

Raman orders CBI inquiry into Jogi tapes

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
RAIPUR, DECEMBER 7

WITHIN hours of assuming office in Chhattisgarh, Chief Minister Raman Singh today ordered a CBI inquiry into the Ajit Jogi tape case that had caught the former CM off-fearing bribes to newly-elected BJP MLAs for their defection.

The BJP government's move worsens Jogi's problems after the Congress suspended him last night. The former CM already has a CBI chargesheet pending against him in a Delhi court accusing him of "dishonesty and fraudulently" using a forged IB document to tarnish the agency's image.

At a press conference after the swearing-in ceremony, Singh said the state Anti-Corruption Bureau had already registered an FIR against three accused — Ajit Jogi, his son Amit Jogi and Lok Sabha MP PR. Khunte. "Since the issue related to defection and involves state's caretaker chief minister, we have taken a decision to hand over investigations to the CBI," he declared.

Singh said the documentary and material evidence, which include cash, audio cassette and a letter written by

Jogi, will be forwarded to the CBI for thorough inquiry so that the accused are brought to book. Asked about the chances of immediate arrests, Singh said: "Now it's up the CBI."

Last evening, Union Law Minister Arun Jaitley had alleged that Jogi had offered Rs 20 lakh to state BJP vice-president Vitender Pandey for BJP MLAs to defect and stake their claim to form an alternative government with Congress support. Baliram Kashyap, a sitting BJP MP from Bastar, was proposed to be projected as chief minister.

Jaitley had also released Jogi's handwritten letter addressed to the Governor, which said the 37-member Congress Legislature Party (CLP) would extend outside support to a government that was to be headed by senior BJP leader Baliram Kashyap. Pandey, who was present at the press conference displayed the cash, said the money was paid to him in two installments — one of which was personally delivered by Jogi and son Amit Jogi.

He said it was BJP MP PR. Khunte, who had defected to the Congress before the polls, who contacted him on behalf of Jogi (this conversa-



Chhattisgarh Governor Lt. Gen. K.M. Seth administers the oath of office and secrecy to Raman Singh at a ceremony in Raipur on Sunday. Express photo

tion is also on tape). "I brought this issue to the notice of senior party leaders, who asked me to lay a trap. I put a voice recorder on my telephone and asked Khunte to let Jogi speak to me. Jogi spoke and the deal was struck. The first delivery of cash (Rs 20 lakh) was made in the morning on December 6 and the second was brought by Jogi and his son late in the evening."

Kashyap added that the total amount paid was approximately Rs 45 lakh. He also secured the entry of Preyam Paikra, daughter of BJP legislature party Nand Kumar Sai, when the BJP National Executive was meeting in Raipur. Before Assembly elections, he also engineered the defection of PR. Khunte — a Dalit BJP MP who used to wear a black scarf as a symbol of his pledge to remove Jogi from the CM's post.

...sworn in as Chhattisgarh Chief Minister

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
RAIPUR, DECEMBER 7

RAMAN Singh, BJP's Chhattisgarh unit president, was today sworn in as the state's Chief Minister. He was administered the oath of office and secrecy by Governor Lt Gen (Retired) K.M. Seth at the Police Lines Ground here.

The 51-year-old Singh led the BJP to a landslide victory in Chhattisgarh's first Assembly polls. Though he was to take oath with 14 other ministers, including a deputy chief minister, party squabbles led him to abandon the plan. "I will be going to Delhi on December 9 and will discuss the cabinet expansion issue with Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee, Deputy PM L.K. Advani and party chief Venkatesh Naithu," Singh told reporters.

The swearing-in was attended by Advani, Gujarat CM Narendra Modi and half-a-dozen union ministers but was marked by mismanagement as BJP workers stormed the venue. The district administration was helpless in handling the crowd, which was shouting anti-Jogi slogans.

Former Union Minister Dilip Singh Judeo, who was also present, remained a star attraction. Raman Singh has promised to provide a corruption-free and responsive administration in the state to free it from terror, poverty and backwardness.

He said farmers' issues would be given highest priority and anti-people policies of the previous government will be reviewed.

The new CM hinted at implementing POA to tackle the Naxal menace and give more teeth to the law against religious conversions in the state. About district collectors and other government servants, who were on BJP's hitlist for their partisan role, Singh said the government would give them sufficient time to improve their functioning. And if they fail, they will face the music, the Chief Minister warned.

Naxalite belt, Adivasi vote ruin Jogi's chances

Statesman News Service

RAIPUR, Dec. 4. — The Naxalite belt of Bastar in Chhattisgarh and the Adivasi vote bank ruined the chances of Mr Ajit Jogi retaining power at the Mantralaya.

Despite having initiated development work, which even the state BJP leadership has admitted, the crafty Mr Jogi lost the electoral battle, not to speak of his credibility in the eyes of the Congress leadership and Mrs Sonia Gandhi.

Mr Jogi, who had declared before the polls that the BJP's battle was with him and not the Congress, couldn't ensure victory of a single seat in the Naxalite belt of Bastar, Surguja, Jashpur and Dantewada. Of the 20 seats spread across this area, the Congress couldn't bag a single seat. The BJP had cleverly projected Mr Jogi as one who had colluded with the Naxalites to win over the area. The well-oiled BJP machinery succeeded in the process of alienating the Congress from the voters who are a terrorised lot because of Naxalite uprisings.

The seat difference between the BJP and Congress lends credence to the fact that Mr Jogi lost the Assembly polls because of this. With the BJP having 51



VOTED OUT: Mr Ajit Jogi

seats in its kitty, the Congress is 17 seats less. This can be compared with the fact that the Congress got none of the 20 seats in the Naxalite belt. Asked about this Mr Jogi said: "I don't want to say that the BJP was hand-in-gloves with the Naxalites. But we couldn't make a dent in the Naxalite belt".

Besides this, Mr Dilip Singh Judeo, the tainted minister, went ahead, undeterred by the controversy dogging him, and campaigned in the Adivasi belt of Jashpur and got dividends. Even after being forced to resign as a union minister, Mr Judeo toured as many as 72 assembly seats, of the 90 in the state, expressing his

concern over the plight of the Adivasis. He got results, as did his party. Voters of the tribal areas put the entire Judeo episode on the backburner and threw their weight behind the saffron party. Surprisingly, the urban electorate showed its disenchantment not with Mr Judeo's alleged scandals but those allegedly involving Mr Jogi and his son.

Even though the outgoing Congress chief minister believes that it's only the BJP and Congress who are going to remain in Chhattisgarh, he is at pains to accept the fact that the Nationalist Congress Party, led by Mr VC Shukla, did cut into the Congress votebank, though the NCP, despite initial projections, couldn't get a single seat in the polls. In several Assembly seats, the NCP played the spoiler by cutting into the Congress votebank and ensured Mr Jogi's exit from Mantralaya.

Mr Jogi today admitted that it was his "personal defeat" and that he would "respect the people's verdict" and occupy the Opposition benches. Such words come from an outgoing chief minister who had told this correspondent in August this year that the Congress would get "two-thirds majority in the 1 December polls".

Victory or defeat: either way, it would be Jogi's

By Rajesh Ramachandran
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Raipur: If the Congress is defeated in the Chhattisgarh elections, Ajit Jogi would only have himself to blame for snatching defeat from the jaws of victory.

In this tough three-cornered fight, Mr Jogi has projected himself as the tallest leader in the entire state, probably bigger than the Congress and its president Sonia Gandhi.

Nowhere in the country would a Congress chief minister dare put up his own cutouts dwarfing Gandhi's. And instead of the elec-

tion debate veering around the Congress' claims of development, he let it be centred around himself. "His image is so larger than life that anyone can take potshots at him," is how a senior bureaucrat explained the electioneering in the state.

For instance, Raj Kishore Patel from Makhri in Kanker district is not a BJP supporter. He is just an upper OBC, a Kurmi who is not comfortable with the idea of Mr Jogi as CM. He firmly believes that Jogi has got Dilip Singh Judeo trapped in the bribery scandal.

Of course, Mr Patel differentiates between someone laying a trap and Mr Judeo walking into it. Yet, for those who do not love him, Mr Jogi is a master manipulator who can never go wrong.

Even a few of the BJP leaders, who had come vis-

iting Mr Judeo in his Jashpur house, were in awe of Mr Jogi: "Yeh tej hain; zyada tej hain (He is sharp; too sharp)."

In fact, by not projecting a chief ministerial candidate, the BJP has let the anti-Jogi or anti-advaita sentiments tilt toward itself. Unlike the BJP, even the Nationalist Congress Party seeks votes in the name of V C Shukla.

But Congress leaders claim that this Jogi-versus-the rest match is going in its favour because many ministers who do not have a good record are going to win simply because the focus of all attention is Mr Jogi. They also feel that the BJP is neglecting local issues by projecting Mr Jogi as the sole villain.

But the presence of the NCP could disturb local calculations. Sure, like Mohammed Aslam, an autorick-

shaw driver in Raipur, many feel that they won't be fooled by the NCP's attempt to split the Congress votes. Yet, the highly visible and high voltage campaign makes one feel that this party could make a difference in the voting pattern.

In fact, even in remote Mariguda village of Bastar, jeeps with the NCP banner and loudspeakers were zipping in out of the narrow lanes. And Hilarius Ekka, a school teacher, did feel that the NCP is spending a lot of money and hence could get some votes.

Again the NCP's target of attack is also just Mr Jogi. When most other issues have receded into the background and only his personality matters, a victory for the BJP would be that of the organisation, while a Congress win would be that of Mr Jogi.



Ajit Jogi

**Battlefield
Chhattisgarh**

Jogi turns tables on BJP

HT-4
1/11
J. S. Chatterjee

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, October 31

CHHATTISGARH CHIEF Minister Ajit Jogi on Friday sought to turn the tables on the BJP by accusing it of violating the model code of conduct when he called on the Election Commission to give his version of the "fabricated complaints" against him on issues like the distribution of school bags.

The CM, who accused the BJP of misusing the official machinery and the media, was upset because his version had not been solicited. He urged the EC to hear both parties before acting on complaints.

In a 10-page memorandum to the EC, Jogi charged that the BJP had lodged "frivolous and false" complaints against him. While presenting his version at a 45-minute meeting with CEC J.M. Lyngdoh and the two ECs, Jogi said he was



Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Ajit Jogi talks to reporters outside the EC office in New Delhi on Friday.

PTI

surprised and shocked that the EC gave credence to the BJP's "preposterous insinuations" and showed an "eagerness to arrive at conclusions" without hearing the other side. He charged

that the BJP's manifesto — *Aarop Patra* — depicts him as "Hitler", questions his ancestry, portrays him as a missionary and Pope's nominee and shows him beating up different sections of

MP elections

AHEAD OF the Assembly polls in MP, Jhabua district's borders along Gujarat and Rajasthan have been sealed till December 7. The collector on Friday said in view of the geographical location of the district, the administration had decided to seal the area to maintain law and order. He said 465 out of a total 870 polling booths had been declared sensitive and additional security deployed there.

PTI, Jhabua

people. "I am shocked that the EC finds nothing objectionable in this," he said, adding that a booklet of the BJP's women's cell carries a cartoon of him raping a woman.

EC turns down Jogi plea on transfers

■ Sets Nov 4 for visit; BJP buries past, asks CEC to check the CM

ENS & AGENCIES
NEW DELHI/RAIPUR,
NOVEMBER 2

AFTER rejecting Chief Minister Ajit Jogi's plea to reconsider its decision to transfer the Collectors of Bastar and Jashpur, both accused of violating the model code of conduct, the Election Commission will be visiting Chhattisgarh on November 4 to review poll arrangements.

The announcement comes a day after the BJP urged Chief Election Commissioner J.M. Lyngdoh to play a more "proactive role in checking malpractices by Jogi".

The BJP, the main Opposition in Chhattisgarh, which had complained against the two Collectors, had sent a fresh complaint to the Commission yesterday, alleging that the state government defied the EC in "delaying" implementation of the officers' transfer orders. State BJP president Raman Singh and Minister of State for Environment Dilip Singh Judeo faxed the complaint to the Commission's office on Saturday evening.



