the Supreme Court vacates the stay, the next move will be the handing over of the 40 acres of that land to the VHP-controlled Ram Janmabhoomi Nyas.

More stories on Page 12

7 FEB 2003

Atal moves to hand over Ayodhya land to Nyas

Shekhar Iyer and
Syed Liaquat Ali
New Delhi, February 5

PRIME MINISTER Vajpayee has set in motion a three-pronged strategy to hand over the undisputed Ayodhya land to the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas. On Wednesday, a Government advocate filed an application in the Supreme Court, seeking early hearing of a suit filed by Md Aslam alias Bhure. It relates to the SC ban on all activities on Ayodhya's disputed and undisputed plots, the main hurdle to handing over the land to the Nyas.

The 'interim' ban was imposed by a three-judge Bench last year before it was referred to a bigger Bench. The Government

9. VMAM
HFI 6/2
hopes to get this bigger bench to review the three-judge Bench's order so that the VHP may call off its planned agitation from February 23.

The RSS and VHP feel the ban flies in the face of a larger, five-member Bench's observation in 1994 which upheld the Centre's acquisition of 67.7 acres and remarked that there was no bar on acquired lands, except the disputed site, being returned to the owners even if the question whether a temple or a mosque existed at the site remained unresolved in the Allahabad High Court.

Secondly, while the Government is expecting the SC's assent, it is also keen on creating a political climate within the

NDA in favour of returning the land to the Nyas.

The PM has asked NDA convenor George Fernandes to speak to the allies. The Samata, the TDP, the DMK and the JD(U) have been opposed till now to any change in status quo.

Thirdly, HRD Minister Murli Manohar Joshi and Kanchi Shankaracharya Jayendra Saraswati have been asked to persuade moderate VHP leaders to ensure that the disputed areas are spared but work on a Ram temple begins early next year on the undisputed areas. The seer will also resume mediation with the Muslim Personal Law Board.

For Joshi and the seer, the brief is to isolate VHP hotheads like Praveen Togadia.

6 FEB 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Ayodhya legal option back on Atal table

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, Feb. 4: Three weeks before the Vishwa Hindu Parishad's *dharam sansad*, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee started afresh religious negotiations to see if a solution — political or legal — could be found to the Ayodhya dispute.

The process was kicked off with an hour-long one-to-one meeting with Swami Jayendra Saraswati, the sankaracharya of the Kanchi Kamakotipeetam, this evening.

Saraswati told reporters that Vajpayee had asked him to continue holding talks with "everybody". He also indicated that the legal options available with the Centre would be explored and the court verdict respected.

The key players in the dispute — the All-India Muslim Personal Law Board and the VHP — made it clear that neither would budge from their stated positions, which stalled similar endeavours in the past. The board had allowed itself to be persuaded by the Kanchi seer to talk to the VHP in March last year when things came to a boil in Ayodhya, but this time it would deal directly with the PMO.

With the political option appearing dim — though Vajpayee had stressed on the need for a dialogue in the morning — the seer as well as sources in the government signalled that the legal course was the most tenable.

Speaking to **The Telegraph** from his base in the Kamakshi temple here, the seer repeated his view that the "undisputed" land should be handed over to the Ramjanmabhoomi Nyas. But he added that the March 2002 Supreme Court order had tied the government's hands.

The court had directed the Centre to maintain status quo ante on not only the "disputed" but also the "undisputed" land just when the government was considering handing over a part of the latter through an Ordinance.

The VHP's case was that it had "rightful claim" to 46 acres of the "undisputed" land which, it argued, was "unfairly" acquired by the Centre. According to the VHP's blueprint for the temple, construction would begin from this portion.

Saraswati said: "The land, if it is deemed to be undisputed, should be legally handed over to its original owner. But, for this, the Supreme Court will have to lift the ban, at least partially."

That the Centre was more serious about the legal, rather than the political, option this time was evident from the involvement of law minister Arun Jaitley and the absence of NDA convener George Fernandes. Jaitley met the seer tonight.

Although he described it as a "courtesy call", BJP sources said the Centre was considering seeking a clarification from the apex court on whether its March order was still operative since the "objective" conditions had "changed".

Jaitley, they said, probably apprised the seer of the legalities of the issue. "Ayodhya is peaceful, the VHP has not threatened to go on an agitation and there is no threat to law and order. The court should consider these factors," a source said. He added that if the court modified its directive, it would pave the way for the next step: bringing an Ordinance to enable the government to hand over part of the "undisputed" land to the Nyas.

