

Cong splits, Mayawati gets a shot in the arm

Statesman News Service

LUCKNOW, Jan. 28. — The 23-member Congress Legislature Party in Uttar Pradesh split today. The eight-member splinter group, Akhil Bharatiya Congress, will support the BSP-BJP government, Miss Mayawati claimed.

The split was formalised after a five-hour drama, during which Speaker Mr Kesari Nath Tripathy was called a "cheat" by Mr Pramod Tewari (Congress). The reason: Mr Tripathy counted the leader of the breakaway group, Mr Akhilesh Singh, as a Congress member, though he was expelled by the party two months ago after he was arrested under National Security Act in connection with a murder.

Mr Tripathi cited rulings of the Supreme Court and Gauhati High Court which say an unattached member can be counted as a member of the breakaway group that has been granted recognition. He said he had considered all legal aspects before granting recognition to the Akhil Bharatiya Congress.

Mr Tewari, however, threatened to take legal steps against the Speaker's "unconstitutional" ruling and table a no-confidence motion against the government. He also claimed that the breakaway MLAs had been threatened as well as given in-

ducements by ruling coalition members.

The chief minister was asked whether the MLAs would join the government. She said: "It all depends on them. But they'll support my government." And why did Mr Akhilesh Singh take the initiative to form the new party? Invoking the name of Netaji and Babasaheb Ambedkar, the murder accused said the Akhil Bharatiya Congress was formed to "save the country and to ensure political stability and development in the state".

Other members of the group are Mr Kameshwar Upadhyay, Mr Shyam Narain Tewari, Mr Kasim Ali, Mr Virender Singh Bundela, Mr Vinod Kumar Singh, Mr Rajpal Tyagi and Mr Dinesh Singh.

This is the second time that the CLP had split. In 1997, a group of MLAs led by Mr Naresh Aggrawal had broken away to form Loktantrik Congress Party.

Though there had been talk of a split in the CLP for more than two months, PCC chief Mr Arun K Singh Munna was caught unawares by today's development. "Only recently MLAs had promised Mrs Gandhi that they would not split the party," was all Mr Munna could say. He alleged that Mr Amarmani Tripathi, a minister in the Mayawati government, had been working on Congress MLAs for some time.

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HINDUSTAN TIMES

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POTAs irony

SHAKEN BY deepening internal strife, the Mayawati government is evidently trying to buy insurance through the defection of Congress MLAs. The trigger for the UP drama is the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA), passed last year with tub-thumping enthusiasm by the BJP. Some of the BJP's allies appeared to be on the defensive in the face of the opposition criticism that the legislation will be misused against political opponents. The case of Vaiko, the firebrand MDMK leader, is a telling one. He had had 'ayed' the POTA bill with some regret, saying it was a "bitter pill" which the country needed to swallow. A few months later, Mr Vaiko himself was arrested under the draconian statute, with the Tamil Nadu government charging him with being a terrorist abettor on account of his LTTE sympathies. To everyone else, this seemed a clear case of political vendetta on the part of the AIADMK which rules the state.

If the first major POTA strike was against an NDA constituent, the law has now come to haunt the BJP itself. Ms Mayawati's government has locked

up Raghuraj Pratap Singh, an independent MLA, and a couple of his relations under POTA. Hints have been dropped that the MLA might have ISI links. A BJP MLA until not long ago, Mr Singh had masterminded a revolt of BJP dissidents against the Mayawati government. UP BJP chief Vinay Katiyar is accusing Ms Mayawati of misusing POTA against political opponents. Influential party general secretary Rajnath Singh too has attacked the chief minister. But she remains adamant. Politically, UP is again simmering.

The point is not Mr Singh's presumed criminality. The man has gained notoriety as one of UP's most dreaded elements. The point is POTA. By its very nature, the act lends itself to abuse, much like its predecessor, TADA. There are enough laws around to book not only terrorists but other criminals. But the BJP insisted on it in keeping with its hobby-horse of appearing to be tough against the ISI. It is clear that if it is relatively easy to book a person under POTA on trumped up charges, it is just as easy to attack anyone for his alleged ISI links in order to discomfit the BJP.

29 JAN 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Mufti to seek PM's nod for policy

By Harish Khare

NEW DELHI, JAN. 24. The Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir, Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, is scheduled to meet the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, tomorrow to seek his endorsement — administrative and political — of his “healing touch” policy.

In particular, the release of political prisoners from jails in Jammu and Kashmir — as part of this healing touch — has become a matter of controversy. It is believed that the Centre and the State Government have agreed to constitute a joint review committee to screen the release of prisoners.

A joint review panel became imperative after the Bharatiya Janata Party started making a political issue out of the release of prisoners. Given the BJP's political offensive, the Mufti's coalition partner, the Congress, is believed to have developed cold feet and is now apparently advising the State Government to “go slow” on the release of prisoners. It would, therefore, be the Mufti's endeavour to see if he can rescue his “healing touch” policy from the BJP-Congress verbal stand-off.

Mr. Sayeed called on the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, today. According to a State Government press release, the “two leaders shared the perception that the opportunity in Jammu and Kashmir that the elections have thrown up must not be missed.”

Meanwhile, a serious note

has been taken by the concerned officials and agencies of the growing debate and rift within the Hizb-ul-Mujahideen. This rift has become quite accentuated in the wake of the People's Democratic Party victory. The “moderate” Majid Dar faction has virtually revolted against the dominant Syed Salauddin faction.

According to information available with the various agencies here, the two groups engaged in a violent clash on the night of January 15 in the Taxila camp of Haripur district in Pakistan. The clash resulted in two deaths. Two days later, another clash among the mujahideen was reported from the jungle

mangal camp (in PoK) on January 17. The Indian sources have reason to believe that an alarmed Inter-Services Intelligence has already moved in quickly to physically segregate the two factions. The Majid Dar cadres have been moved out to a camp in Terbela (in Pakistan).

The divide between the two factions dates back to the July 2000 ceasefire initiated by the Hizb. With the changed political mood after the Assembly elections, the disillusionment among the Hizb cadres is reported to have become quite pronounced.

This disillusionment is seen as part of a larger debate among the militants as to what extent the

“struggle” was to be dovetailed to the ISI's priorities. The debate is most severe among the Hizb cadres who are deemed to be the only indigenous group among the so-called freedom fighters. Increasingly, the ISI has been relying on foreign militants, belonging to the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed groups, to carry out its agenda.

It in this overall context of the disillusionment with the “idiom of gun” that the Mufti's “healing touch” approach becomes crucial. The only question is whether he can insulate it from the narrow political calculations of the BJP and the Congress.