Interestingly, it was not too long ago when the BJP itself was at loggerheads with the EC and Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi sought to hammer home the Christian identity of the Chief Election Commissioner by using his full name, James Michael Lyngdoh. Post-Gujarat, the party's perception seems to have undergone a complete change. Today, when Jogi faces charges of forging a tribal identity, BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu has called upon Lyngdoh to play a "pro-active role in checking malpractices by Jogi".

"Jogi is a habitual violator of rules and regulations. He organised a dharna in front of the PM's residence, courted arrest and then gave a call for bandh. And now, he takes a large number of people to the EC for the purpose known only to him. This drama amounts to an intimidation of the EC and is aimed at covering his misdeeds. It is unbecoming on the

part of the CM to take resort to such an action." Naidu said.

Referring to the Chief Minister's effort to give a caste colour to the transfer of officers ordered by the EC, Naidu said: "Caste is no ground to determine malpractices. Jogi is threatening the Commission with his remarks on the issue."

During the visit, Lyngdoh and Election Commissioners T.S. Krishnamurthy and B.B. Tandon are expected to hold a series of meetings with political parties, as also top civil and police officials, on the poll arrangements, sources said.

Jogi after a meeting with the EC on Friday had charged the BJP with flooding the Commission with "frivolous, false and fabricated" complaints. He had accused the EC of not following the "principle of natural justice" while acting against his government.

Commission sources said it will react to Jogi's comments "at an appropriate time".

Divided Fronts

In Kerala, the UDF and the LDF are too busy fighting themselves to worry about the world

KERALA has had a long history of working with stable coalitions in government. While the two sides, the United Democratic Front and the Left Democratic Front, have seen partners come and go and while these partners have often quarrelled with each other, the internal discipline within the dominant party in each coalition — the Congress in the UDF and the CPM in the LDF — has helped ensure political stability. This may now be history given the manner in which both the CPM and the Congress are riven with internal factionalism. If it's the wily old fox, K. Karunakaran, versus the plodder A.K. Antony in the Congress, it has been the E.K. Nayanar and now V.S. Achutanandan versus his detractors in the CPM.

Thanks to this intense factionalism, the state's economic development has suffered. Just when it appeared that Antony was finally moving Kerala out of its cloistered past and its excessive dependence on rubber, spices and the Persian Gulf into cyberspace, and his Global Investors Meet marked a turning point in altering investor perception of the state, Karunakaran has thrown a spanner in the works with his old game

of nepotism and factionalism. On the other side, of the political divide, one faction within the CPM is busy hurling the favourite left abuse against another, dubbing one of its own a "CIA agent"! The target of attack, one of the architects of Kerala's "peoples' plan", T.M. Thomas Isaac. Formerly an economist from the prestigious research institute, the Centre for Development Studies, and now a member of the state assembly, Isaac is being charged with writing joint research papers with "foreign scholars" and of being associated with foreign funded non-governmental organisation. Shades of Murlu Manohar Joshi in the CPM? No less a radical scholar than Noam Chomsky has come to Isaac's rescue, admonishing Kerala's marxists for their xenophobia! Hopefully, the CPM's rank and file will appreciate the dangers of calling ideological detractors names, for what you do unto others, they can do to you.

If the Congress party's national leadership has to step in to rein in Antony's detractors, the CPM's national leadership must step in to rein in Isaac's. Kerala can do with a few more like Antony and Isaac.

INDIAN EXPRESS

22 JUL 2003

Kerala Antony Govt. rides out a storm

By Girish Menon

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JULY 21. The A.K. Antony-led United Democratic Front (UDF) Government in Kerala today surmounted three major political hurdles. The first one was crossed when the Congress leader and former Chief Minister, K. Karunakaran, gave up moves to make MLAs who support him form a separate bloc in the Assembly, after the All-India Congress Committee intervened with a carrot-and-stick approach. These MLAs voted in the Assembly today with the Government on the Appropriations Bill though they kept away from the debate on it.

The second hurdle was crossed following the decision of lorry owners to withdraw a six-day-old strike that had threatened to throw life in the State out of gear.

The third hurdle was crossed when the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) softened its stand against the Chief Minister and entrusted its leader, Panakkad Mohammedali Shihab Thangal, to take an appropriate decision on the issue of a statement that Mr. Antony had made last week with regard to what he saw as aggressive demands made by various minority communities in the State.

Mr. Karunakaran softened his

position when it became clear that he did not have the numbers in the Assembly. Moreover, the high command apparently threatened to expel from the party five MLAs owing allegiance to Mr. Karunakaran, including two who are Ministers. Mr. Karunakaran had got 22 of "his" MLAs to give in writing that they would sit as a separate bloc in the Assembly. Two MLAs made it clear that they were not for any move that might endanger the Government. Some of the other MLAs who had given the written commitment were not exactly happy at the turn of events, and they informed the president of the Kerala Pradesh Congress Committee, K. Muralidharan, who is Mr. Karunakaran's son, about this.

The AICC general secretary, Ahmed Patel, who is in charge of the affairs of the party in Ker-

ala, had advised Mr. Karunakaran this morning to desist from his moves and to sort out matters through discussions. He was reported to have said that if his advice was not followed, the high command would take disciplinary action against the truant MLAs.

While agreeing to maintain the *status quo*, Mr. Karunakaran made it clear that his faction's main demand was a change of leadership of the Government. Mr. Antony is his *bete noire*. The former Chief Minister spoke at a press conference of the "lapses" of the Antony Government, including his observations last week regarding the minority communities.

The IUML's pro-active moves to ensure that the UDF had the numbers to see it through the vote also apparently discouraged Mr. Karunakaran from go-

ing ahead with his threats. The IUML had directed seven of its members to be present in the House, and had made arrangements to bring in more if the need arose. The IUML's action indicated that it was not prepared to oust Mr. Antony through a vote in the Assembly.

The IUML working committee meeting in Kozhikode this evening passed a cryptic resolution stating that Mr. Thangal stood by his critical reactions to the Chief Minister's observations about the minority communities.

The IUML leaders, P.K. Kunhalikutty and E. Ahmed, said that the meeting had entrusted Mr. Thangal to take an appropriate decision on the issue. Mr. Antony had had a couple of telephone conversations with Mr. Thangal, which evidently helped cool tempers.

Cong. bid to mollify IUML in Kerala

By Our Special Correspondent

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM, JULY 19.

The All-India Congress Committee general secretary in charge of Kerala, Vayalar Ravi, and the United Democratic Front convener, Oommen Chandy, today launched efforts to mollify the Indian Union Muslim League leadership and prevent it from taking any drastic step at its coming working committee meeting in the wake of the Kerala Chief Minister, A.K. Antony's remarks on majority-minority equations.

The initiative is significant as it comes close on the heels of the veteran Congress leader, K. Karunakaran's closed-door meeting with the IUML supremo, Panakkad Sayyed Mohamedali Sihab Thangal. Mr. Karunakaran's overtures to the IUML from an anti-BJP and pro-minority plank has triggered a panic of sorts among the anti-

Karunakaran sections in the Congress and the current attempt, according to Congress circles, is to prevent Mr. Karunakaran from getting political leverage.

The IUML leadership appears to be in a dilemma. The party has dropped enough hints that it does not intend to unseat Mr. Antony. At the same time, it is under considerable pressure from its rank and file to take extreme positions if only to reassert its place in the UDF. At a different level, the party is also looking for a formula which would enable it to tackle the extreme elements in the community and the party and retain them in mainstream politics.

Senior IUML leaders say that the matter could be resolved if Mr. Antony talked to Mr. Thangal directly, but till late this evening that seemed unlikely.

Mr. Antony refused to comment. IUML leaders are also in

touch with other UDF leaders, including the Kerala Congress (M) leader, K.M. Mani.

Mr. Mani too held discussions with Mr. Thangal on Friday evening. Today, the Kerala Congress(M)'s steering committee meeting authorised Mr. Mani and party chairman, C.F. Thomas, to take an "appropriate decision" and decide on the future course of action. The cryptic statement not withstanding, the party leaders indicated that they were in no mood to unseat Mr. Antony and go along with the IUML if that party were to take an extreme stand.

News reports that Mr. Karunakaran's faction had demanded a postponement of the vote on the appropriation bill to be taken up by the Assembly on Monday prompted the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, M.M. Hassan to issue a whip to UDF MLAs, barring the IUML mem-

bers, to be present for the vote on Monday.

The IUML MLAs have been exempted because they have to be present for the working committee meeting in Kozhikode on Monday.

Mr. Hassan told presspersons that it was not possible to postpone the Assembly debate and the vote on the appropriation bill because it had been approved by the House.

The Karunakaran faction had not demanded in writing a postponement of the Assembly debate though the Congress chief whip, P.P. George, a Karunakaran supporter, had suggested such a move.

Mr. Karunakaran was also in the spotlight today when he attacked the Chief Minister for his remarks on majority-minority equations. He said he would wait till the IUML's decision on Monday before deciding his course of action.

QNDH ERE

20 JUL 2003

Deliberations continue on Kerala Cong. crisis

H.D. 11
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By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI APRIL 17. The Congress leadership today continued to deliberate on the course of action to be adopted in the wake of the developments in its Kerala unit.

The AICC general secretary in charge of the State, Ambika Soni, and the two observers, Gulam Nabi Azad and R. K. Dhawan, have made some recommendations to the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi.

The Congress president had asked the two observers and Ms. Soni to study the report sent by the KPCC chief, K. Muralidharan, besides inputs received from other sources, and suggest the course of action to be adopted. At the end of their consultations, the leaders said their recommendations were made "keeping in mind the discipline and unity of the party".

Mr. Muralidharan sent a detailed three-page report last night in which he has sought to absolve himself of any responsibility for the developments. He has reportedly argued that he did all that was asked for by the high command and ensured the victory of the official candidates. He is also reported to have pointed out that not only did he expel the rebel candidate, he had also directed the MLAs to vote for the official candidates. The central leadership, however, does appear to be unhappy with him.

However, the leadership is treading cautiously, considering the overall impact that its actions may have on the party and the Government in Kerala. Emerging from their meeting this evening, Ms. Soni, Mr. Dhawan and Mr. Azad emphasised the fact that "it is a political issue that has to be handled tactfully, keeping both the long term and short term interests of the party in

mind". The three leaders are expected to meet the Congress president on Friday morning. "It is now up to the Congress president to decide; she may accept our recommendation or amend it," Ms. Soni said, refusing to reveal the course of action they have suggested.

The Congress leadership has to address the twin issues of indiscipline and safeguarding the State Government from any adverse impact. It wants to act in a manner that shows that it does not condone indiscipline, without precipitating matters. The bottom line, according to Ms. Soni, would be to strengthen the party.

CPI(M) to keep off issue

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 17. The CPI(M) has decided to adopt a passive posture with regard to the political crisis being faced by the A.K. Antony-led United Democratic Front (UDF) Government in Kerala.

With the official Congress camp having survived the rebellion during the recent Rajya Sabha elections, the CPI(M) now prefers to keep a distance.

Briefing correspondents after a two-day politburo meeting here, the CPI(M) general secretary, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, said the party's objective was not to bring down the Antony Government, which was best left to the party concerned.

The Rajya Sabha poll results came around the time when the politburo was in session. Had the senior Congress leader, Karunakaran's candidate pulled it off, the CPI(M) would have had to swing into action.

18 APR 2003

THE HINDU

Jharkhand pulls plug on Koel Karo

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

9: 870.
Jharkhand

RANCHI, Aug. 30. — The Jharkhand government has decided to wind up the ambitious 710 MW Koel Karo hydro electric project because the terms of the National Hydro Power Corporation (NHPC) are not acceptable to them.

Chief minister Mr Arjun Munda said the electricity cost of Rs 7.92 per unit was not acceptable, adding that the cost would go up even further if the rehabilitation package prepared for those displaced was implemented.

The project, conceived in 1957 and cleared by the Bihar government in 1980, will now never see the light of day. The NHPC had been threatening to pull out of the project for while but the state government had, time and again, asked for more time to deliberate on the issue.

Sources said the government's decision to shelve the project was aimed at pacifying the 'tribal lobby' which has been vociferously opposing the project on the grounds that it would displace tribals.

Mr Munda said the project, if completed 20 years ago, would have served the purpose of the state. "But the then Bihar government was not interested at all in the project as a result of which the cost of the project has risen 10 times from Rs 350 crore initially to approximately Rs 3,500 crore today."