5 FEB 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

ADVANI'S JURISDICTION EXTENDED

PM takes back CBI from deputy

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 30. — In a surprise move, the Prime Minister today retained control over the Central Bureau of Investigation even as he extended the Deputy Prime Minister's writ beyond the home ministry to the ministry of personnel, public grievances and pensions.

It could, however, not be confirmed if the CBI was removed from the personnel ministry, which is now headed by Mr LK Advani, at the instance of the Deputy Prime Minister himself, but a senior official said this was unlikely. There would have been some resistance in the PMO to gift-wrapping the CBI and handing it over to Mr Advani, he suggested, notwithstanding the fact that Mr Advani and not Mr Vajpayee has been credited with planning yesterday's reshuffle.

Mr Advani now gets the ministry of personnel, public grievances and pensions minus the CBI.

A ministry official said when the notification for transferring the personnel ministry to the Deputy PM was made yesterday, a change was made in the schedule of allocation of business rules — that lists responsibilities of all ministries — to withdraw the CBI from the purview of the department of personnel. Administrative power over the premier investigating agency will now be exercised by the Prime Minister through the Cabinet Secretariat.

The personnel ministry does all the pa-

perwork for the CBI, clearing proposals, notifying cases that the agency can take from state governments, and the like.

The technicality, however, may not mean a lot to Mr Advani, who can still have his way in the CBI by virtue of his status in the government. And as before, on an informal basis. Besides his status as number two in the government, the fact that he heads the home ministry — the controlling authority for all IPS officers — is certainly of help to him.

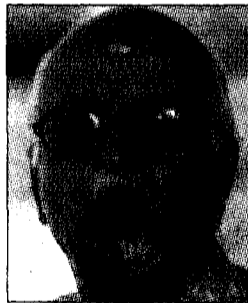
But that will be later. For now, Mr Advani left this afternoon for Thailand and Singapore on a five-day tour for talks on a variety of issues including terrorism and Asean. In Bangkok, he will meet Prime Minister Mr Thaksin Shinawatra and Deputy PM Mr Wissan Krea-Ngam during his three-day stay, and discuss security-related issues and steps to enhance the over \$1 billion trade between India and Thailand, as also the creation of a free-trade zone.

Accompanied by a six-member delegation that includes home secretary Mr N Gopalaswami and OSD to the Deputy PM Mr Ajay Prasad, Mr Advani would reach Singapore on Sunday. There he will hold talks with President Mr SR Nathan, Prime Minister Mr Goh Chok Tong and the home and trade ministers. Bilateral trade, the Asean Summit in Bali in October and security issues would find focus in Mr Advani's parleys with the Singaporean leadership. He is due to return on 5 February.

More reports on page 5



Control regained



Personnel save CBI

Editorial: Post-shuffle cards, page 8

THE STATESMAN

30 JAN 2003

PM tells SJM to be pragmatic

STATISTIAN NEWS SERVICE & PTI

MUMBAI, Jan. 28. — Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today exhorted the RSS affiliate, the Swadeshi Jagaran Manch, to be more pragmatic on economic issues and recognise the needs of modern times. The Prime Minister told the Manch to redefine its role "by cooperating with the government instead of criticising it". Inaugurating the "Swadeshi Mela" in Mumbai this evening, Mr Vajpayee said he appreciated the SJM's criticism of the government's policies on liberalisation, while at the same time pointing out that merely organising such melas was not enough.

Mr Vajpayee said it would be more appropriate if the proponents of Swadeshi philosophy come up with practical suggestions to meet the requirements of a competitive economy such as that in India. To this end, Mr Vajpayee said, he expected a more positive approach from the Manch.

The Prime Minister said economies all over the world were passing through a "crisis of confusion", but the Indian economy was an exception to this trend, and claimed India is following a well-charted path of economic progress which was a model in self-reliance.

He cautioned against "some countries which were trying to influence World Trade Organisation policies thereby creating hurdles for

others... But we won't succumb to these pressures".