Dangerous complacency

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Black caps in the red bastion 5.8
29/11

Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's response to the CRSS Sarsanghatah's rally held in Kolkata, that the VHP and RSS are "unwanted guests" who will never be able to make a dent in West Bengal, is tempting but dangerously complacent — the graveyards of politics are littered with such brave pronouncements. The truth is that Bengal does present a target of opportunity for the BJP and RSS, as its legacy is a mixed one. It is true that Bengal was an original outpost of the *bhakti* movement and is rich in religious reform and syncretic traditions, which ought to act as a buffer against RSS-style intolerance. But on the other hand, one of the inventors of the modern communal ideology was the Bengali writer Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay, from whose works the RSS has culled its *Vande Mataram* anthem. Bengal suffered horribly during the Partition and subsequent mass migrations, and leftist politicians collude in ongoing illegal immigration from Bangladesh in the hope of building captive vote banks. Further vote bank politics is evident in the decision to dole out crores of rupees to *madrasas*, a system that turns out hordes of unemployables who are grist to the mill of bigoted clerics and fanatical politicians rather than subserve the Muslim community as a whole. When Bhattacharjee proposed to reform *madrasa* syllabi by introducing modern subjects and investigate the source of funds of the large number of *madrasas* that have sprung up along the Bangladesh border, following the change of government in Dhaka, he was stymied by his own party for reasons that have nothing to do with the Muslim community's best interests and everything to do with party political advantage.

If Bhattacharjee exalts "awareness" levels in Bengal, and he is right to do so; by the same token people will become quickly aware of these things too. They create a reservoir of resentment available for exploitation by the saffron camp, and the ground could slip from beneath leftist feet sooner than they think. As a cadre-based organisation with a rigid centralised command structure, the RSS has the same kind of organisational strength as the CPI-M. Even their rhetoric tends to be similar — when RSS chief KS Sudershan slams the Centre for following economic policies dictated by the West, the World Bank and the IMF, it could be Jyoti Basu or Biman Bose speaking. Religious zealotry rushes into spaces created by bad governance, not because it offers a better alternative, but because it makes for a better narcotic. The leftist ideology has been discredited and thoroughly exposed and it has few takers among today's youth. If Bhattacharjee and the CPI-M want to prevent the BJP and RSS from making inroads into the state, it is bad governance that they need to address.

THE STATESMAN

24 JAN 2003

Naga talks to resume after polls

By Vinay Kumar

NEW DELHI, JAN. 23. The Centre and the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M) today agreed to continue their talks aimed at finding a lasting settlement to the Naga problem.

A joint communique signed by two sides at the end of three rounds of official-level talks here said that both the sides had reaffirmed the need to maintain a "peaceful and violence-free environment."

Government sources said that substantive issues were raised during the three rounds of talks between the Centre and the NSCN (I-M) leadership, adding that the talks "proceeded in the right direction." The sources were hopeful that the peace talks with the NSCN (I-M) seemed to be "reaching somewhere."

Indications are that the next round of Centre-NSCN talks would be held after the February 26 Assembly polls in Nagaland. Though the Centre would prefer that talks be held in India, both sides are stated to be "flexible" on coming to an agreement on it.

Some kind of understanding has been reached between the Centre and the Naga insurgent leaders, according to sources,



The NSCN (I-M) leaders, Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu, and the Centre's special emissary, K. Padmanabhalah, talking to the media in New Delhi on Thursday. — PTI

but they too are of a "tentative nature" and it would take some more time before anything could be put down on paper.

The reasons for this are not very far to visualise as the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (I-M) raised about 30 issues relating to "devolution of power, autonomy" and each one of them was linked to the other.

"Concession on one cannot be given till all issues are sorted out. Nothing is final at this stage," sources indicated.

It was pointed out that the Centre was clear in its mind on what could be done and what cannot be done. If indications

from Naga and the Government sources are to be believed, it is not yet clear how the Centre is going to deal with the NSCN (I-M) demand of including the Naga-dominated areas in other States of the northeast in Nagaland.

This would need a redrawing of the geographical boundaries of Nagaland. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's reported assurance to the Manipur Chief Minister-led all-party delegation on protecting the territorial integrity of the neighbouring State has also had its "impact" on the current round of talks with Naga leaders.

Shinde wins trust vote

Hints at downsizing jumbo Deshmukh Cabinet

HT Correspondent
Mumbai, January 22

MAHARASHTRA CHIEF Minister Sushil Kumar Shinde as was predicted won the trust vote on Wednesday. "The dreams of Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi (to empower the dalits) have come true," said an emotional Shinde moments after he won the vote of confidence in the State legislature in Mumbai on Wednesday afternoon.

Shinde, who took the helm from Vilasrao Deshmukh on Sonia Gandhi's wishes last week, faced no opposition from the Shiv Sena-BJP alliance.


Realising the immense pressure to run a coalition Government and expectations from a cross-section of people including the party high command, Shinde on Wednesday hinted that he would downsize his cabinet. Deshmukh, however, had a whopping 57 ministers working under him in a jumbo cabinet — which is only less than the UP Government having 90 ministers.

Shinde, who rushed to Delhi on Wednesday evening, said the expansion of his Cabinet, to include Congress legislators, would be

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Special session prorogued

THE DAY-LONG special session of the Maharashtra legislature was prorogued here on Wednesday. The House was prorogued after an announcement to this effect by the Speaker Arun Gujrathi in the lower House and chairman Prof N S Pharande in the Upper House. The budget session of the State legislature is scheduled to begin on March 10 in Mumbai.



PTI, Mumbai

Sushil Kumar Shinde

done "after consultations with everyone concerned" on January 24 or 25.

Minutes before the special session of the legislature began, a beaming Shinde clad in white, personally went up to the opposition benches and shook hands with leaders like Narayan Rane, Gopinath Munde and Ganpatrao Deshmukh. He then walked within the well and greeted the legislators.

He said he was expecting a "great deal of cooperation

from the Opposition" to take the State to prosperity. Once the proceedings began, senior Congress leader Rohidas Patil proposed that the House had confidence in the Ministry headed by Shinde. The proposal was immediately approved by a voice vote and the opposition did not ask for a division of votes. The saffron camp, surprisingly, witnessed the entire show indifferently.

Maharashtra Governor Mohammad Fazal addressed

a joint session of the legislators from the Legislative Assembly and Council. Fazal read out his speech in English even as the members requested him to speak in Marathi. He said the last year had been very difficult for the state as there has been drought, scarcity of drinking water and a severe liquidity crunch. He thus outlined the priorities of the new Government headed by Shinde. The speech was so boring that the legislators yawned loudly. Some had forgotten to switch off their mobile phones and Fazal's speech was interrupted by ringing of phones.