The chief minister pointed out that the NHPC was interested in a long-term agreement with the state government for the project but the steep cost prevented the government from going ahead. Mr Munda said the government would promote small hydel projects instead of thermal projects — "these small projects will pose little or no threat of displacement and electricity generated through these projects would reach farmers directly," he added. The NHPC has invested Rs 70 crore in Koel Karo.

■ Another report on page 7

31 AUG 2003

THE STATESMAN

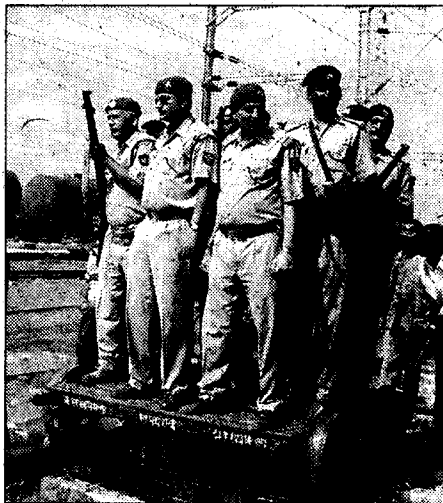
PWG bandh: Violence in Jharkhand, 21 held

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
RANCHI/JAMSHEDPUR, AUGUST 25

TWENTY-ONE people hailing from Andhra Pradesh and suspected to be members of the Peoples' War Group (PWG) were arrested from Naxal-hit Dumaria block in Jharkhand even as the state-wide bandh by the Jharkhand Disom Party in tribal-dominated areas affected life in the state.

They were detained for interrogation after two of them, Krishna Naidu and Babu Sayeed Waqar, were nabbed by residents of Vitharamda village in the block yesterday and handed over to police, SP Arun Oraon said. The other members, who claim to be fruit and seed vendors, were detained today from Ghat-sila in the district, he said.

Meanwhile, activists of the Maoist Communist Centre and the PWG, who called today's bandh, turned their ire on the Railways, damaging the engine of a goods train and beat up a driver near Daltonganj in Palamu. Four trucks were torched alongside the highway in Koderma, an engine of a goods train burnt in Mangra police station in Palamau and Kurla station in Dhanbad attacked with the result that the rail traffic on this section



Police patrol rail tracks during the bandh. PTI was brought to a halt for hours.

Elsewhere, vehicular traffic on the national and state highways remained paralysed. Even private and government schools in the capital didn't open. Loading and ferrying of coal from the mines of three public sector companies—CCL, ECL and BCCL—virtually came to a halt though life went on as usual in Ranchi, Jamshedpur, Hazaribagh, Dhanbad, Dumka, Sahebgunj, Pakur and Bokaro cities.



Violence kills 2 on Day II, Jharkhand fails the test

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
RANCHI, MAY 27

TWO people were killed, 14 others, including two policemen, injured and more than 170 arrested today during the controversial teachers' recruitment test here on the second day of the 48-hour Jharkhand bandh called by pro-domicile groups.

Deputy Commissioner Jai Shankar Tiwari said a petrol bomb was lobbed inside St Louis High School, an examination centre, at Harmu. Swift action by the strong contingent of security force brought the situation under control and no one was injured.

Unconfirmed reports said police opened fire at another centre in Namkum where a mob attempted to disrupt the test. Police had to resort to firing in four different places — the Ranchi College, Huluhundu,

Harmu and Samlong.

A Jamshedpur report said five persons, including a policeman, were injured when police had to fire in the air to scare away the protesters who had assembled near an examination centre in the Khasmahal area of East Singhbhum district.

About 400 activists, mostly from JMM led by its vice-presidents Champai Soren and Vidyut Mahato, arrived at the Shyama Prasad College centre to disrupt the test, SP Dr Arun Oraon said. Police had to fire in the air and use rubber bullets to disperse the activists. There were also reports that the bandh supporters fired several rounds during the clash, Oraon said.

Later, at a joint press conference with Education Secretary Amit Khare, Home Secretary J.B. Tubid, DGP R.R. Prasad and Additional ADGP B.D. Ram, Chief Sec-

retary A.K. Mishra said: "The test went off peacefully in most of the centres."

Asked if the two deaths were caused by police firing, Prasad said: "We are awaiting the postmortem reports to know for sure." PTI reports Tubid as saying ten-year-old Sudhir Sao was killed when police exchanged fire with bandh supporters near Ranchi College.

It also reports IGP (Special Branch) G.S. Rath as saying that the other casualty occurred when the bomb a bandh supporter was carrying exploded. However, the family of the woman, Mary Sumati Kujur, said she died when police opened fire.

Of the 67,000 applicants to the 10,000 posts for trained teachers, less than 40,000 reportedly appeared for the test.

Meanwhile, non-receipt of admit cards left many examinees stranded.

2 killed as Jharkhand bandh turns violent

By K. Balchand

RANCHI, MAY 27. At least two persons, including a boy, were killed when police opened fire to disperse a mob protesting "outsiders" from taking the examination for recruitment of teachers on the second day of a two-day bandh.

Supporters of the bandh entered the premises of some examination centres and indulged in violence in a bid to get the examinations cancelled. Police resorted to a lathicharge and burst teargas shells, in which an eight-year-old boy and a woman, both tribals, were killed. More than 24 persons, including a dozen policemen, were injured in the clashes which in some centres lasted for more than four hours. The condition of at least three of the injured was stated to be critical.

The demonstrators were demanding total reservation for domiciles of the State and were against the opening up of the recruitment process to "outsiders". Police defended their action saying that the demonstrators had hurled crude bombs at them in St. Louis High School and St. Francis High School. The students of the Ranchi College, they alleged, were behind the arson on the college premises.

While all the candidates, about 176 of them, had been escorted to safety, at least 12 jawans, including an officer, were injured. Stray incidents were reported from other districts as well. A Chennai-bound truck was set on fire in Ranchi.

Meanwhile, the Chief Secretary announced the cancellation of the examination held at three centres. He said fresh dates would be announced for the re-examination.

28 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

Forces out to foil 48-hr bandh over teachers' recruitment

Jharkhand braces for strike

OUR BUREAU

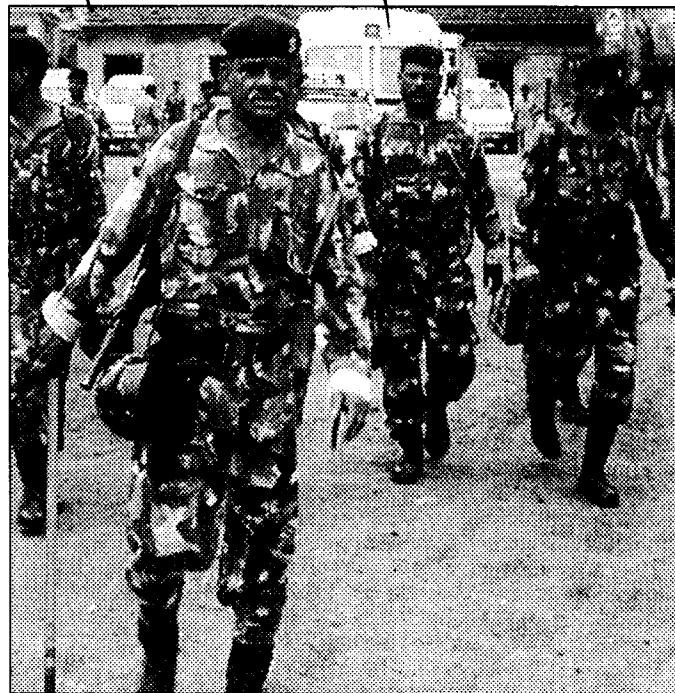
May 25: Jharkhand is on edge on the eve of the 48-hour statewide bandh, called by pro-domicile groups to oppose primary teachers' recruitment tests scheduled for Tuesday.

The government said fool-proof arrangements have been made to foil the strike. Section 144 has been clamped in all major cities and forces are being deployed at all sensitive points.

Though it is expected to remain peaceful tomorrow, police sources said "trouble is definitely expected on Tuesday", the day of the examinations for recruiting nearly 10,000 teachers.

Candidates, many from Bihar and Orissa, have been pouring into all cities that have exam centres. One such centre in Dhanbad, SSLNT School, was targeted today by bandh supporters who hurled petrol bombs at the building. No one was injured though some furniture was burnt. Deputy commissioner Nitin Kulkarni said he suspected members of the All-Jharkhand Students' Union to be responsible for the attack.

Ranchi district geared up for violence with forces being deployed at 76 centres, of which 20 are "most sensitive". Each will be under the charge of a deputy superintendent of police, assisted by paramilitary forces, fire tenders and ambulances. Anti-riot vehicles, equipped with



RAF jawans stand guard during a flag-march in Jamshedpur. Picture by Uma Shankar Dubey

water cannons, tear-gas shells and rubber bullets, have been stationed in the capital.

"Nine checkpoints will be set up at the entrances to the capital. These will be at Kathitand, Hehal, Ormanjhi, Namkum, Pithoria, Hatia, Sithio and Tupudana. The checkpoints will stop the entry of miscreants," a senior bureaucrat said in Ranchi today. "To ensure that the exams

are peacefully conducted, regular magistrates have been deployed for distribution of question papers in the morning and collection of answer sheets in the evening. They will start their duty from 7 am," he added.

Several pro-domicile leaders have been arrested in preventive police raids across the state.

"We face a test of our identity and self-pride. The bandh has

not been called only to oppose the recruitments. It is a fight for realising the dreams for which Jharkhand was formed. The tests will be disrupted even if we have to face bullets," a leader of the Adivasi Moolvasi Janadhikar Manch said.

Jamshedpur has been fortified with a company of the Rapid Action Force, whose jawans conducted flag-marches in sensitive localities today. Railway stations and bus depots have been safeguarded for examinees with extra police.

The anti-domicile lobby in Dhanbad got a shot in the arm today after Rajiv Ranjan Singh, nephew of urban development minister Bachcha Singh, warned those trying to obstruct the exam. "Any move to stop any of the candidates will not be tolerated. We will ensure their safety," he said.

Bandh supporters in Dhanbad took to the streets, urging the people to ensure the bandh's success. As the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha has a base in Dhanbad and the CPI-ML in Giridih, authorities fear group clashes in both places.

The Domicile Virodhi Manch has decided to deploy its volunteers at exam centres to confront bandh supporters. As many as 39 centres in Bokaro have been reinforced with two companies of paramilitary forces along with personnel of the Jharkhand Armed Police.

Anarchy in Jharkhand

Backroom manoeuvres have become the stuff of governance in this state

JHARKHAND was created in the year 2000, ostensibly to expedite development in a tribal-dominated state and give the local population, especially its tribals, a sense of purpose. Today, this state — convulsed by popular discontent over the domicile issue, ruled by a corrupt and incompetent leadership and riven by contending political ambitions — stands on the verge of anarchy, both constitutional and otherwise. In many ways, the coup staged by the speaker of the Jharkhand assembly, Inder Singh Namdhari, is an apt expression of the general drift and cynicism that has come to mark governance in the state. Blissfully unmindful of his constitutional function which is that of an umpire, rather than captain.

From its very inception, the BJP-led coalition government that has ruled the state has been a creature of political expediency. The promotion of Babulal Marandi to the post of chief minister over the claims of senior party colleague and tribal leader, Karia Munda, sent the latter into a serious sulk until he was somewhat mollified with a cabinet minister's post. It's ironic then that today the BJP high command, desperate to resuscitate its faltering government in Jharkhand, is believed to be seriously mulling over the Munda option even as it publicly stands by Marandi. Backroom manoeuvre then, rather than genuine popular democracy, has come to be the hallmark of Jharkhand politics.

Marandi, a tribal himself, has always pretended to represent tribal interests and his ham-handed attempt to use the domicile issue for this purpose had threatened to send the state up in flames not so long ago. Trouble is, backroom manoeuvre only perpetuates backroom manoeuvre, as Marandi has discovered to his cost. Thus did an ambitious speaker, cleverly utilising a split within Marandi's ranks, pull the rug from under his feet. The government today could technically be considered to have fallen if there were no doubts about the technical tenability of Thursday's assembly proceedings that saw the government fall short by five votes during voice vote over a money bill. The speaker, well-known for having zigzagged in and out of parties, then had the audacity to put forward his own claims to the chief minister's chair, claiming the support of a ragtag bunch of parties.