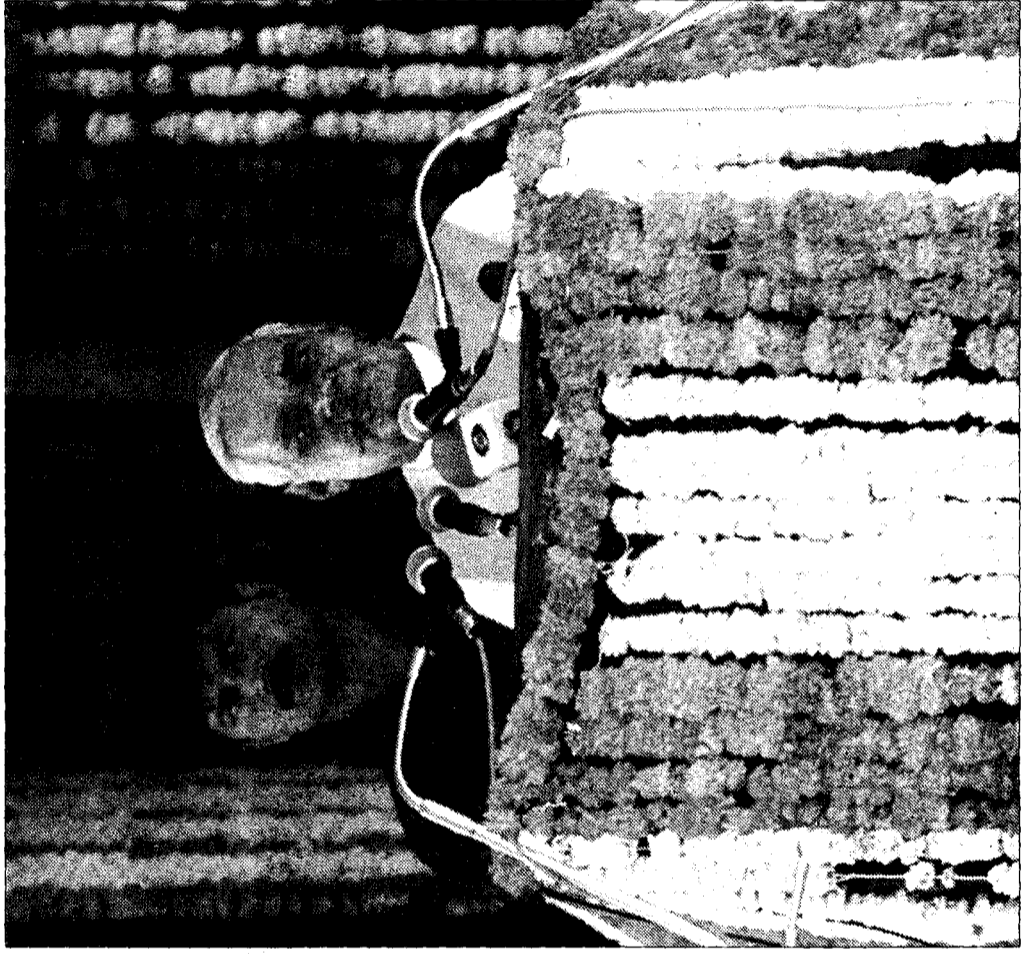
India's policies on WTO were very clear. "We will march ahead and progress but not at the cost of others."

Mr Vajpayee urged the Opposition to join hands with his government in nation-building and asked them not to create obstacles. Progress of nation should be of paramount concern to one and all, he said.

The Prime Minister said *Swadeshi* was a mantra during freedom struggle and five decades after gaining freedom, India had today become truly independent. "We do not need foreign funds and even do not desire to borrow them but if comes then you cannot stop it. Only because the country was independent it can take its own decisions. Protest is a useful weapon but how much can we use it depends on our economic strength..."

The chief minister, Mr Sushil Kumar Shinde, said the weapon of *swadeshi andolan* was raised 50 years ago and was relevant even today. Welcoming the Prime Minister, Mr Shinde said he would not approach Mr Vajpayee with his problems on this occasion but would go to Delhi to seek an audience with him on resolving issues concerning Mumbai and Maharashtra.

The joint convener of Swadeshi Jagran Manch, Mr S Gurumurthy, said the Swadeshi Mela was like presenting India to itself and to the world.



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee addresses a gathering at the inauguration of an expressway in Ahmedabad on Tuesday. — AFP

NRI MEET HIGH ON HYPE, CONFUSION

PM opens door to diaspora

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 9. — “*Jab jee chahe tab aa jana, hamare dwar sada khulen hain* (come when you feel like, our doors are always open),” is how Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee welcomed the Indian diaspora in his inimitable style as he inaugurated the first ever *Pravasi Bharatiya Divas* (Overseas Indians Day). The Prime Minister’s ‘gift’ of dual citizenship for NRIs and people of Indian origin (PIOs) in certain countries brought thunderous applause and some tears of joy among the participants from overseas.

That was the tenor of the first gathering of NRIs and PIOs from across the world (about 2,000 people from 66 countries) — high on hype, nostalgia and nationalistic sentiment, but low on content and rather confused in terms of what each category expected of the other.