Later in the day, addressing the media with his deputy Chhagan Bhujbal, the new chief minister said a co-ordination committee of the constituents of the Democratic Front would be set up to review the performance of the Government.

"The committee would meet once a month. We have before us serious problems such as scarcity of water, unemployment and financial crunch. I would need some days to understand the situation. But this is the time to act and not to think about ideas," said Shinde.

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 2003

IMPINGING ON RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

THE NOTICE SERVED on the American missionary, Joseph Cooper, to leave India within a week may be an appropriate action by the civil authorities in Kerala on the grounds that he should not have spoken at a religious meeting after coming into the country on a tourist visa. But then, the issues involved in this case are certainly not those that could conveniently be reduced to a matter of immigration rules. The violence let loose against Mr. Cooper and his associates near Thiruvananthapuram was clearly a fallout of the majoritarian political agenda at work and hence warranted an approach that had to be distinctly different from dealing with ordinary instances of breach of law and order. It is in this context that the measures taken by the Congress-led United Democratic Front Government in Kerala appear to be inadequate. While the civil authorities in the district did what was expected of them — detain a number of suspects — the fact that the political establishment, including the Chief Minister, A.K. Antony, had refrained from speaking out against the violent attack and identifying the political forces behind the heinous crime raises some serious concerns.

The silence maintained by the AICC establishment in this context is indeed conspicuous. The Thiruvananthapuram incident was certainly one of the many instances in recent years where the pluralist foundations of the polity were sought to be destroyed by elements associated with the Sangh Parivar outfits and pursuing the majoritarian agenda. The people involved were not demonstrating in protest against his violation of the visa rules; they indulged in an unpardonable and grievous assault. Their intention was to drive a sense of fear into the Dalits and the tribals the missionary had visited and “prevail” upon them against converting to Christianity. In this sense, the incident on Friday was one that infringed on the right of the people to choose their religion.

The approach to the incident by the State Government is cause for concern in this context as well as in the context of reports that the police department in the district is now investigating the activities of some of the “gospel groups” functioning there. Such a move, at a time when the political leadership of the BJP is busy endorsing the campaign by the other associates of the Sangh Parivar — against missionary activities across the country — to conjure up fears of the Hindu faith being in danger, will only provide a handle to sections within the civil administration to harass even those missionaries who are involved in running educational institutions as well as health care centres across Kerala. While the need to put the activities of the missionaries and their source of funds through the scanner and the enforcement of immigration rules is justified in the abstract, the fact is that such a focus in the immediate aftermath of the attack and in a context where the majoritarian virus has infected the social fabric across the country will not only be abused by sections within the bureaucracy but will also lend a sense of legitimacy to the violent ways of the storm troopers of the various Sangh Parivar outfits.

The stoic silence maintained by the AICC and the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, after the incident near Thiruvananthapuram is indeed surprising in this context. It is rather strange that the Congress as a party continues to hedge on the question of setting itself as categorically against the majoritarian campaign even after the experience in Gujarat recently. By refusing to come out against such political machinations by the BJP and its other associates, the Congress is clearly pandering to the same majoritarian political temptation and abdicating its responsibility, as the main opposition party (also in power in as many as 14 States), to defend the pluralist values that are integral to democratic India.

THE HINDU 22 JAN 2003

ALL-PARTY TEAM MEETS PRIME MINISTER ✓

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No compromise on territory: Manipur CM

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 21. While welcoming the Centre's peace talks with the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (NSCN I-M) leadership, neighbouring Manipur today asserted that any agreement at the cost of its territorial integrity would not be acceptable to it.

Even as the official level talks between the Centre and the NSCN leaders, Isak Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah, began here today, an all-party delegation from Manipur met the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, and claimed it got an assurance that the boundaries of the State would not be affected in the wake of the ongoing peace talks between the Centre and Naga leaders.

The leader of the all-party delegation and Chief Minister of Manipur, Okram Ibobi Singh, told reporters that the Prime Minister had given an assurance in this regard when they met him to discuss the impact of the Naga peace talks on Manipur.

He said that Manipur wanted a Constitutional amendment for the maintenance of the territorial integrity of the State.

However, PMO sources merely said that the Prime Minister gave the delegation a patient hearing.

"We welcome the Centre's peace talks with Nagaland but the parleys should not be at the cost of the territorial integrity of Manipur. The State will not give a single inch of land as part of the Centre's agreement with Nagas," the Chief Minister asserted. He said the Constitutional amendment should make the consent of the legislature of the State concerned mandatory in the event of the formation of a new State or in the event of alteration of areas, boundaries and name of the existing States.

Emphasising that territorial integrity of Manipur as it existed on October 15, 1949 was "invulnerable", he said that Article 371 of the Constitution should contain a clause mentioning it.

Mr. Singh later also met the Janata Dal (United) president, Sharad Yadav, and cautioned that the unfortunate incidents of June 2001 should not be allowed to recur when the whole of Manipur witnessed an uprising and unprecedented violence to protest any attempt to alter its boundaries.

In a statement to mark the

31st Statehood celebrations of Manipur, the Chief Minister expressed concern over the possible ramifications of the ongoing peace talks between the Centre and a section of Naga militants.

"Peace efforts everywhere are of national importance and are welcome. However, peace efforts that create apprehensions in the minds of law-abiding citizens of the country cannot be in the national interest. Peace efforts that may alienate a population that has endlessly brought laurels to the nation cannot be in the interest of the nation," he said.

Manipur was not a "Meiteland" and over the years the Tangkhuls, the Kukichins, Maos and Kabuis had adopted the State as their homeland, struggling and prospering together.

Meanwhile, the Centre-NSCN talks were held at a "secret location" here and would continue tomorrow, sources said.

From the Government's side, the Centre's interlocutor for Naga talks, K. Padmanabhaiah, the Intelligence Bureau Director, K.P. Singh and the Special Secretary in the Home Ministry, R.C. Jain, participated.

BHUJBAL IS DEPUTY AGAIN

Shinde sworn in CM

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40-1 By Mahesh Vijapurkar 19/1

MUMBAI, JAN. 18. Sushil Kumar Shinde (61) of the Congress was today sworn in Maharashtra Chief Minister, heading a multiparty Democratic Front Government. The Governor, Mohammed Fazal, administered the oath of office and secrecy to him and 15 Ministers.

Except for Mr. Shinde, no other Congress leader was inducted into the Ministry, which has six independents. There was no new face. Mr. Shinde succeeds Vilasrao Deshmukh, who was asked to step down by the party high command.

The constitution of the ministerial team, predominantly of independents and those from the smaller parties, shows the heavy dependence on them for securing a trust vote on January 22.