Now, while the state governor has asked Marandi to prove his majority on March 27, the speaker has decided to convene the House for the confidence vote today — although constitutional experts are divided whether he can do so, given the fact that he is the alternative chief ministerial candidate. Pretty putrid stuff, but that's what politics has become in Jharkhand. Clearly, no matter who wins that vote, it's the people of Jharkhand who stand to lose from the politics of naked self-aggrandisement.

7 APR 2003

INDIAN EXPRESS

Jharkhand bully

14/4/03 Jharkhand
578
Need for tough action against minister

Those who have observed legislators close to the seat of power in Bihar indulging in outrageous crimes should not be surprised by the latest example of the bully in Jharkhand who used his ministerial powers to beat up a deputy collector for failing in what the minister considered the elementary task of looking after his personal needs. Ministers, particularly in the Hindi heartland, are accustomed to getting everything they ask. On this occasion the official was met with slippers because he had made lunch arrangements for 10 of the minister's lackeys when he turned up with 50 of them for a BJP function in his Chatra constituency. Why the official should arrange food for party activists the minister does not feel obliged to answer. Tall claims of Jharkhand leaders that their hearts bleed for the tribals need not be taken seriously. In Bihar, an RJD MLA had kept a Dalit truck driver and his helper confined for a month subjecting them to inhuman torture, again for personal reasons. It was another matter that he won a legal reprieve after all the evidence mysteriously disappeared. It will be a tragedy if history repeats itself in Jharkhand where the official has had the courage to lodge an FIR. The minister is liable to be booked for physical assault as any other citizen.

The question is whether the police have the go-ahead from above. All parties are culpable — the BJP as much as the CPI-M in West Bengal. Matters are worse in Jharkhand to the extent that the new chief minister, Arjun Munda, is seen as having been propped up by ministers who had revolted against his predecessor, Babulal Marandi. That disables him from taking tough action all the more. Fortunately the Jharkhand Administrative Officers' Association has entered the fray and it is hoped that officers are made of sterner stuff. A bitter lesson in civilised conduct is called for.

14 APR 2003

THE STATESMAN

THE STATESMAN

TUESDAY, MARCH 18, 2003

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18/3

JHARKHAND'S POWER PLAY

9-8 2'

THE RESIGNATION OF the Chief Minister, Babulal Marandi, brings down the curtain on the first act of the grubby drama that was recently played out within the Jharkhand legislature. Given the depths to which the politicking and the posturing sank, it will be no surprise if the second act — the formation of a new Government — is as painfully farcical. The current crisis faced by the Bharatiya Janata Party and its allies in Jharkhand is largely of its own making. It has been clear for a long time now that Mr. Marandi, who headed the NDA Government on the basis of a wafer-thin majority, was at odds with his coalition partners in the State, the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (United). It was the inability to carry legislators along with him that finally did Mr. Marandi in, but his cause was hardly served by presiding over a Government that was incompetent, unpopular and was constantly either indulging in populism or resorting to politicking in order to survive. If the BJP leadership in New Delhi was caught napping by the sudden and rapid developments that eventually forced Mr. Marandi's resignation, then it was not paying enough attention to the political goings-on in this tribal-dominated State created three years ago. For, even if no one could have predicted that his Government would be reduced to minority status through a craftily-engineered voice vote on a cut motion, the signs of Mr. Marandi's increasing inability to control his political flock were unmistakable.

The Opposition-sponsored coup was executed through the moving of a cut motion on the demand for grants, which was accepted by the Speaker, who took the extraordinary step of settling the matter through a voice vote. The backroom manoeuvring came out into the open soon after, when the Speaker, Inder Singh Namdhari, staked a formal claim to form the Government with the support of 42 MLAs, a number that included seven members of Mr.

Marandi's Council of Ministers. This bizarre state of political affairs was given an even more perplexing twist with Mr. Namdhari summoning the House for a test of strength on March 17 and Mr. Marandi, after having convened a Cabinet meeting, declaring that it would meet only ten days later. The tussle over the dates threw up some tricky legal questions, but these have been relegated to the background with Mr. Marandi deciding to demit office just hours ahead of the Assembly session during which voting on the Opposition's no-confidence motion was scheduled to take place.

Mr. Marandi's resignation is an admission that he did not enjoy the majority of the House. However, the fact that he has stepped down does not imply — not with any certainty anyway — that Mr. Namdhari has the required numbers to pull off his gambit and fulfil his ambitions of occupying the chief ministerial chair. From the BJP's point of view, Mr. Marandi's resignation provides the opportunity to replace him with another candidate for chief ministership — Arjun Munda, Welfare Minister in the Marandi Ministry and try to regain the full backing of the coalition partners, namely the legislators belonging to the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (United). Given that Mr. Marandi was the focus of dissident resentment, cobbling up an alternative Government may not be an impossible task for the NDA's managers. But given the utter ineptitude and dishonesty that characterised the Marandi Government, it is difficult to see another NDA Government, repackaged with a change at the top, enjoying any credibility whatsoever. It is impossible to predict what shape a new Government will take in Jharkhand, but recent developments would suggest that any alternative will be put into place with exactly the same kind of grubby scenes that marked Act One in Jharkhand's power play — dirty tricks, devious strategies and backroom manoeuvres.

18 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

Marandi quits, Munda to be sworn in today

Statesman-News Service

RANCHI, March 17. — Mr Arjun Munda will be sworn in as Jharkhand chief minister tomorrow. The Governor tonight formally invited him to form the government. Mr Babulal Marandi resigned this morning an hour before his ministry's trial of strength on the floor of the Assembly.

Mr Munda (40) met Governor Mr M Rama Jois at Raj Bhavan staking claim to form the government. He said he had submitted to the Governor a list of 40 MLAs in a state Assembly with an effective strength of 79. He expects two more legislators, including rebel tourism minister Ms Joba Manjhi of AJSU-UGDP, to come out in his support tomorrow.

Earlier, he met four rebel ministers — Mr Lalchand Mahto (JD-U), Mr Madhu Singh, Mr Jaleswar Mahto and Mr Ramesh Singh Munda (Samata Party) — and succeeded in wooing them back into the NDA fold.

Mr Munda, state welfare minister, was elected the leader of the state BJP and the

NDA legislative party at a meeting in the evening. His name was proposed by Mr Marandi and seconded by other MLAs. Only one of the seven rebel ministers — Mr Samresh Singh of Jharkhand Vananchal Congress —

was present in the meeting. The four rebel ministers of the Samata Party and the JD-U did not attend today's Assembly session convened by Speaker Mr Inder Singh Namdhari. The other three — Mr Samresh Singh, Mr Baidyanath Ram and Ms Joba Manjhi — were present in the Opposition ranks. The Speaker adjourned the House till 21 March.

After submitting his resignation, Mr Marandi said he had done so of his own free will. Elevating Mr Namdhari to the Speaker's post was his biggest mistake, he said. His exit caps a month of dissidence among the BJP's NDA allies, the Samata Party and the JD-U, demanding leadership change. Seven ministers resigned and joined the Opposition ranks and defeated the government on a financial vote.



Mr Babulal Marandi

BJP yields to allies' pressure, page 6

1 8 MAR 2003

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Hark
Continued from page 6

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BJP yields to allies' pressure, page 6

18 MAR 2003

Jharkhand Speaker wins round one

Statesman News Service

RANCHI/NEW DELHI, March 16. — Chief minister Mr Babulal Marandi tonight lost the first round in the battle against Speaker Mr Inder Singh Namdhari. Mr Namdhari's decision to convene the House tomorrow for a trial of strength received the backing of Raj Bhavan.

An instruction sent by its secretary Mr RS Sharma to the Assembly secretary that adequate security be provided to the 42 opposition MLAs, who elected Namdhari as their chief ministerial candidate, at tomorrow's session.

Earlier, Mr Namdhari rejected the chief minister's demand to reconvene the Assembly on 27 March and decided to go ahead with tomorrow's special session during which Mr Marandi will be asked to prove his strength. "There is

no constitutional crisis and I've decided to go ahead..." he said.

While the NDA tried its best to garner support to survive a no-confidence motion against Mr Marandi, the 42-member Opposition went on an outing today to Bundu-Tamrar, near Ranchi. Though the Opposition termed the outing as a break from politics, an Opposition MLA said the outing was undertaken to prevent the NDA from wooing the MLAs.

Mr George Fernandes today blamed Mr Namdhari for the present crisis. Mr Fernandes said the NDA high command had summoned the "disgruntled" Samata Party and the JD-U ministers on 15

March to "discuss their grievances. But the Speaker engineered the revolt midway." Criticising the role of the Speaker, he said: "How can Mr Namdhari, being the Speaker, stake claim to the chief minister's post?" But BJP central leaders not averse to replacing Mr Marandi so long the party stays in power.

Reports are doing the rounds that six Congress tribal legislators — Deputy Speaker Mr Bagun Sumbrai, JPCC acting president Mr Pradeep Balmuchi, Mr Sawana Lakra, Mr Niel Tirkey, Mr Devkumar Dhan, and Mr Theodore Kiro are being approached by the BJP because they do not want Mr Namdhari as the

chief ministerial candidate. All these legislators were, however, present at today's outing except Mr Sumbrai who went to his home in Chaibasa.

The others who were absent are Mr Nalin Soren of JMM who broke his leg, Ms Sushila Hansada of JMM who went home, and Mr Samresh Singh who said he was sick. Sources say Mr Singh is undecided on whether to join the Opposition after his Saturday's meet with BJP general secretary Mr Rajnath Singh.

Ms Joba Manjhi and Mr Baidyanath Ram were among the first to get into the bus. BJP legislator Mr Sanjay Yadav drove the bus. A legislator said they would return tomorrow morning to attend the session. Mr Stephen Marandi of JMM refuted claims that the outing was meant to prevent any break ups in the Opposition.



Mr Marandi: Will he have the last laugh?

MONDAY 17 MARCH 2003

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17 MARCH 2003

NATION

Uttarakhand Speaker wins round one

NEW DELHI, March 16. — Minister Mr Babulal Marandi lost the first round in the battle to become Speaker of the Uttarakhand Assembly. Marandi's decision to convene the assembly for a trial of strength tomorrow, at the behest of the backing of Raj Bhavan, was rejected by its secretary, Mr Sharma. The Assembly secretary, Mr Sharma, said that adequate security could not be provided to the 42 opposition MLAs, who are contesting the election. Marandi as their chief ministerial candidate, at tomorrow's session, Mr Marandi rejected the assembly's demand to reconvene on 27 March and decided to convene the assembly tomorrow with Mr Marandi as its speaker. "There is no constitutional crisis and I've decided to go ahead," he said.

While the NDA tried its best to garner support to survive a no-confidence motion against Mr Marandi, the 42-member Opposition went on an outing today to Bundu-Tamrar, near Ranchi. Through the Opposition termed the outing as a break from politics, an Opposition MLA said the outing was undertaken to prevent the NDA from wooing the MLAs.

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Now, while the state governor has asked Marandi to prove his majority on March 27, the speaker has decided to convene the House for the confidence vote today — although constitutional experts are divided whether he can do so, given the fact that he is the alternative chief ministerial candidate. Pretty putrid stuff, but that's what politics has become in Jharkhand. Clearly, no matter who wins that vote, it's the people of Jharkhand who stand to lose from the politics of naked self-aggrandisement.

17 MAR 2003

INDIAN EXPRESS

DIFFERENT DATES FOR ASSEMBLY SESSION ANNOUNCED

CM, Speaker on collision course in Jharkhand

By K. Balchand

RANCHI, MARCH 15. The Jharkhand Assembly Speaker, Inder Singh Namdhari, and the Chief Minister, Babulal Marandi, are headed for a showdown with both announcing separate dates for convening the Assembly.

The Speaker has reconvened the House on Monday, March 17, for the beleaguered BJP Chief Minister to prove his majority, but the latter has contested Mr. Namdhari's authority and fixed the agenda for March 27, precipitating the present political crisis gripping the BJP-led Government.