“We invite you not only to share our vision of India in the new millennium, but also to help us shape its contours,” Mr Vajpayee said. “We do not want your riches, but the richness of your experience.”

The Prime Minister was followed by speakers who spoke of the greatness of their host country while extolling the greatness of the land of their ancestors — India.

There was little in common except the shared heritage of Indianness (what the foreign minister said was the *Hindustani dil*) in the experience of the descendants of indentured labourers who were sent to sugar and rubber plantations under British rule

around 150 years ago, and the highly-educated ‘brain drainers’ who went abroad in search of fame and fortune in the post-independence era, after having studied at Indian Institutes of Technology and so on. This was aptly summed by Mr Mewa Ramgobin, a South African parliamentarian, when he called it the difference between the “Silicon

Valley graduates and the indentured labour graduates”. But, he added both have been assimilated into the mainstream of their host countries after several generations of trial.

Officials, however, said a “beginning” has been made and gradually more concrete forms of cooperation could emerge, once this kind of meet is organised into an annual framework that is being envisaged.

The first few proposals out of close to 160 recommendations by the special group on NRIs were announced today — dual citizenship for PIOs in around seven countries, regular forums for meetings, a compulsory insurance scheme for Indian workers migrating to the Gulf region, a welfare fund for overseas workers, and the reservation of seats in educational institutions for children of NRIs in the Gulf.

Mr Rajat Gupta, CEO of Mackinsey, a leading management consultancy, used the simile of the banyan tree to symbolise what India and its 20 million-strong diaspora meant to each other. But the vision beyond shade and longevity, which the hoary tree signifies, appeared hazy.



Dual citizenship on limited offer

NEW DELHI, Jan. 9. —The Centre will make appropriate legislation for the grant of dual citizenship to PIOs from seven countries before the Budget session, foreign secretary Mr Kanwal Sibal said.

The countries are likely to be the USA, Britain, Canada, Singapore, Australia, New Zealand and the West Indies. Pakistan, Bangladesh and West Asian nations will be excluded.

Mrs Krishna Bose, parliamentary standing committee on external affairs chairperson, said the proposal would create controversy in Parliament. — SNS

More reports on page 6

10 JAN 2003

Drive to flush out illegal immigrants

States agree to identity cards

OUR SPECIAL
CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Jan. 7: Swivelling the spotlight back on foreigners overstaying in India, the Centre today obtained concurrence from states on issuing citizens' identity cards and announced the launch of a three-month drive from April to flush out illegal immigrants.

The multi-purpose identity cards will be issued on the basis of a proposed national citizens' register.

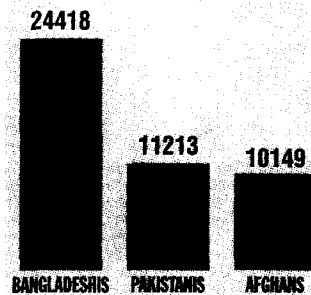
A pilot project for the identity cards will be launched in specific areas in 13 states, including Bengal, Assam and Tripura, which have a sizeable number of immigrants from Bangladesh. If the finance ministry releases Rs 14 crore needed for the preliminary round covering 28.5 lakh people, the identity card project will get off the ground on April 1.

The consensus on the identity cards emerged at a national conference of chief secretaries and directors-general of police, where deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani launched an offensive against foreigners overstaying in India.

"There is no reason why our states should be soft on them. Immediate steps should be taken to identify them, locate them and throw them out," Advani said.

STAYING PUT

Foreigners who entered India in 2001 and overstayed



Based on a government reply in the Rajya Sabha

The deputy Prime Minister, who is also in charge of internal security as Union home minister, voiced concern "over 11,500 Pakistanis and 1.5 crore Bangladeshis illegally staying in India" and directed state governments to launch a special drive to "detect and deport them as they posed a serious threat to national security".

The Centre wants the special drive to begin in April and continue till June, but sources said states like Bengal, which had earlier expressed reservations against such operations, have not yet agreed to the proposal.

A similar drive a few years ago in Maharashtra targeting illegal immigrants from Bangladesh had stirred a controversy. Several political parties

and human rights organisations had then alleged that the flushout was being misused to harass the minority community.

But home secretary N. Gopalaswami today sought to allay such apprehensions, saying nodal officers would be appointed to monitor the special drive.

Estimates put the number of illegal Bangladeshi immigrants in India at 20 million, out of which over 10 million are in Assam and Bengal alone.

The Centre has also promised to provide Rs 45 crore in three years to each district in nine states, including Jharkhand, affected by Left-wing extremism.