The Nationalist Congress Party's four heavyweights, including Chhagan Bhujbal — again sworn in as Deputy Chief Minister — find berths in the new Ministry.

Earlier, the idea was that Mr. Shinde would consult the high command about the constitution of his side of the coalition team before they are brought in while the entire line-up of the NCP as it was in the outgoing Government was to be administered the oath of office and that the independents would be kept waiting till they vote on the January 22 confidence motion. However, the plan was changed to ensure that the risks were limited since independents have a tendency to switch loyalties.

The uncertainty among Congressmen, however, is palpable because they have not been told who among them and when they would be taken into the Ministry.

Mr. Shinde, who has the unenviable task of steering a possible pre-poll alliance for the October 2004 Assembly elections with the Nationalist Congress Party and delivering the State out of the financial mess it finds itself in, would have to reconcile several contradictions within the party before he shapes his side in the coalition.

The AICC's pointman for Maharashtra, Vayalar Ravi, who supervised the changeover from Mr. Deshmukh to Mr. Shinde, was present but the anxious Congressmen around wanted to know when their turn would come. Two more phases of induction have been announced but that will take some time.

Those from the NCP who have become Cabinet Ministers are Mr. Bhujbal, Vijaysinh Mohite Patil, Madhukar Pichad and Padmasinh Patil.

Two others, Harshwardhan Patil, an independent and Dasharath Bhande from the RPI-Bahujan Mahasangh, too, were given Cabinet status. The rest, including the Janata Dal (Secular)'s Dada Jadhavrao, retained their Ministers of State status



Sushil Kumar Shinde taking oath as Chief Minister of Maharashtra in Mumbai on Saturday.

of the out-going Ministry. None of the smaller parties has more than three MLAs and some are single-MLA entities in the legislature.

The line up includes: Sulekha Kumbhare (RPI-Gavai), Dharmarao Atram (Gondwana Ganatantra Party), Ramdas Bodkhe (BRP-Bahujan Mahasangh), Sanjay Deshmukh, Shivaji Kardile, Ajit Ghorpade, Vinayakrao Jadhav and Digambar Bagal, all independents. Now, there is hardly any independent who matters has been left out; if any, some other office of profit awaits them, sooner than later. "What we want," some have been saying, is an "amber beacon on our cars" and "some work in our constituencies."

The swearing-in ceremony, conducted in Marathi, was witnessed among others by the former President, K.R. Narayanan.

THE HINDU

JAN 19 2004

SATURDAY, JANUARY 18, 2003

CHANGE OF GUARD IN MAHARASHTRA

BY EFFECTING A change of guard in Maharashtra, at a time when elections to the State Assembly are due in less than a couple of years, the Congress high command has indeed taken a calculated risk. The anointment of Sushil Kumar Shinde as Chief Minister in place of Vilasrao Deshmukh might appear at first sight to be a response to the demand from within the Maharashtra unit of the party rather than another instance of the command mode coming into play. But then the pace at which the process was carried out — the central party observers had several rounds of talks with the party MLAs as well as with the leaders of the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) within a couple of days of Mr. Deshmukh being told to step down by the party president, Sonia Gandhi, in New Delhi on January 13 — is sufficient evidence that the factors leading to the change of guard were not merely those confined to the Maharashtra State unit. Instead, it emerges clearly that Mr. Deshmukh had to go only because the high command wanted it that way. Dissidence within the State unit against him is certainly not a development of the past few weeks. Mr. Deshmukh was even forced into convening a special session of the State Assembly a few months ago when a handful of Congress MLAs went so far as to inform the Governor that they were withdrawing support to the Government. Mr. Deshmukh did continue as Chief Minister even after that because he enjoyed the confidence of the party high command at that stage. Now when the party's central command decided otherwise, he had to go.

The command mode was in evidence even in the manner in which Mr. Shinde was made Chief Minister. True that the "election" of Mr. Shinde to replace Mr. Deshmukh did not go through the familiar pattern (established over the years in the Congress) of the central observers obtaining a simple resolution where the legislature party would "authorise" the party high command to name the new leader. This, after all, was how Mr. Deshmukh himself was chosen soon after the State Assembly elections in September 1999. But

then, the central observers left no one in doubt, in this instance too, that Mr. Shinde was chosen as the new leader of the Congress Legislature Party only because the high command had so desired. The only hurdle they had to clear before they could complete the process of "electing" Mr. Shinde seemed to be the NCP — the Congress' ally in the coalition Government — and after the high command's emissaries persuaded the NCP to endorse their choice, Mr. Shinde's election as CLP leader was only a formality. It is clear that Mr. Deshmukh (despite having been offered an assignment in the AICC) is unlikely to take his forced exit from the Chief Minister's post without a murmur. There are others in the party's State unit who have already expressed their resentment against the imposition of Mr. Shinde as Chief Minister. But then, such dissent within the party is immaterial as far as Mr. Shinde is concerned as long as he continues to enjoy the confidence of the high command.

Given this reality as well as the years of experience Mr. Shinde has in the political arena, there is indeed a lot of space for him to manoeuvre in the coming months to equip the Congress as a party for the State Assembly elections (as well as the general elections) due in October 2004. Mr. Deshmukh's record in the area of governance had left a lot to be desired and this was among the reasons behind the decision by the Peasants and Worker's Party (one of the allies in the coalition Government) withdrawing its support to the Government some months ago. All these and dissidence against Mr. Deshmukh had left the ruling combine with a slender majority in the State Assembly. The build up of dissatisfaction could have been the reason for the party high command finally pressing the panic button and deciding to replace Mr. Deshmukh at this stage. Mr. Shinde, thus, has a difficult task ahead for he will not only have to deal with detractors within his party but also balance his own party's interests with that of the NCP and, above these, deal with a determined opposition in the shape of the BJP-Shiv Sena combine.

THE HINDU

18 JAN 2003

9-8 w 1971 Birthday bash for Mayawati questioned

By J.P. Shukla

LUCKNOW, JAN. 16. The Bharatiya Janata Party has reason to be concerned at the manner in which the dividing line between the functioning of the ruling Bahujan Samaj Party in Uttar Pradesh and the State Government got blurred during the Chief Minister, Mayawati's birthday celebrations here on Wednesday.

While the BJP leadership seemed to have ignored the 'aberrations', the cadres are concerned at the likely political fallout of the event.

The Opposition has questioned the propriety of the political activities of the ruling dispensation being mixed with Government work.

The Chief Minister's birthday was celebrated on a scale that could be the envy of anyone.

But the organiser of the function was the State Government with its various departments involved in different activities including erection of pandals and looking after other arrangements to make the event a success.