(On Thursday, the Marandi Government faced a crisis on the floor of the House following the sudden resignation of seven Ministers belonging to allies and the Opposition insisted on a vote on a cut motion to the demands for grants which the Speaker conceded. The Speaker, who belongs to the Janata Dal (United), later said the Government had lost the mandate with a majority of the members supporting the Opposition cut motion.)

While the Speaker has taken upon himself the responsibility to carry out the directive of the



Marandi and Namdhari... at daggers drawn

Governor, M. Rama Jois, the Chief Minister, however, maintained that the authority vested in the State Government to decide on the date for reconvening the Assembly.

The new twist to the drama comes in the wake of the Governor's directive to the Jharkhand Assembly to ensure that Mr. Marandi proves his majority and make sure that the State budget is passed before March 31.

Mr. Namdhari held a long meeting with Opposition party leaders, including the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha president, Shibu Soren, and decided on reconvening the Assembly. He

held the meeting soon after he received a communique from the Raj Bhavan and stressed that he alone had the right to convene the House as the Governor had not prorogued it as yet.

On learning Mr. Namdhari's move, Mr. Marandi too went into a huddle with senior party leaders, including the general secretary, Rajnath Singh, who arrived here today on a fire-fighting mission, along with Kailashpati Mishra, vice-president, who is in-charge of Jharkhand affairs.

Later, Mr. Marandi called on the Governor to apprise him of the legalities revolving round

the convening of the Assembly and held the Speaker's action violative of rules.

Mr. Marandi said that since the House had been adjourned sine die he held a Cabinet meeting and decided that he would prove his majority on March 27 and complete the financial business the following day. He conveyed the same to the Speaker to do the needful, besides informing the Governor of his decision. He said the Speaker had acted arbitrarily and hastily but denied that he himself was trying to buy time to "make good the numbers" he lacked.

On the other hand, the Opposition members, including Stephen Marandi (JMM), Lalchand Mahto (JD-U), Phurkan Ansari (Cong.) and Girinath Singh (RJD) called on the Governor to plead for security in the House on March 17 to prevent the ruling BJP from "unleashing violence as witnessed on March 13."

The Opposition parties are claiming the support of 42 MLAs in a House with an effective strength of 80, after seven Ministers resigned and crossed the floor earlier in the week. They also elected Mr. Namdhari as their leader.

16 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

Marandi loses majority

Statesman News Service

RANCHI, March 13. — The Babulal Marandi government in Jharkhand was reduced to a minority today with three more ministers joining the four rebels and together resigning from the government.

Thirty-five Opposition MLAs and the seven rebels met the Governor and staked claim to form the government. Mr Shibu Soren (JMM) later said Speaker Mr IS Namdhari (JD-U) was their chief ministerial candidate.

When the Assembly session resumed after lunchbreak, the seven ministers were seen sitting in the Opposition bench. They announced on the floor

that they had resigned from the government. The four ministers who have been rebelling for the past few days are Mr Lalchand Mahto (JD-U/power), Mr Madhu Singh (Samata/revenue),

I am still in power and I will prove my strength in the House, says Marandi



Mr Jaleshwar Mahto (Samata/PHED) and Mr Ramesh Singh Munda (Samata Party/excise). Today they were joined by Mr Samarsh Singh (JVC/science and technology), Ms Joba Manjhi

(UGP/ tourism) and Mr Baidyanath Ram (JD-U/sports).

To prove the government's lack of support in the House, JMM's Mr Hemlal Murmu tabled a cut-motion seeking to reduce the Rs 1,12,23,38,000 budget by Rs 10. The motion was passed by voice vote, but amid anti-Speaker slogans by Treasury bench members.

Pro-Marandi MLAs demanded that the session be adjourned. Some members threw chairs at Mr Namdhari, called him a traitor and sat in the Well of the House.

A crestfallen Mr Marandi said his government had not yet fallen and that he would prove his majority on the floor of the House when asked for.

India mulls Malaysia travel advisory

Yojna Gusai and Niloya Roy Chaudhury in New Delhi

March 13. — As many of the Information Technology (IT) professionals detained and humiliated over the weekend planned to leave Kuala Lumpur, India was mulling whether to issue a travel advisory, warning its citizens not to travel to that country.

Indian High Commissioner to Malaysia Ms Veena Sikri said the government would have "little choice" but to issue a travel advisory, unless Malaysia gave "a suitable explanation and apology" and assured India that such an incident would not recur. Officials said the move was being considered "very seriously."

At least 32 of the 195 people who had been detained were set to leave Kuala Lumpur tomorrow, the High Commissioner said. She said she had still not re-

ceived "any credible explanation" for what happened last Sunday.

The souring bilateral relationship has affected the outflow of tourists who were planning to attend the ongoing Malaysia Mega Sale Carnival, the country's biggest shopping festival.

The incident has dented the shopping spirit of Indians who were planning to visit the country for the much-hyped shopping festival. Those who had booked their tickets earlier this month are now having "second thoughts" about the trip. Tour operators are receiving calls from people who are enquiring about the "situation at ground level" in both countries specially in Malaysia, where this festival is one of the biggest revenue source. Indian tourists form a large percentage of visitors to Malaysia, and such a move would hit the country's economy.

Subhas seeks to halt state

KOLKATA, March 13. — Perhaps it's only in West Bengal that a transport minister can proudly call for a *chakka* jam.

Mr Subhas Chakraborty's proud, and predictably loud, proclamation of a half-hour transport bandh from noon to 12.30 p.m. on 21 March ostensibly to condemn the USA's war designs on Iraq was made at a meeting of transporters called to discuss the recent diesel price hike.

His predecessor in the department, Mr Shyamal Chakraborty, present at the meeting as CITU representative, moved the resolution for the *chakka* jam.

Mr Subhas Chakraborty readily agreed. And the transporters were left bemoaning the fate of the issues on their agenda. — SNS

en-house' makes light of PM security

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er function in the 'distinction' of this 11, Race Course s from the Prime Idle of one of the / zones.

i virtual standstill it's vehicles were



An illuminated 11 Race Course Road. — The Statesman

parked from the gate of the Air Force station to the Samrat Hotel roundabout. Even at 11 p.m. guests were still coming to the reception, while some of them stood outside the gate conversing with each other.

Area police officers confirmed that several functions have been held during the wedding season in December and March at 11, Race Course Road.

The house has been allotted to the deputy leader of the TDP's Parliamentary Party, Dr Venugopal. It shares its boundary with 9, Race Course Road, which houses the offices of the Special Protection Group. The Prime Minister

Turn to page

Dissidents forge ahead in oust-Marandi push

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi/Ranchi, March 4: The Opposition in Jharkhand today scurried to launch a united campaign to form an alternative government in the state, with the Dissident Five claiming that their "first round" of talks with Samata Party and Janata Dal (United) leaders in Delhi had progressed "as per expectations".

The rebels — Madhu Singh, Bachcha Singh, Ramesh Singh Munda, Jaleshwar Mahto (all Samata) and JD(U)'s Lalchand Mahto — said they have been given a "firm assurance" by their party leaders of a decision regarding their one-point demand to remove chief minister Babulal Marandi. "Matters could be slightly delayed due to Parliament being in session. But we have been assured that the leaders would very soon sit down and arrive at a decision regarding our demand of ousting Marandi as chief minister," Munda told **The Telegraph** in Delhi after separate meetings



Babulal Marandi: Cornered

with Samata leaders Nitish Kumar and George Fernandes. The dissidents met JD(U) president Sharad Yadav last night.

Munda added that the central leaders have asked the group to stay in Delhi for two more days to facilitate an "appropriate decision" by the high command. "We have apprised the central leadership of the political situation in the state and have backed our arguments with relevant documents. We stick to our stand that Marandi should be replaced. There is no alternative to our de-

mand, but there can be alternatives for Marandi," Lalchand Mahto said after holding talks with Fernandes late tonight.

The dissidents said since there's no scope for a compromise, the possibility of a "Manipur-type" situation in Jharkhand cannot be ruled out. "The central leadership might also allow us to choose our own course of action, in which case we will explore the options of forming a government with the Opposition parties," said Jaleshwar Mahto.

In Ranchi, the Opposition began exploring possibilities of forming an alternative government. All 36 Opposition legislators met in an hourlong hectic "strategy session" at MLA Club. "The meeting was to chalk out a course of action to be adopted by the Opposition in the House. The Opposition is united on almost all the issues of public and state interest, which are taken up in the House," leader of Opposition and JMM leader Stephen Marandi said.

5 MAR 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

BELEAGUERED JHARKHAND CM TO OBEY PARTY DIKTAT

Marandi survives revolt

SR STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE & PTI 9-8

RANCHI/NEW DELHI, March 1. — BJP today reposed faith in Jharkhand chief minister Mr Babulal Marandi and asked its alliance partners — Samata Party and JD(U) — to rein in the ministers who had revolted against him.

"There is no question of change of leadership in Jharkhand and we will be talking to Samata and JD(U) leaders and ask them to tell their ministers not to precipitate any crisis," BJP president Mr Venkaiah Naidu said after meeting Mr Marandi in New Delhi today.

Mr Marandi, however, emerging after meeting where he apprised the Central BJP leaders of the state's political crisis today, said he would do what the party requires him to.

He, however, did not elaborate what transpired in the meeting with the senior leaders. But he said he would do what the party needed.

The present political scenario in Jharkhand seems rather tricky following the "Remove Marandi campaign" launched by five ministers.

March.

The ministers are adamant that Mr Marandi must go since he has been a "non-performing" leader.

The BJP, however, along with some of its NDA ministerial colleagues — Mr Ramchandra Kesri (Ione Samta minister who supports Mr Marandi), Mr Sudesh Mahto (AJSU), Mr Baidyanath Ram JD(U) and Mr Samarash Singh (JVC) have made it clear that Mr Marandi will not be removed from his chair.

Tourism minister Ms Joba Manjhi abstained from the meeting citing ill-health. It is however unclear which side is Ms Manjhi on even though she claims that she is with the chief minister.

The Opposition on the other hand have alleged that the BJP is trying its best to woo some of its legislators either in cash or Mr Marandi had met senior party leaders, including Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani, external minister Mr Yashwant Sinha, party general secretaries Mr Rajnath Singh and Mr Pramod Mahajan. After the two rounds of talks, Marandi sought to play down the crisis saying there was no revolt against his leadership.



Mr Marandi: As close as it gets

The announcement by the five rebel ministers; Mr Lalchand Mahto JD(U), Mr Madhu Singh, Mr Bachcha Singh, Mr Jaleshwar Mahto and Mr Ramesh Singh Munda (Samta party) to announce their chief ministerial candidate has been now deferred to 4

Advani sniffs underworld

Bandh against Pandya's murder passes off peacefully

Rathin Das
Ahmedabad, March 27

DEPUTY PRIME Minister L.K. Advani on Thursday said the terrorist-underworld nexus in the state may have been responsible for the murder of former Gujarat minister and BJP leader Haren Pandya.

Advani, who had flown down for Pandya's funeral, said, "A terrorist-cum-underworld nexus seems to have been responsible for the murder of Pandya. This may not be confined to Gujarat. But investigations are on and I hope that we will be able to trace the assassins." The BJP leader and former Gujarat home minister was shot dead by two unidentified gunmen on Wednesday.

Meanwhile, the day-long Gujarat bandh in protest against Haren Pandya's murder passed off peacefully on Thursday evening with no violent incident being reported from anywhere in the state.

The calls for the bandh were given separately by the state Viswa Hindu Parishad and by the state Congress. While the VHP had called for the bandh in protest against "killing of a Hindu leader", the Congress had called the bandh to highlight the state government's failure in maintaining the law and order leading to the murder. The minority-dominated areas of the city, too, observed the bandh with the people preferring to stay indoors and shops staying closed.

The bandh evoked a partial response in the state, with only Ahmedabad and Vadodara cities showing any impact of the protest call. The board examinations for the 10th and 12th standard stu-



Narendra Modi consoles Jagruti, wife of Haren Pandya, at the latter's funeral in Ahmedabad.

dents were conducted peacefully with no untoward incident being reported from any centre. Colleges, government offices and banks functioned normally, while vehicular traffic remained unaffected.