Advani, who had promised funds to fight Naxalites when he visited Jharkhand recently, said the Centre had decided to adopt a multi-pronged strategy to deal with the menace.

The conference also revived a proposal to set up a unit called the Federal Law Enforcement Agency (FLEA) but several states opposed it, fearing that it would encroach on their jurisdiction. The proposal was discussed last year also by the same conference but did not make any headway.

Some states contended that the CBI was already doing the job and, hence, another agency will only duplicate the work. The home secretary declined to name the dissenting states.

8 JAN 2003

India to fight terror war alone: Advani

Statesman News Service

HYDERABAD, Jan. 5. — Mr LK Advani has said India will fight terrorism on its own and ensure that normalcy returns to J&K. It, however, wants other countries to stand by their statements against terrorism.

"The least they can do... is remain faithful to their affirmations not to support or tolerate, in any way, states that are known to shelter, finance, aid and instigate terrorist organisations that have openly declared India as their target," he said. "We wish Western nations act on their own assertions after the 11 September terrorist attacks on the USA — namely that they fight terrorism wherever and under whatever pretext it operates."

The Deputy Prime Minister was speaking at the inauguration of the CII-AP Partnership Summit, the second successive one in Hyderabad and the third in a row in south India.

He drew a parallel between the recent J&K elections and those held in Pakistan. "Unlike in Pakistan, no party or leader in India was threatened with 'dire consequences' if he did not 'fall in'. Here candidates were threatened and killed."

He obliquely referred to Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. "The world has now realised that the ouster of Taliban from Afghanistan has not meant the exit or the final defeat of terrorist groups in this region. Today it is not a secret anymore as to where the epicentre of international terrorism has shifted."

He repeated India's stand to stamp out terrorism in the country with its own resources. "People ask me if J&K will return

'Gujarat riots an aberration'

HYDERABAD, Jan. 5. — Mr LK Advani today said the violence in Gujarat was an aberration. "It is now behind us. We remain wedded to our commitment of a peaceful, harmonious, inclusive and secular nation that celebrates its diversity but is determined to defend its unity at all costs." Flag flak for Advani. CPI-M general secretary Mr HS Surjeet today condemned Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani for "promoting the BJP-RSS brand of secularism", and appealed to all "secular forces" to join hands to fight the Hindutva agenda which he said was being passed off as "cultural nationalism", adds a report from Delhi. In a statement, the CPI-M general secretary termed as "highly objectionable" Mr Advani's recent observations that the Ashoka Chakra in the National Flag was a symbol of Buddhism. — SNS

to normalcy. J&K will definitely return to normalcy. We will see to it that it does."

The four day Partnership Summit 2003 has the theme 'Networking Businesses — Linking Nations' with 800 participants from 23 countries.

The Deputy Prime Minister urged the international business community to lend its influential voice to strengthen the resolve of the global community to effectively fight the menace, "especially by exerting pressure on their respective governments to isolate and turn the heat on states that sponsor terrorism"

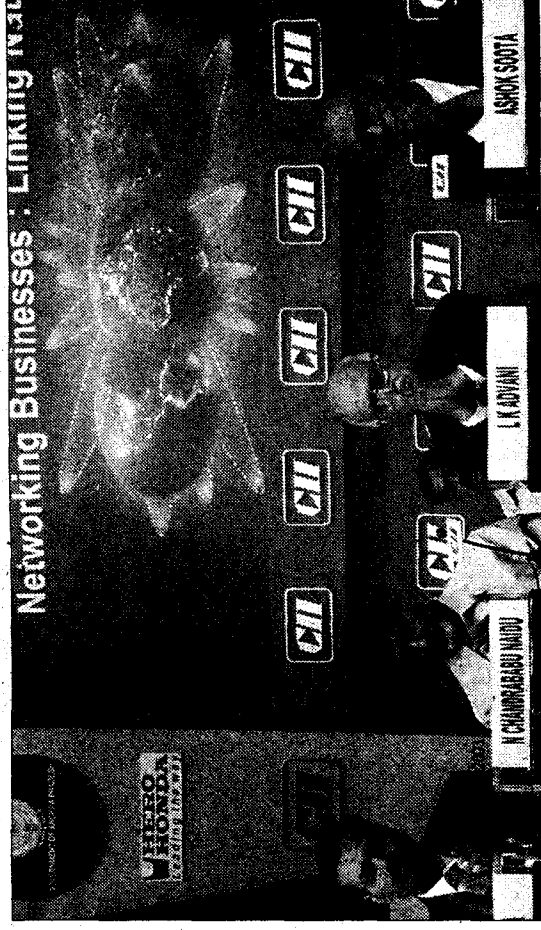
Digital Deputy PM thrills all

Statesman News Service

HYDERABAD, Jan. 5. — Mr LK Advani regaled the captains of industry at the CII-AP Partnership Summit by recalling his "digital encounter" and said it was a journey to the present "Connectivity Revolution", as it is referred to by the Prime Minister.