The invitation letters were sent out by the Chief Secretary in his official capacity. He was present on the dais along with the BSP supremo, Kanshi Ram, and the BJP Legislature Party leader, Lalji Tandon.

And the justification given was that the function was to observe "Swabhiman Divas" meant to enhance self-respect among Dalits and other weaker sections of society.

The pride of place for Mr. Kanshi Ram as also his speech could hardly show that it was a Government function.

The BSP supremo explained the future plans of his party to the BSP cadres, who had especially come to attend the func-



The Bahujan Samaj Party chief, Kanshi Ram, offering a piece of cake to the Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister, Mayawati, on her birthday in Lucknow on Wednesday. — Photo: Subir Roy

tion from different parts of the State. The main thrust of his speech was that he wanted to see the BSP attain the "number one" position in the country's political firmament.

Right now, it was behind the BJP and the Congress but he would like it to go ahead of the two parties during his lifetime.

He also justified collection of funds to be gifted to the Chief Minister on the ground that his party needed money to run the organisation, especially when he had fixed higher aims for the party.

The Opposition parties, including the Samajwadi Party and the Congress, severely criticised 'misuse' of official machinery and government funds to celebrate Ms. Mayawati's birthday.

The Samajwadi Party leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, said it

was a "great insult" to the people of Uttar Pradesh that instead of providing relief to those suffering from cold and hunger, the Chief Minister was "celebrating her birthday with public funds".

The Congress echoed similar sentiments and said that spending public money for the birthday could never be justified.

The BJP leaders kept mum. No party leader except Mr. Tandon has directly associated himself with the celebrations.

The concern among the cadre about the propriety of the function was, however, quite visible, as they feel that one day they would have to explain to the public why they failed to prevent the Chief Minister from obfuscating the line between her political agenda and the agenda of the Government.

THE HINDU

17 JAN 2003

Hill council for Kargil cleared

Statesman News Service

JAMMU, Jan. 16. — The state Cabinet today sanctioned the Autonomous Hill Development Council for Kargil on the pattern of similar council already in existence for Leh.

The chief minister Mr. Mufti Mohammad Sayeed chaired the first meeting of the expanded Cabinet here this morning. Announcing the decisions of the Cabinet, the chief secretary, Dr. Sudhir S. Bloreia said that the formal notification in terms of Section 3 (Sub-Section 1) of Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council Act, 1997 will be issued fixing 30 June as the date from which KAHADC shall come into being.

On the pattern of LAHDC Leh, the KAHDC shall have the same structure and powers which are provided to the Leh council and will have chief executive councillor, executive councillors with same powers and perks as notified by the government.

The Cabinet also accorded approval to the provision of necessary funds in the state's annual plan for 2003-04 for setting up of Council for Kargil.

The Cabinet also decided to re-tender for disposal of accumulated stocks of empty gunny bags lying in the stores of Food and Supplies Department, Kashmir. These will be disposed of 'on as is where is basis' on the terms and conditions to be fixed by the Director, Food and Supplies, Kashmir.



A man walks past fire outside a police station in Chinore near Jammu on Thursday after protesters set alight documents and files seized from the station. They were demonstrating against the alleged killing of Rajesh Singh under police custody. — AFP

The Cabinet directed that the contract for disposal of empty gunny bags shall be finalised by the end of the current financial year.

The gunny bags worth over Rs 11 crore are reportedly lying in various stores of the Kashmir valley. While the issue relating to disposal of about 119 lakh gunny bags has been hanging in balance since 1998, today's decision to re-tender for their disposal was motivated by the increase in the sale rate of these bags in the open market. Disposal of gunny bags at the earlier fixed rate of Rs 10.02 per bag could put the state exchequer to loss. Dr. Bloreia

also said the Cabinet has also approved the master plan for Srinagar for 2000-21. The earlier master plan for the Srinagar city had expired in 1991 and was extended till the notification of the new plan.

Mufti seeks help for reviving tourism: Mr. Sayeed today stressed upon the tourist and travel trade to supplement government efforts for revival of tourism, which is the backbone of the economy of the state that has suffered immensely due to militancy. He was interacting with a deputation of hoteliers of Pahalgam, Gulmarg and Srinagar that called on him here this evening.

17 JAN 2003

THE STATESMAN

ELECTED CLP CHIEF UNANIMOUSLY

Shinde to be Maharashtra CM

By Mahesh Vijapurkar

MUMBAI, JAN. 16. At the behest of the Congress high command, Sushilkumar Shinde, MP, was elected Leader of the Maharashtra Congress Legislature Party this afternoon even before the Chief Minister, Vilasrao Deshmukh, could submit his resignation to the Governor, Mohammed Fazal, who was away from Mumbai. Mr. Shinde will thus become the first Dalit Chief Minister in a State where Marathas dominate politics.

Though, in typical Congress fashion, Mr. Shinde was elected "unanimously" with Mr. Deshmukh himself proposing his name after putting up a stiff fight the whole of Wednesday to retain his office, no explanation was forthcoming on why Mr. Deshmukh was sacked in the first place. The MPCC chief, Govindrao Adik, Mr. Deshmukh's bitter rival, seconded Mr. Shinde's name, while praising the outgoing Chief Minister "for doing his best."

The only word on Mr. Deshmukh's departure came from Pranab Mukherjee, one of the central observers, who told the MLAs that it was not due to "non-performance" but because "a change was required." Some disgruntled MLAs were later heard saying, "first, an injustice was done to Mr. Deshmukh. Now, we are not even told why he was replaced."

Mr. Deshmukh did not bow out easily. He put up a stiff resistance, claiming that the majority in the Assembly was in his favour. He cited the wavering nature of support of the



Sushilkumar Shinde being felicitated after being elected chief of the Maharashtra Congress Legislature Party in Mumbai on Thursday. Also seen are the outgoing Chief Minister, Vilasrao Deshmukh (right), and the Pradesh Congress chief, Govindrao Adik. — Photo: Vivek Bendre

Independents and the smaller parties to buttress his point. Not that Mr. Deshmukh had any quarrel with Mr. Shinde's elevation — he did not want to leave just because a few detractors had "persuaded" the high command to act.

Seasoned politician

The 63-year-old Mr. Shinde is a seasoned politician and administrator and has held several portfolios in the Maharashtra Cabinet. Born in a poor family, he started off as a court peon, joined police, studied law and was spotted by Sharad Pawar who initiated him into politics. He went on to hold a Ministry during his first stint as MLA in

1974. Last year, he contested the Vice-Presidential election as the combined opposition candidate against Bhairon Singh Shekhawat.