In Ahmedabad city, the bandh was effective in the main city areas

and commercial centres, which were closed for the day. But, in many other outlying residential areas, shops were open throughout the day as the bandh protagonists did not try to implement the call violently.

However, in Vadodara, VHP activists went about the market areas

to urge shutoff. The bandh was not implemented in Surat.

Pandya cremated amid tight security

HT Correspondent
Ahmedabad, March 27

THE MORTAL remains of former Minister of State Haren Pandya were consigned to the flames at the municipal crematorium here on Thursday morning amid shouting of slogans by his grieving supporters all along the funeral route.

BJP leader and former Minister of State for Home Haren Pandya was shot by two unidentified gunmen on Thursday morning outside the city's Law Garden where he had

been cremated. N. Chandrababu Naidu, who flew down for the cremation on Thursday morning, drove straight to Pandya's residence to pay homage to the assassinated leader who was soon to be inducted into the BJP's national executive.

Later, Pandya's body was brought to the state BJP headquarters in a procession of lorries and cars as his supporters continued raising slogans like *Harenbhai amar rahe* and *Jai tak suraj chand rahega, Haren tera naam rahega*.

The procession to the BJP office and thereafter to the crematorium



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28 MAR 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

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murder passes off peacefully



Pragati, wife of Haren Pandya, at the latter's funeral in Ahmedabad on Thursday.

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However, in Vadodara, VHP ac-
tivists went about the market areas

to urge the shopowners to down
shutters, which they did. The ac-
tivists also went to some cinemas to
urge people to abandon the shows.

There was virtually no impact of
the bandh in other major cities like
Surat and Bhuj, where business ac-
tivities went on normally.

and amid tight security

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BJP office
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last elections due to a tiff with Chief
Minister Narendra Modi.

Pandya's father, wife and elder
son accompanied the body on the
flower-bedecked truck. At the BJP
office, the body was placed in a spe-
cially erected tent, draped in the
party flag. Deputy PM L.K. Advani,
Arun Jaitley, Venkaiah Naidu, Chief
Minister Modi and members of his
Cabinet ministers paid tributes to
Pandya before the body was taken to
the crematorium.

It was former CM Keshubhai Pa-

SILENT VALLEY: DEPUTY PM BLAMES PAK FOR INCIDENT

BJP in no mood to directly indict Mufti with attack

Bharti Jain

SRINAGAR 25 MARCH

NOTWITHSTANDING the BJP's denouncement of Mufti Mohammad Sayeed government's "soft" policy on terrorism in the wake of Monday's massacre of Kashmiri pandits, the Centre does not seem to be in a mood to directly indict the state government for the attack.

Even though deputy prime minister L.K. Advani on Tuesday described the incident as a security lapse, which is why he said at least nine policemen were suspended in an immediate follow-up, he chose against getting on a confrontationist path with the state government. "There is no point in blaming this or that...but we need to take corrective steps wherever possible," he told newsmen here after a visit to the site of the massacre.

Admitting the Centre could not wash its hands off the responsibility to provide security to innocent civilians, Mr Advani said just as development was predominantly the responsibility of the state, the onus of providing security rested predominantly with the Centre. "But both development and security are concerns of the Centre and state government, who must work in perfect harmony and coordination to achieve these goals," he told newsmen while rounding up his visit here on Tuesday.

The toned down attitude of the Vajpayee regime was evident when Mr Advani brushed aside the demand from certain quarters, including the BJP, for central



LATE REACTION: Deputy prime minister L.K. Advani (centre) and Jammu & Kashmir chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed (right) on a visit to Nadimarg on Tuesday. — AFP

action in J&K. "It is our approach that Article 356 should never be lightly used...besides, the demand for invoking it may have just been an expression of anger and exasperation over such incidents," he said.

But, Mr Advani made it clear to Mr Sayeed the need for undertaking immediate corrective steps to prevent terrorists from gaining an upper hand on the security forces. Among the steps which the Centre and state government agreed upon at a review meeting chaired by the Mr Advani here — attended by Governor G.C. Saxena, Union home secretary N. Gopaldaswami, IB director K.P. Singh, besides top brass from the Army and state government — were reconfigu-

ration of the security grid to ensure greater presence of military and para-military forces around hamlets occupied by minorities, and stepping up intelligence-based operations against nearly 3,000 terrorists, including over 1,800 foreign mercenaries, based in the state.

The corrective steps were outlined even as the J&K Governor maintained that given the 300-odd, widely-scattered, hamlets housing 8,000 pandits, it was virtually impossible to provide them foolproof security all the time.

Blaming Pakistan for the terrorist violence in J&K, Mr Advani said the US had failed to exert any significant pressure on the neighbour to stop cross-border terrorism in J&K.

Govt dismisses US call for talks with Pakistan

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 25 MARCH

THE Vajpayee government lashed out at the perpetual sermonisers and perennial votaries of Indo-Pakistan dialogue in the international community and said Tuesday's US' appeal for dialogue with Pakistan was "inappropriate."

"If dialogue per se is more critical than combating international terrorism with all necessary means, then one can legitimately ask why both in Afghanistan and Iraq military action instead of dialogue has been resorted to," external affairs ministry spokesman said when asked about remarks made by US state department spokesman Richard Boucher in Washington.

The statement coincided with statements of outrage from western capitals and a meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security to take stock of the Kashmir situation. The government, which has already conveyed its anger against the continued jehadi violence sponsored by Pakistan against civilians, said the massacre of Kashmiri Pandits was carried out at Islamabad's behest. With the issue once again bringing internal security into focus, the deputy prime minister along with the defence minister will convene a meeting of the state governor, chief minister and officials to review the security sce-

nario. L.K. Advani, who visited the massacre site on Tuesday, briefed the panel about the situation.

In the unfolding scheme of things, the army is expected to be given a larger role in the management of internal security. In effect, this could reduce the wiggle room for the chief minister to go populist in security matters. With "healing touch" policy already under attack from within his own coalition and the spate of post-election jehadi violence claiming over 300 civilian lives, the chief minister will find it difficult to stick to his security formulations.

On his part, the army chief, N.C. Vij, on Tuesday, confirmed that the army will step up its operations in the state. "Our endeavour will be to reduce infiltration to a minimum possible level. Our anti-terrorist operations will be carried out in full swing in the best possible manner." He was talking to reporters at a reception hosted in honour of the armed forces personnel who are to be honoured with gallantry awards at an investiture ceremony on Wednesday. On the "healing touch" policy, he said: "It is an experiment. If found counter-productive, it can always be reviewed."

Meanwhile, the widespread condemnation of the terrorist act by the international community saw Islamabad washing its hands off the crime committed by jehadis sponsored by it and reviving the by-now-familiar "fair investigation" demand.

Chhattisgarh new 'power' on the block

ASHWANI SHARMA
RAIPUR, MARCH 24

FROM a power-starved region to the country's power hub — and all this in just two years. This is what Chhattisgarh has achieved. As part of undivided Madhya Pradesh, it used to reel under acute electricity shortage, forcing closure of dozens of ferro-alloy and mini-steel plant units, which are dependent on power, besides affecting the cement industry. Now, it's a sea change. More than half the closed industrial units are functional, others on the revival course. Chhattisgarh not only meets its peak demand — without any perennial cuts — but has another 100 MW to sell to other states.

CM Ajit Jogi has promised to add another 7000 MW by 2007, and if he keeps that, it will be a

long time before Chhattisgarh faces a power crunch again.

The state has achieved this by cashing in on its abundant resources, mainly coal, and improving its plants. Says a proud Jogi: "For us power is an abundant resource like coal, minerals, water and land. We propose to invest in this sector to position ourselves as leaders in quality power. None of the other advanced states, including Karnataka, will be able to do so."

The state generates over 1300 MW of power, 1100 MW from the thermal sector alone. When the state was formed two and a half years ago, it had 1360 MW of installed capacity but actual generation never exceeded 1100 MW. The additional power was generated by improving existing thermal stations, whose Plant Load Factor (PLF) was increased from 61 per cent to 71 per cent.



The state that faced acute power crisis 2 years ago now has a surplus that it is selling

Over the past two years, Chhattisgarh has pumped in Rs 540 crore to set up new substations and strengthen its transmission and distribution network, which was earlier so skewed that it was impossible to supply power

to villages close to Korba which had two major power stations.

Besides, the government has sanctioned separate packages for revival of closed units. "Six out of 11 closed ferro units and seven out of eight mini-steel plants have become functional. Revenue collections in Urla industrial estate have increased from Rs 4 crore to Rs 12 crore per month, despite a 30 to 35 per cent cut in power tariff," says Mahesh Kakkar, general secretary, Chhattisgarh Udyog Mahasangh. The overall revenue collections have also seen a quantum jump. "There is an average increase of Rs 50 crore each month and this is still going up," says State Electricity Board Chairman B.S. Banafar.

Recently, Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister Digvijay Singh got party high command Sonia Gandhi to intervene to get extra power from Chhattisgarh for his

state. Jogi refused, handing over a fact sheet showing overdrawal of 90 MW from Chhattisgarh's share in the Central pool, and followed it up with a letter to the Union Energy Ministry protesting against the unilateral allocation of the state's share to MP.

But there is another reason why Jogi is not willing to share his power surplus with his neighbour. Officials in the state Energy Department say that Digvijay starved Chhattisgarh of power. Despite the fact that all major thermal and hydel projects were located in the region, it was always power deficient.

Most of the power was transferred to Jabalpur, Bhopal, Indore and Gwalior, says a senior Energy Department official. The shortage that resulted forced closure of many industrial units in Raipur, Durg and Bilaspur, and also deterred new invest-

ments. "There were minimum two to four-hour unscheduled power cuts for industries, besides frequent trippings and low-voltage problems," recalls Kakkar.

With local units revived in Chhattisgarh and at least a dozen new large power-intensive iron and steel units commissioned in Siltara and Urla industrial estates, prime Madhya Pradesh areas are the main sufferers.

With abundant coal deposits at its disposal, the state still has the capacity to generate 50,000 MW of power without compromising on environmental norms.

Already MOUs for generating 3000 MW of power have been signed with the Jindals, Gujarat State Electricity Board, L&T, Balco (Sterlite group), Tata Power and Motinnet group. The NTPC has begun work on its superthermal power project at Sipat in Bilaspur district.

Fishing in troubled

The paper

11.9.81
D. P. Ramesh

TAMIL fishermen from Sri Lanka's Jaffna and Mannar districts attacked a fleet of fishing boats from Rameswaram on 3 March, took more than 125 fishermen captive and burnt their boats. This was a serious setback for Tamil Nadu Liberation Front, an organisation of misguided Tamil youths formed by the LTTE with the aim of bringing the world's Tamil speaking people under the single umbrella of a 'Greater Tamil Nadu' comprising Sri Lanka's northeastern province, the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the districts of Mysore, Chamrajnagar, Mandya and Kolar in Karnataka, Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh, the Lakshadweep and the Maldives.

It came as a rude shock to cadres of Tamil Nadu Retrieval Troops for, as they had been trained by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to wage an armed struggle for Tamil Nadu's secession from the Indian Union and unite the "disputed" state with Tamil Eelam. Notorious forest brigand Veerappan is a "brigadier" of TNLA.