He put to shade the computer savvy Mr N Chandrababu Naidu, who, moments earlier, gave a computer-aided presentation.

Mr Advani said that a friend presented him with a digital diary in 1985. Four years later at a party conference in Mumbai, some colleagues invited him for a function. He took out his digital diary to check if he was free but someone took his photograph while he was do-



(Left to right) Former president of the Confederation of Indian Industry Mr Sanjiv Goenka, Andhra Pradesh chief minister Mr Chandrababu Naidu, Mr LK Advani and CII president Mr Ashok Soota at the inaugural session of the CII Partnership Summit in Hyderabad on Sunday. — AFP

ing so. "The next day, a leading Mumbai daily published the photograph with the caption 'Mr Advani, is this swadeshi?'," the Deputy PM said, sending the audience into peals of laughter.

Mr Advani said his concept of swadeshi was not exclusive, but it absorbed technological advancements from around the world. He said these days photographers look out for remarkable photo-ops. "Like a leader yawning or scratching

his head. They use these on an appropriate occasion with an appropriate caption". Mr Advani then recalled the "traditional image" India had in the international arena. In 1972, a professor in Australia asked him if there were universities in India. Around the same time in Moscow a lady who spotted him wearing a kurta asked him why he did not have a turban. When he said no, she asked him, "From Raj Kapoor's India?"

Mr Advani also wondered why a book on Mr Bill Gates in the early 90s was titled on his riches instead of portraying him as the man who introduced software.

"When an India director (Shekar Kapur) is chosen to make a film on Mr Nelson Mandela, it just goes to show how the talent in India's cinema business is also 'linking nations' in its own unique ways". He referred to the Ramoji Film City here as the country's best film facility.

Mr Advani also wondered why a book on Mr Bill Gates in the early 90s was titled on his riches instead of portraying him as the man who introduced software.

Nuke button rests in the PM's hands

No first use doctrine but option open in case of bio/chemical war; National Security Advisor heads council to implement orders

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JANUARY 4

OVER four years after Pokharan II, the Government formally placed the nuclear button in the hands of the Prime Minister and outlined its command and control structure for its nuclear arsenal.

After a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security this evening, the Government reiterated its nuclear doctrine that is based on no-first strike.



political council, headed by the Prime Minister, which will be the "sole body which can authorise the use of nuclear weapons."

Helping the Political Council will be an executive council chaired by the National Security Advisor that will feed the Political Council with all key inputs and also "execute the directives given by the Political Council."

While the nuclear button has been placed with the political leadership, the military structure was also formalised today with the CCS

Chain of command

- Political council, headed by PM, alone can authorise use of nuclear weapons
- Once it decides, executive council, headed by National Security Advisor, will carry out directives
- Commander-in-chief, Strategic Forces Command, to manage and administer nuclear and strategic forces

Highlights of nuclear doctrine

- No first use
- Build, maintain credible minimum deterrent
- Retaliation to be massive, inflicting "unacceptable damage"
- No attacks on non-nuke states but option open if attacked even by bio/chemical weapons

approving the appointment of a Commander-in-Chief for the newly established Strategic Forces Command, the body that will now take control, manage and administer all "strategic forces".

The decision to reiterate the "No first use" doctrine also puts to rest a school of thought in strategic circles that had been advocating its review. While a certain section of the country's strategic leadership had called for adopting a "first use" policy, the doctrine now banks on a

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Nuke button rests in Vajpayee's hands

"nuclear retaliation to a first strike will be massive and designed to inflict unacceptable damage."

The CCS, comprising the PM, the Home, Defence, External, Finance ministers along with the deputy chairman of the planning commission had a long list of "special invitees" who attended today's meeting.

Besides the three service chiefs who gave extensive

presentations on the pros and cons of the nuclear command and threat perceptions, other key figures including the defence secretary and National Security Advisor Brajesh Mishra were also present.

Incidentally, the Air Force has already attached a senior air force officer — Air Marshal T M Asthana

— in anticipation of a formal announcement of the Strategic Forces Com-

mand. Asthana, who had been moved from the Southern Air Command, had been attached to air headquarters holding charge of the Bangalore-based Air Force Training Command is now slated to take over as the first Commander-in-Chief of the new command.