Mr. Shinde's election came through only after the Nationalist Congress Party expressed its willingness to go along with the Congress' choice. To get the concurrence, the three observers from Delhi — Mr. Mukherjee, Vyalar Ravi and Ghulam Nabi Azad — met the NCP leader and Deputy Chief Minister, Chhagan Bhujbal, at his residence. The other independents, and smaller parties, gave their letters of support to a "Congress-led Government," unlike in the past, when they ex-

pressed support to Mr. Deshmukh as an individual.

Mr. Shinde had to cross another hurdle. Vijaysinh Mohite-Patil, NCP Minister, had said "anyone but Mr. Shinde" was acceptable and threatened to make his election to the Assembly in the mandatory six months "impossible." Mr. Shinde called on his sore rival, powerful in his domain of Solapur, and pacified him in a one-on-one meeting.

Earlier, a resolution was moved saying that Mr. Deshmukh was resigning in favour of Mr. Shinde and that the CLP would like to have the high command announce the name of his successor. And when Mr. Shinde's name was formally announced, Mr. Deshmukh said the two had been the "best of friends for long."

If Mr. Shinde, long-time aspirant for the top job, was brought in to improve the Congress chances at the elections in October 2004, the difficulty of the assignment was not lost on him. Upon election as the CLP chief, he said, "we have only 16 to 17 months left" before the elections to the Assembly. But before that, he would have to get elected in a by-election; Anandrao Deokate, Minister in the outgoing Government, offered his seat, South Solapur.

Observers said Mr. Shinde's election might have a limited impact. "It can at best be a tokenism" as he did not have a big "base among Dalits." Some Congressmen claimed that there could be a negative impact on the Maratha enthusiasm.

GEHLOT MEETS SONIA, MAY NOT BE DISTURBED

Cong. deposes observers to Maharashtra

By Javed M. Ansari

NEW DELHI, JAN. 14. The exercise to effect a leadership change in the Maharashtra Government today moved up a notch, with the high command deciding to send the senior Congress Working Committee (CWC) members, Pranab Mukherjee and Ghulam Nabi Azad, and the AICC general secretary in-charge of Maharashtra, Vayalar Ravi, to Mumbai tomorrow, as observers. Their brief interact with the MLAs and report back to the high command.

(Meanwhile, in a development concerning Rajasthan, its Chief Minister, Ashok Gehlot, met the party president, Sonia Gandhi, along with Ambika Soni, AICC general secretary in-charge of the State. Party sources, however, dismissed reports of a leadership change in Rajasthan. According to Ms. Soni, as far as the programme and manifesto implementation was concerned, Mr. Gehlot had done a "remarkable job".)

Mr. Mukherjee, Mr. Azad and Mr. Ravi are being sent to Mumbai to ensure a smooth transition, according to senior leaders. They are likely to meet the MLAs

individually and later preside over a legislature party meeting. It is expected that at the end of the exercise the MLAs will authorise Ms. Gandhi to decide who the next Chief Minister will be.

Talking to newsmen this afternoon Mr. Ravi said: "We will have consultations with the MLAs and get back to the leadership."

The Central leadership is keen that the change of guard is brought about in a smooth and dignified manner. "There is no question of humiliating Vilasrao Deshmukh," a senior leader said.

Talks with NCP

The central observers will also hold talks with the Nationalist Congress Party. Though the NCP chief, Sharad Pawar, is abroad, Mr. Ravi said they would consult with the leaders of that party. "They are after all our coalition partners," he said.

Mr. Mukherjee and Mr. Azad are familiar with Maharashtra and the leadership hopes that they will be able to ensure a smooth change of head of Government. Mr. Azad, who was in Jammu, arrived here this eve-

ning and later the three met at Mr. Mukherjee's residence to decide on the modalities for talks tomorrow.

Govindrao Adik, Maharashtra Pradesh Congress Committee chief, briefly met Ms. Gandhi this morning.

He was apparently asked to continue for the time being. According to sources, the focus now is on ensuring that the change of leadership in the Government is completed without a hitch. After this the leadership is expected to turn its attention to the PCC.

The sources said that the question of a change in the PCC was very much in the reckoning and it was likely that Mr Adik would be accommodated in the new Ministry, before being replaced.

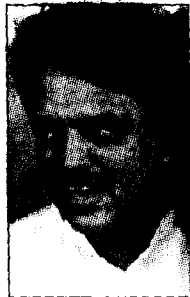
The leadership, it is felt, will have to ensure that the regional balance is maintained and if the chief ministership goes to western Maharashtra, then the PCC chief will have to be from Vidharbha.

Prominent amongst the names being mentioned as his replacement are Prithviraj Chauhan, Shivaji Rao Mojhe and Ranjit Deshmukh.

See also Page 12

Sonia asks Deshmukh to step down

State News Service



Mr Deshmukh

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, Jan. 13. — The Maharashtra chief minister, Mr Vilasrao Deshmukh, who was summoned to Delhi by the Congress president today, was told by Mrs Sonia Gandhi to step down to facilitate a change in the state leadership. The Congress Legislative Party meets in Mumbai

on Wednesday to elect a new leader.

However, the alliance partner in Maharashtra, the Nationalist Congress Party leader, Mr Chagan Bhuwal, was told about the impending change in the afternoon before Mr Deshmukh left for Delhi.

Three Congress observers under party general secretary Mr Vyalar Ravi will conduct the CLP meeting. They'll take the opinion of Congress legislators over the choice of the new chief minister. The names being mentioned are that of Mr Sushil Kumar Shinde and Mr Shivraj Patil. The party leadership is likely to announce a simultaneous change in the organisational set-up.

The PCC president, Mr Govindrao Adik, who has consistently campaigned against Mr Deshmukh is also likely to be axed. The NCP has almost accepted the change. The party chief, Mr Sharad Pawar, left for Switzerland this evening after making sure that the Congress intends to change the chief minister.

Mr Deshmukh left 10 Janpath tonight literally through the back door without technically offering his resignation.

If removed Mr Deshmukh will be the fourth chief minister to be served marching orders by Mrs Gandhi, who had earlier struck twice in Orissa and once in Pondicherry. The chief minister has reportedly told Mrs Gandhi that many powerful sections have been placing obstacles in his way. His arch rival, Mr G Adhik, who is also not placed comfortably, is slated to meet Mrs Gandhi tomorrow.

VIRTUAL BARGA II BEFORE POLLS

State waives land tax dues

571 1411
Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, Jan. 13. — With a few months to go for the panchayat elections, the Left Front government today offered sops to all beneficiaries of Operation Barga, its vote bank of small and marginal farmers, by granting an amnesty since April 1978 on tax payable on their land holdings.