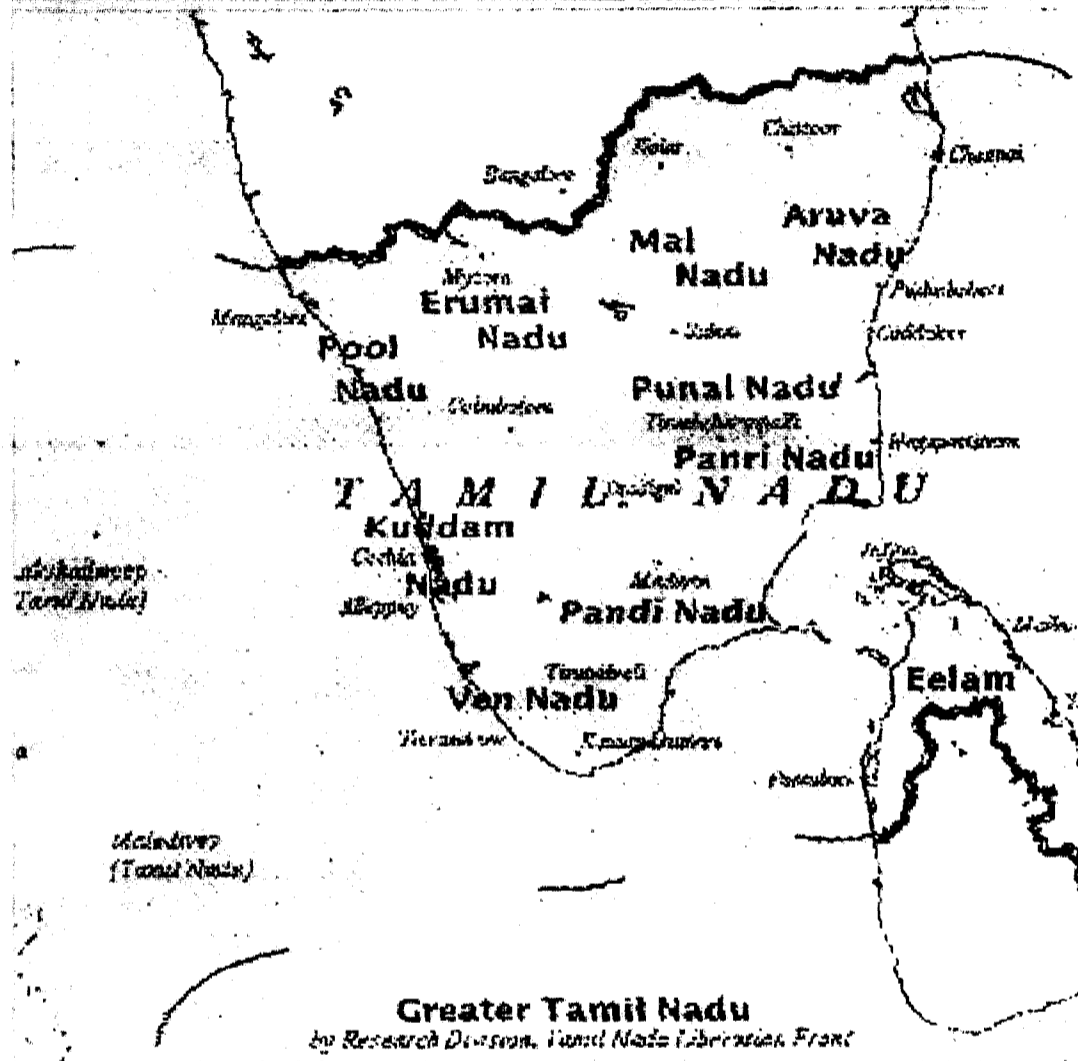
If the Tamils from across the Palk Straits could not tolerate their fellow Tamil speakers from Rameswaram fishing in the common territorial waters, the brainwashed TNLA and TNRT cadres are beginning to wonder what would be their position in the Eelam Tamil dominated 'Greater Tamil Nadu'. They don't want to sacrifice their first-class citizenship status for second class under the Eelam leaders in the name of linguistic affinity and consolidation.

The trawlers of Rameswaram fishermen, which triggered the re-thinking of the separatist elements in Tamil Nadu, go back to 1974 when Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister, evaded the small, uninhabited islet of Kachchatheevu in the Palk Straits, an integral part of Tamil Nadu's Ramanathapuram district, to Sri Lanka ostensibly to "boost the sagging morale" of the then Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Needless to say Indira Gandhi has been unmindful of the problems it would create for the fishermen of Rameswaram and its economy. Justifying her folk, Indira Gandhi described Kachchatheevu as a "sheer rock with no strategic significance."

The 285-acre Kachchatheevu, 15 km north-east of Rameswaram bears

The pan-Tamil movement across the Palk Straits has suffered a setback, thanks to the Centre's policy of silence, says S RAJAPPA

PROPOSED MAP OF GREATER TAMIL NADU



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nathapuram. They use the islet to dry their nets and rest.

At the turn of the last century, Seenikuppam Padayachi, a fisherman from Ramanad, built a church dedicated to St Antony on the islet to fulfil a vow. St Antony is revered as the guardian of fishermen. During the annual festival of St Antony, which used to draw a large number of pilgrims both from India and Sri Lanka, a priest from Thangalimadam, near

mass, according to the Gazette Ramanad.

The DMK, which was the party in Tamil Nadu when Gandhi gifted Kachchatheevu to Sri Lanka, had opposed the move and nail. When the matter brought before the Lok Sabha July 1974, P. M. Sezhian, then a member, described it as an "in and disgraceful act of statesman unworthy of any government

Fishing in troubled v

7-10 April
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 D. Rehman

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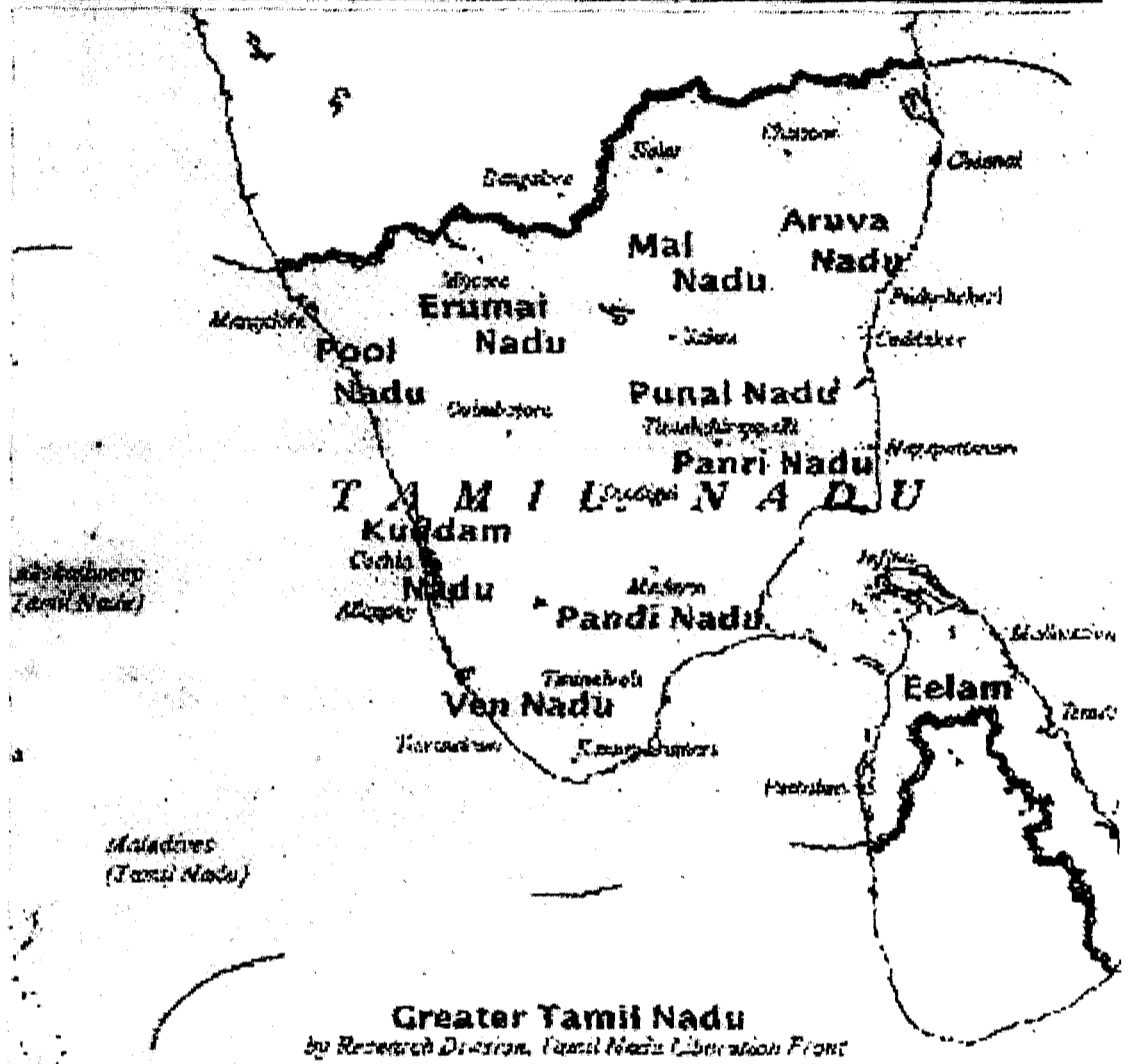
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Fishing in troubled

The Opinion
 19 81
 D. P. Renu

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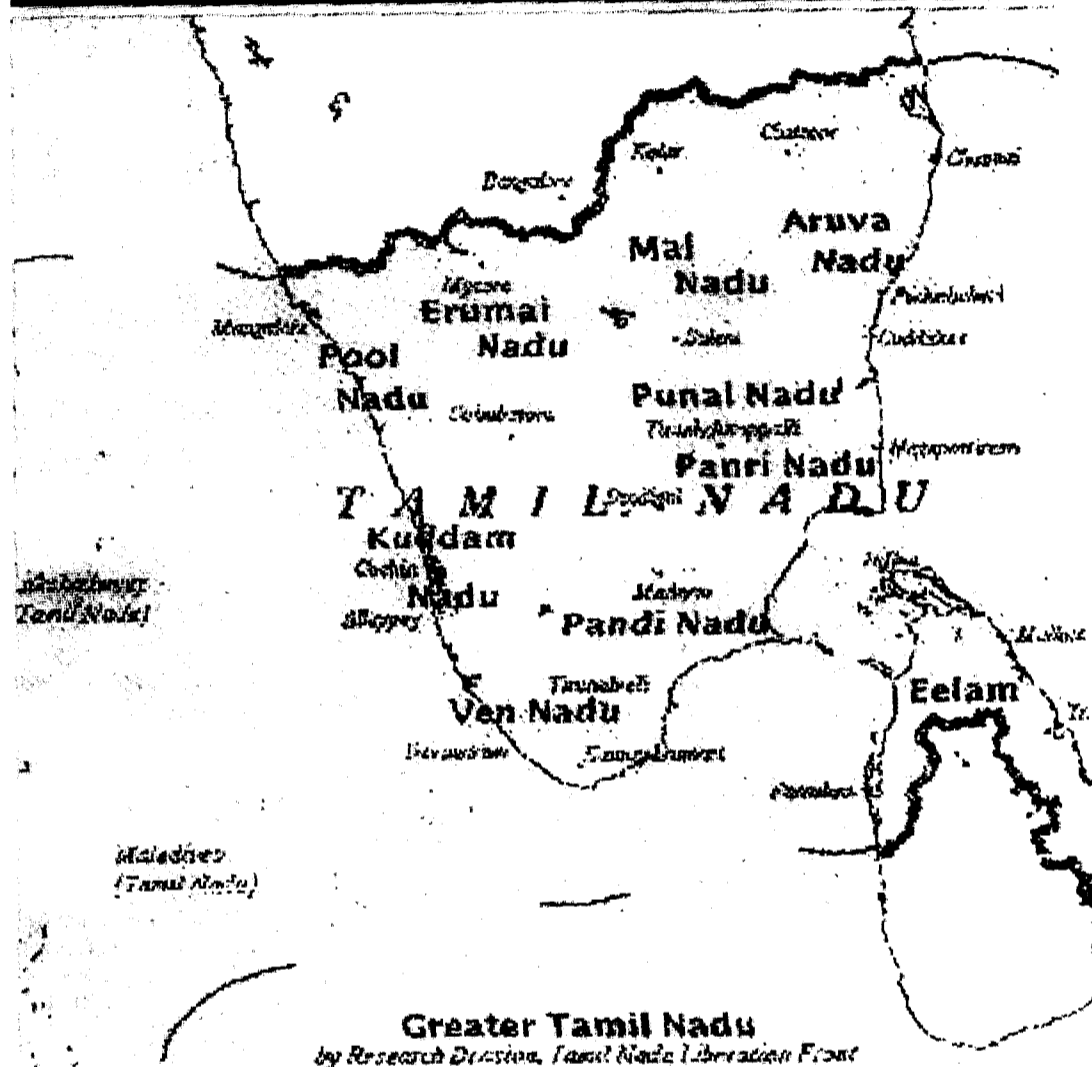
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The traumas of Rameswaram fishermen, which triggered the re-thinking of the separatist elements in Tamil Nadu, go back to 1974 when Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister, ceded the small, uninhabited islet of Kachchatheevu in the Palk Straits, an integral part of Tamil Nadu's Ramanathapuram district, to Sri Lanka ostensibly to "boost the sagging morale" of the then Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Needless to say Indira Gandhi had been reminded of the problems it would create for the fishermen of Rameswaram and its economy. Justifying her folly, Indira Gandhi described Kachchatheevu as a "sheet rock with no strategic significance."