While announcing the formal structure — eagerly awaited after a GoM had recommended it sometime ago — the CCS has reiterated its nuclear doctrine. Key points include a nuclear retaliatory attacks in the event of a major attack on India or Indian forces anywhere, be it nuclear, biological or chemical.

It reiterates its promise to maintain a moratorium on nuclear tests and a continuance of strict controls on export of nuclear and missile related materials and technologies.

Goa message

The same, reassuring Vajpayee

Good auguries for India in 2003 — the Prime Minister remains firmly committed to using his authority against those in his own party and in the wider political fraternity who have a habit of regressing a few centuries while sermonising. The message from Goa is indirect only in so far as direct name calling tied the PM's hand. There's little ambiguity over Vajpayee's stand — that he genuinely abhors the hijacking of one of the most catholic and tolerant of religions, which is actually more a way of life, by false ideologues. As if to make all of us doubly certain, the VHP said it was upset by the PM's new year message. And the RSS spoke of the "real Hindu", ignoring that it was Vajpayee's focus, too. The PM got it right though. The angst shown by the parivar over the PM's observations indicates the responsibility senior BJP leaders have as 2003 goes through an extensive electoral cycle. Praveen Togadia and his ilk will have to be reined in and, if necessary, the strong arm of the law applied in all its severity, as when plans were aborted to celebrate the Ayodhya yatra in Gujarat. The BJP cannot expect the PM to intervene every time the trident gets too sharp. Time for Advani and co to take on the parivar hardliners on their own steam. The Deputy Prime Minister especially has been far less vocal and far more circumspect in using his authority than he can and should. Whether or not this reflects the alleged "ideological" and "temperamental" differences between the PM and DPM is irrelevant. Advani has the second most important job in public affairs and he is duty bound to speak up against mischief makers.

The PM's Goa message also addressed the issue of "secularism". Hindutva as he sees it, is not antithetical to secularism. He is right because Hinduism as it is practiced, notwithstanding the best efforts of the trident crowd, has in fact been the guarantor of secularism in India. He is also right because politicians and most Muslim community leaders have interpreted secularism to mean the community, so rich in its past cultural contributions, can be politically and socially ghettoised. That guarantees Muslims often vote en bloc but it also unconscionably delays the community's modernisation. Five decades after independence, there's still no viable middle class among the 100 million-plus Indian Muslims. This is a tragedy and the responsibility for that lies in part with those who cannot start a political argument without uttering "secularism" ten times. Calling for political and social modernisation of Indian Muslims should not be a political taboo. Praveen Togadia and the Shahi Imam should not be allowed to become excuses for each other.

THE STATESMAN

1-2 JAN 2003

Atal's picture-perfect Hindutva

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 31: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee reiterated his government's commitment to the principle of secularism and clarified that Hindutva, as he understood it, was an inclusionist concept which affirmed that "India belongs to all, and all belong to India. It means that all Indians have equal rights and equal responsibilities".

In a rebuttal to the likes of K.S. Sudarshan, Ashok Singhal and Praveen Togadia and the BJP hardliners, Vajpayee's New Year message from Goa, released today, celebrated India's unity-in-diversity spirit and reinterpreted Hindutva as a broad-based and progressive concept "which is forward-looking, not one that seeks to take us back".

The Prime Minister's musings, titled "Let us celebrate — and strengthen — our Indian-ness", were placed in the context of Gujarat, especially his reflections on Hindutva and Bharateeyata which formed the bulk of the text. Commenting on the "two distinct voices, which have become louder after the Gujarat elections", Vajpayee wrote: "On

the one hand, secularism is being pitted against Hindutva under the belief that the two are antithetical to one another. This is incorrect and untenable. Secularism is a concept of the State, enjoining upon it the duty to show respect for all faiths and to practise no discrimination among citizens on the basis of their beliefs. In this sense, India has been secular since the beginning of her known history. We chose to remain wedded to secularism even when Pakistan was carved out on the basis of the spurious and communal Two-Nation Theory. This could not have been possible if the majority of Indians were not secular."

Vajpayee's part political and part philosophical musings were buttressed with quotations from Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore and Aurobindo. He maintained that Hindutva presented a "vibrant *darshan*" or an all-encompassing view of human life and regretted that it was projected by some in a "narrow, rigid, and extremist manner".