The revenue loss from what is virtually Operation Barga II, an amount the government refuses to specify, will be incurred despite the state's grave financial crisis.

Interestingly, 68.5 lakh of the 73 lakh agricultural land holdings in the state belong to small or marginal farmers, an outcome of Operation Barga under which large agricultural land holdings were divided and distributed among farmers.

The cut-off year for the amnesty — Bengali New Year's day, 1978 — too is politically significant, falling around the time the barga operations began after the Left Front first came to power in June 1977.

That exercise saw the LF through polls after polls for 25 years, but has now apparently stopped yielding political dividends.

The decision on tax waiver was taken at a meeting at Writers' Build-

ings this evening. It was attended by the chief minister and ministers for land and land reforms, agriculture, finance and panchayats. The move is aimed at reminding the rural masses about the LF's 25-year-old gift in the form of plots of land.

The decision was announced by the state land and land reforms minister, Mr Abdur Rezzak Mollah. The tax amnesty will apply to all farmers with agricultural land hold-

ings below four acres in irrigated areas and six acres in non-irrigated areas.

Hence, those who haven't paid tax on their holdings for the past 25 years — and most haven't — are being rewarded for keeping the LF in power that long. Owners of small land holdings will, however, have to pay arrears on cess at an annual rate of only Rs 9 an acre.

Those who own large land holdings — above four

acres irrigated land and six acres non-irrigated land — will have to pay arrears on tax and cess at an annual rate of Rs 38 an acre. There are only 4.5 lakh such agricultural land holdings across the state. The government expects to earn about Rs 15 crore a year from arrears on tax and cess. This meeting also decided to impose tax on tea garden land at Rs 30 per acre annually.

Citu threat to private hospitals

KOLKATA, Jan. 13. — The Citu today threatened it would not hesitate to organise strikes at private hospitals and nursing homes in the state. The threat follows Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee's appeal to keep hospitals out of the purview of strike. Citu said private hospitals "that follow anti-worker policies" would be targeted. State president Mr Chitabrata Majumder claimed Citu was opposed to vandalism in the name of trade unionism. "We will, however, never surrender the workers' right to strike work as a weapon of last resort."

— SNS

Delhi signals stage II of Naga talks

SEEMAGUHA

9-12-88 5-09 14/1

New Delhi, Jan. 13: In a clear indication of the Centre's keenness to resolve the decades-old Naga problem, deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani today said a political negotiator would be appointed soon to carry on the discussions with the NSCN (I-M).

This is aimed at bringing the talks to a satisfactory conclusion. However, he maintained that there was no overnight solution to the problem.

Having expressed satisfaction over the way the talks have progressed so far, the Indian leadership now wants to elevate them to the political level.

Till recently, the talks were being handled mainly by former Union home secretary K. Padmanabhaiah.

"We are thinking of it and will soon make an announcement," Advani said asked about New Delhi's decision to appoint a political nominee for the talks with the Naga leaders. Advani also pointed out that the Centre has chalked out some plans for resolving the country's oldest insurgency problem, but refused to divulge details.

"Though I have knowledge about certain aspects, it would not be fruitful to disclose those at this stage of the talks," he said.

The deputy Prime Minister expressed happiness over the progress of the talks with the

NSCN (I-M), pointing out that the decision of Naga leaders Thuingaleng Muivah and Isak Chisi Swu's decision to come to the country was a "significant achievement."

Commenting on the ongoing talks, Advani said it was heartening that the NSCN (I-M) leaders have agreed to visit India for talks as earlier, all such parleys were held in other countries.

Advani had been personally keen to ensure that substantive negotiations take place only on Indian soil. It had taken time and effort to convince the NSCN (I-M) leaders of the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government's sincerity in wanting a final resolution of the Naga issue. The preparatory talks had extended over nearly five years.

The NSCN (I-M) leaders have publicly appreciated the sincerity and wisdom of the current leadership, Advani pointed out. Both Muivah and Swu had said so after meeting the Prime Minister and the deputy Prime Minister.

"The talks have progressed in the right direction as the government wanted peace in that state," Advani said after inaugurating the Brahmaputra beach festival in Guwahati. To a question whether the government was considering any proposal to include the NSCN (Khaplang) in the peace process, he said the Centre had allowed the ban on both factions to lapse.

14 JAN 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

Grounded, above and under

Cops watch as cadres paint Kolkata red

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 12

THE CPI(M) partied, Kolkata paid the price.

The "mother of all rallies", as the Marxists had touted its Sunday Brigade rally, turned out to be the mother of all bother as a sea of red flags and cadres drowned the city in unremitting chaos. Even on an unheated Sunday this was a rally that the few Kolkataans who ventured out would like to forget in a hurry.

The cops were reduced to hapless spectators, with comrades taking over the business of road management. On the rare occasions when it moved, traffic was painstakingly slow. With most buses appropriated to "mobilise" the cadres, and others kept waiting for eternity by serial processions, public transport was all but dead.

If this was the scene on the ground, it wasn't much different below it. Metro authorities were jolted out of their winter Sunday slumber as disruptions hit Chandni Chowk, Esplanade, Park Street, Maidan and Rabindra Sadan stations. Between 4 and 5 pm, trains had to be detained at every station as Metro officials pleaded with enthusiastic cadres to ask some of their comrades to step out so that the doors could close and the trains move.

Adding to Metro's woes were Gangasagar pilgrims — most on their first Metro ride. At 4.10 pm, the air pipe of an overcrowded rake snapped. The train had to be halted and the entire compartment vacated. Services on the Up line were disrupted till 6.20 pm and six trains cancelled before services could resume.

Admitting the mess, Metro's Chief Operations Manager David Topno said the problem was aggravated by the fact that a skeletal staff works on Sundays, who just couldn't cope with the rush. "We had considered running special trains, but even that was not possible."

BRIGADE BOTHER



CROWD Over 6 lakh

BUSES Taken off to ferry rallyists

TRAFFIC Condemned to a crawl

METRO Severely disrupted

HOSPITALS Services hit

All roads leading to central Kolkata were chock-a-block. It was only after 7.30 pm that the traffic began to ease. But that wasn't much help as most of the 1.250 private buses had been taken off the roads to ply party workers.

Some transport operators claimed Citu men had forced them to provide the buses. Asked about this, a Citu leader said the programme had been decided well in advance with transport operators. Hundreds of buses that came from the districts — and paid a meagre Rs 1,000 for the day's service — were parked along the major thoroughfares, adding to the traffic jam.

Bengal Bus Syndicate leader Sarna Kamal Saha alleged: "Bus owners who were lucky enough to get requisition slips will get just a few hundred rupees, which doesn't even cover the fuel costs. What can we do? They wield control over the drivers' and contractors' unions."