The 295-acre Kachchatheevu, 15 km north-east of Rameswaram bear-

The pan-Tamil movement across the Palk Straits has suffered a setback, thanks to the Centre's policy of silence, says S RAJAPPA

PROPOSED MAP OF GREATER TAMIL NADU



ing survey No. 1250 was part of the Ramanath Zamindari and the Raja of Ramanath exercised control and ownership over the islet. After independence, it became part of Ramanathapuram district. This barren, uninhabited islet has very little flora and not a drop of water to drink. The sea around Kachchatheevu is rich in prawns and attract a large number of fishermen from Rameswaram and the coastal districts of Thanjavur, Nagapattinam, Pudukkottai and Rama-

nathapuram. They use the islet to dry their nets and rest.

At the turn of the last century, Seenikuppam Pichayachi, a fisherman from Ramanathapuram, built a church dedicated to St. Anthony on the islet to fulfil a vow. St. Anthony is revered as the guardian of fishermen. During the annual festival of St. Anthony, which used to draw a large number of pilgrims both from India and Sri Lanka, a priest from Thalagachiruvadam, near Rameswaram, used to conduct a

mass, according to the Gazetteer, Ramanathapuram.

The DMK, which was the main party in Tamil Nadu when Indira Gandhi gifted Kachchatheevu to Sri Lanka, had opposed the move to and, in fact, when the matter was brought before the Lok Sabha in July 1974, Eru Sezhan, then a DMK member, described it as an "unjust and disgraceful act of statesmen unworthy of any government" and walked out of the House.

Fishing in troubled

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TAMIL fishermen from Sri Lanka's Jaffna and Mannar districts attacked a fleet of fishing boats from Rameswaram on 3 March, took more than 125 fishermen captive and burnt their boats. This was a serious setback for Tamil Nadu Liberation Front, an organisation of misguided Tamil youths formed by the LTTE with the aim of bringing the world's Tamil speaking people under the single umbrella of a 'Greater Tamil Nadu' comprising Sri Lanka's northeastern province, the states of Tamil Nadu and Kerala, the districts of Mysore, Channarayana, Mandya and Kolar in Karnataka, Chittoor in Andhra Pradesh, the Lakshadweep and the Maldives.

It came as a rude shock to cadres of Tamil Nadu Retrieval Troops too, for they had been trained by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam to wage an armed struggle for Tamil Nadu's secession from the Indian Union and unite the "liberated" state with Tamil Eelam. Notorious forest brigand Veerappan is a "brigadier" of TNLA.

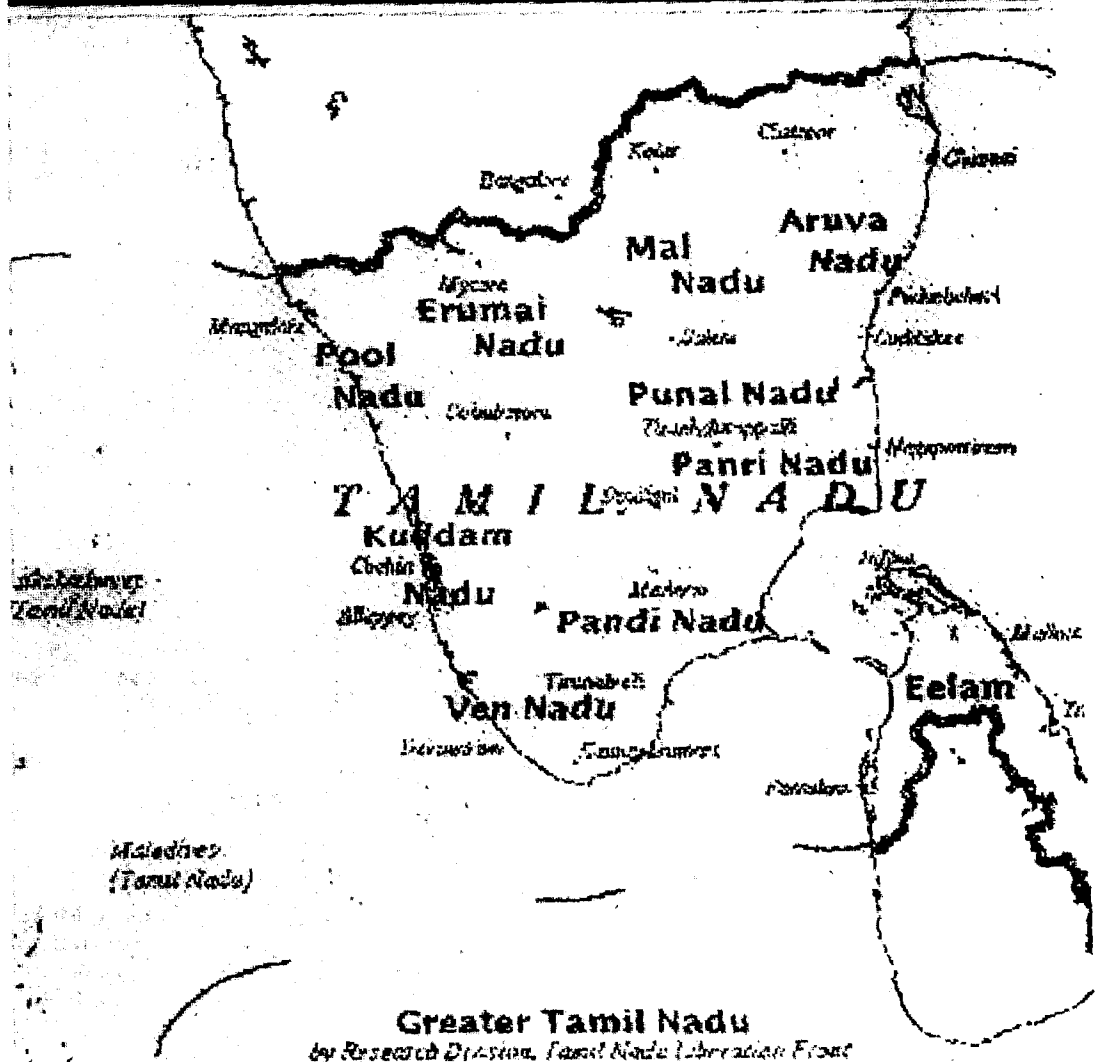
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The travails of Rameswaram fishermen, which triggered the re-thinking of the separatist elements in Tamil Nadu, go back to 1974 when Indira Gandhi, then Prime Minister, ceded the small, uninhabited islet of Kachchatheevu in the Palk Straits, an integral part of Tamil Nadu's Ramanathapuram district, to Sri Lanka ostensibly to "boost the sagging morale" of the then Sri Lankan Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike. Needless to say Indira Gandhi had been mindful of the problems it would create for the fishermen of Rameswaram and its economy. Justifying her folly, Indira Gandhi described Kachchatheevu as a "sweet rock with no strategic significance."

The 285-acre Kachchatheevu, 15 km north-east of Rameswaram being

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PROPOSED MAP OF GREATER TAMIL NADU



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nathapuram. They use the islet to dry their nets and rest. At the turn of the last century, Seenikuppam Pichayachi, a fisherman from Ramanad, built a church dedicated to St Antony on the islet to fulfil a vow. St Antony is revered as the guardian of fishermen. During the annual festival of St Antony, which used to draw a large number of pilgrims both from India and Sri Lanka, a priest from Thalagachinadaram near Rameswaram, used to conduct the

mass, according to the Gazette, Ramanad. The DMK, which was the in party in Tamil Nadu when Indira Gandhi gifted Kachchatheevu to Lanka, had opposed the move to and said: "When the matter was brought before the Lok Sabha in July 1974, Era Sezhiyan, then a DMK member, described it as an "unlucky and disgraceful act of statesmanship unworthy of any government." It had walked out of the House.

Fishing in troubled

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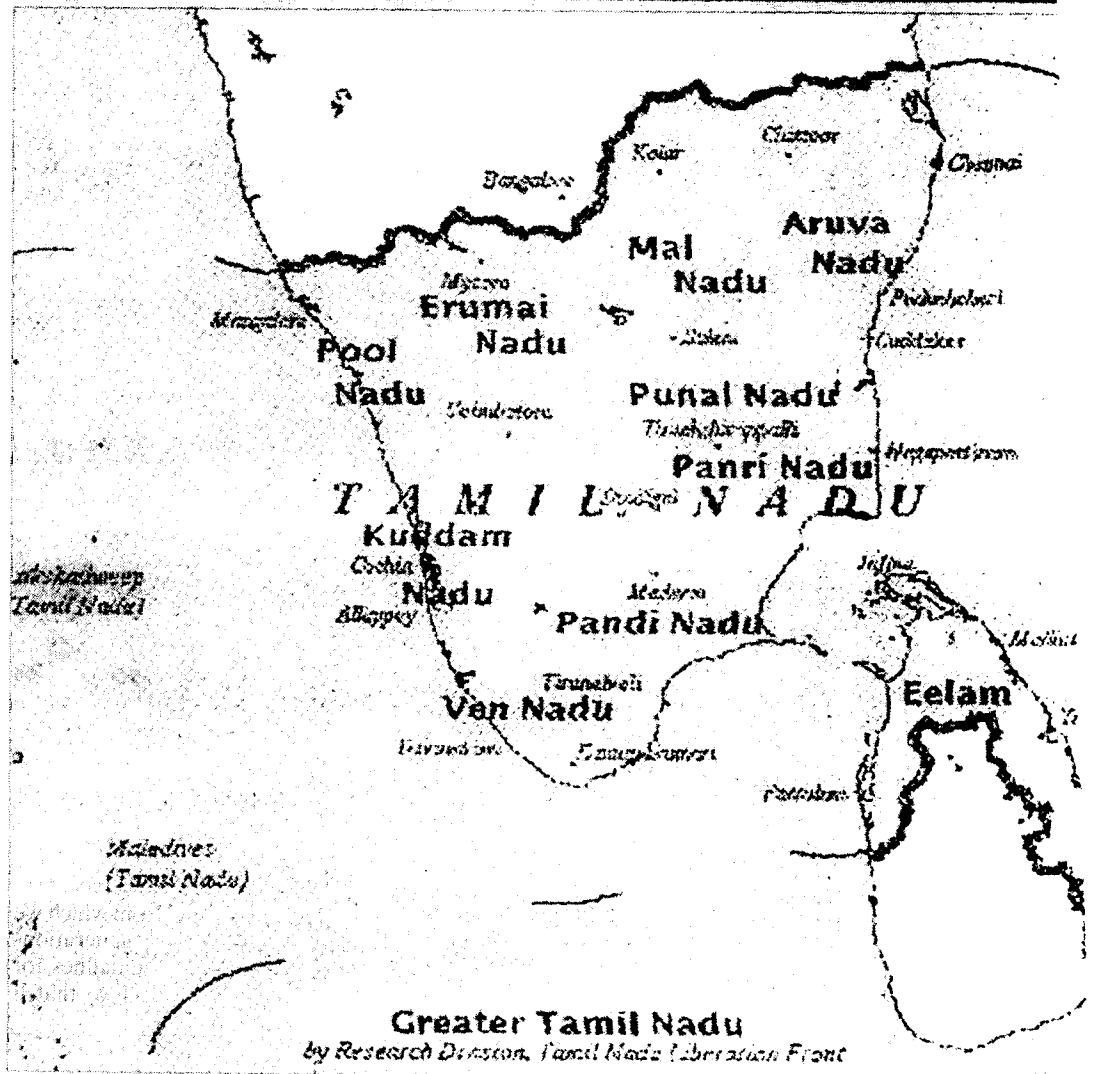
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