"Hindutva is an integral understanding of the entire Creation, showing the way both to the Here and the Hereafter. It emphasises the inseparable relationship between the individual



Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the beach in Goa on Tuesday. (PTI)

and society, as well as between man's material and spiritual needs. Hindutva is liberal, liberating and brooks no ill-will, hatred or violence among different communities on any ground," the Prime Minister wrote.

Vajpayee's version of Hindutva was as much a put-down of RSS *sarsanghchalak* Sudarshan, who protested against President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's proposal to inaugurate a Jesuits' conference in Calcutta, and the Vishwa

Hindu Parishad — whose senior leader Acharya Giriraj Kishore declared that cows' lives were more precious than Dalits' after the Jhajjar massacre in Haryana — as his own minister M.M. Joshi for whom Vedic maths was

the touchstone of knowledge.

He said Hindutva was "that which makes us capable of meeting the challenges of the modern world, not one that is stuck in the grooves of the past; that which is reform-minded, and not one that protects obscurantism and injustice, against which all the reformers of the past have fought. If understood and practised in this enlightened sense, which is how Swami Vivekananda and other great patriots propounded it, the current controversy over Hindutva will be seen as wholly unnecessary".

This is the second time Vajpayee has chosen to go against his ideological fraternity's beliefs and expatiate on the theme of secularism in his prime ministerial tenure. But the timing of the message falls into a pattern: the first time he waxed eloquent on secularism was in the Kumarakom musings penned in December 2000 when he was holidaying in Kerala's backwaters.

Days before, he played to the saffron gallery by declaring that the Ram temple was a "manifestation of nationalist sentiment" — a statement which upset the NDA allies.

■ Excerpts from PM's musings, Page 6

'NATIONAL CONSENSUS NEEDED ON POWER SECTOR REFORMS'

Isolate states sponsoring terrorism, says Advani

By S. Nagesh Kumar

HYDERABAD, JAN. 5. The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, today asserted that the NDA Government was determined to end the menace of terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir and urged businessmen in Western countries to lend their influential voice to exert pressure on their Governments to turn the heat on states sponsoring terror.

He said terrorism did end in Punjab though, at one time, it appeared that the killing of political leaders would go on forever. "It is going to end in Kashmir too and we are determined to stamp out terrorism from our soil," he asserted.

Making no secret of India's resentment at the way Western countries were soft-peddalling Pak-sponsored terrorism, he said the least they could do was to remain faithful to their affirmations to fight terrorism by not supporting states aiding terrorist outfits that had openly declared India as their target.

Mr. Advani said Pakistan's "self-serving propaganda that what was happening in Kashmir was a 'freedom struggle' had failed to convince the world community which had also seen the stark contrast between the elections in J&K and the ones in Pakistan. Unlike in Pakistan, no party or leader in India was threatened with 'dire conse-



The Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani, watching the inauguration of the Partnership Summit 2003 by the Confederation of Indian Industry president, Ashok Soota, in Hyderabad on Sunday, as the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu (extreme right), and the former CII president, Sanjeev Goenka (middle), look on. — AP

quences' if he did not fall in line".

Inaugurating the Confederation of Indian Industry's (CII) ninth Partnership Summit here, the Deputy Prime Minister said the scope of reforms would now extend beyond the economic framework to areas like administration, judiciary and governance to enable businesses to grow faster and in a hassle-free environment.

He was unhappy with the slow pace of reforms in the

power sector and called for a national consensus on the issue. He attributed this to the tendency of political parties to follow power reforms in States where they were at the helm and oppose them where they were in the Opposition and quoted the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, N. Chandrababu Naidu's lament on this score at the National Development Council meetings. "My party, the BJP, is also guilty of this," he confessed.

He made it clear that the NDA Government would not imitate any particular model of reforms, be it on the issue of foreign direct investment or disinvestment of public sector undertakings. It would be guided primarily by national interests and fair competition.

Mr. Advani sought to project a 'feel good' message to the gathering, which included captains of the Indian industry and those from 23 other countries. He said there was remarkable stability in the country on the political front, the economy was resilient, Gujarat violence was firmly behind the nation and terrorism was under check.

Mr. Advani called for major reforms in the system of agriculture markets, the PDS and in the FCI's functioning to tackle the problem of food surplus.

Mr. Naidu, in a power point presentation, referred to the vertical growth in the BPO (business processes outsourcing) market with the total number of U.S. jobs moving offshore rising to 3.3 million by 2015. He did not see the flight of professionals from India as 'brain drain' saying that it would be 'brain gain' when they returned.

The CII president, Ashok Soota, said India would be among the top 20 economies if it addressed issues relating to the achievement of a two-digit growth in GDP.

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