Emergency health services were hit. The worst sufferers were patients heading to SSKM. Its emergency ward was empty. Ambulances had to alter routes as no one dared to take on the long marchers. Their right of passage wasn't negotiable, even with others' right to live. No one messes with The Party.

See also Kolkata Live



Buddhadhab Bhattacharjee and Jyoti Basu exchange notes as Biman Bose addresses the crowd at the Brigade Parade Grounds on Sunday.

CPM sticks to old lines, hums unity tune

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 12

IT WAS back to the basics for the CPI(M) at its mammoth Brigade rally on Sunday where its top leaders flagged off the panchayat elections build-up by stressing Left unity and reaffirming the party's commitment to the working class.

Responding to Mamata Banerjee's recent call to the CPI(M)'s Front partners to dump the Marxists and join her, Jyoti Basu and CPI(M) State secretary Anil Biswas appealed to Front constituents to thrash out the inner

wrangling at the panchayat level.

"Front partners fought one another in as many as 2,000 panchayat seats last year. Despite this, people voted us to power. We should try to minimise such intra-Front contests this time," Basu told the gathering in the presence of Front colleagues such as Asoke Ghosh, Kshiti Goswami and Manju Majumdar.

Appealing to party leaders to begin preparing for the panchayat polls, Biswas said: "Strengthen Front unity at the grassroots. Let's consolidate our support base."

Buddhadhab Bhattacharjee

said: "The Trinamool Congress is trying to woo our partners. They aren't even aware of the sacrifices our predecessors made to bring the Left Front to power. Difficult as it may be for the Trinamool to comprehend, ministership is not what Front leaders are interested in."

Taking the attack to a personal level, Basu said: "I hate to take her name as she doesn't care for principles. I am surprised at her audacity to invite our partners to her camp. What can you expect from a lady who lies even about her academic credentials?"

Dumping his pet peeve against militant trade unionism, Bhattacharjee thought it wise to stick to the peasant-worker script. He had little option, as Front chairman Biman Bose set the tone of the Chief Minister's address by asking him to "clarify the prevailing confusion among the Left ranks on the new economic policy" as he invited him to deliver his speech.

Bhattacharjee thus didn't say a word on sick PSUs or the increase in service charges. Instead, he made populist noises over how the State was determined to carry on the ration system despite Delhi's pressure.

Subhankar Chakraborty/HT

MONDAY, JANUARY 13, 2003

THE NAGA PEACE PROCESS

18/1
THE MEETING BETWEEN the top leaders of the NSCN (I-M) and the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, in Delhi suggests that a solution to the problem involving the Nagas is imminent. The NSCN (I-M), after all, was among the outfits banned for their activities considered inimical to the unity and territorial integrity of India and its top leaders — Isaac Swu and Thuinggaleng Muivah — were forced into exile for several years. The ban on their activities had prevented the Union Government from holding talks with the outfit within the country due to which the Government's special emissary, K. Padmanabhaiah, had to fly to Thailand several times since 1996 even to set the stage for formal talks. Mr. Swu and Mr. Muivah, it may be recalled, were holed up in Thailand all these years to evade arrest and there was an element of incongruity in the manner in which the negotiations were being carried out; the Union Government was engaged in talking to the leaders of an outfit that was banned by law. The ban, which was time bound, had lapsed a couple of months ago and when the Home Ministry did not extend it further, it was clear that the stage was set for direct and formal talks with the NSCN (I-M).

The extension of the areas of ceasefire between the Government troops and the NSCN (I-M) cadre to parts of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh at one stage, which was agreed upon during one such round of talks, however, provoked large-scale violence across Manipur. It is a fact that the idea of including the several districts outside Nagaland within the scope of the ceasefire agreement was indeed based on a demand by the NSCN (I-M). It was clear even then that Mr. Swu and Mr. Muivah placed the demand in the larger context of their demand for "greater Nagaland". That the NSCN (I-M)'s demand and its agenda go beyond mere territorial adjustments and that the Council continues to remain firm on its demand for secession of the Naga dominated region (that includes several districts in Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh) from the Indian Union are clear from the

9-11-2003 5:10
words that the two leaders have chosen to describe the nature of the talks even now. Take for instance the refrain by the two leaders soon after the talks that they perceived a change in the Government's position in that "there is a better understanding now" and that the Government was willing to understand the unique history and circumstances of Nagaland. Similarly, Mr. Swu has refused to categorically distance the NSCN (I-M) from the demand for "greater Nagaland". All these and similar remarks by the two leaders during their interaction with the media after the talks with the Union Home Minister, L. K. Advani (that their demand remains the same), will certainly remain the basis for serious apprehensions over the direction of the talks whether it be among the people of Manipur, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh where the idea of a "greater Nagaland" could mean ceding of territory or the level of unity and territorial integrity of the Indian state. The NSCN (I-M) has refused, even at this stage, to give up its demand for a separate nation.

For all these reasons, it becomes imperative for the Vajpayee regime at this stage to state in categorical terms that the NSCN (I-M) should give up its demand for "greater Nagaland" once and for all. It is also important that the Union Government put in place an institutional arrangement to involve the political leadership across the spectrum in the negotiations. Such an approach is all the more important given the conflict of interests in the northeastern region where the party system and political labels have remained irrelevant and where internecine wars between outfits consisting of tribal youth have led to the collapse of the party system completely. An immediate fallout of the Naga peace talks, as it is evident now, is the unrest simmering among the Khuki youth in Manipur who fear that the talks could lead to disintegration of the State. Given fears and apprehensions the onus is now on the Prime Minister to not just assuage the feelings but also clarify the framework within which the Naga peace process will be pursued from now.

THE HINDU

13 JAN 2003

12/11
10-1

There will be no more fighting, say Naga leaders ^{9/11/88}

By Sandeep Dikshit

NEW DELHI, JAN. 11. Emerging from the meeting with the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, leaders of the National Socialist Council of Nagaland (Isak-Muivah) made a significant statement here today. There would be "no more fighting between Indians and Nagas," they said.

"I want to tell you that there will be no more fighting between Indians and Nagas. That is the understanding we have reached now," the NSCN (I-M) chairman, Isak Chisi Swu, said after an hour-long meeting with Mr. Fernandes.

"The people of Nagaland

have been praying that the leadership of India and the NSCN (I-M) should successfully conclude their talks. Nagas have now a much better understanding with the people of India," said Mr. Swu. The NSCN (I-M) general secretary, Thuingaleng Muivah, described the talks with Mr. Fernandes as "very cordial" and his response as "very warm."

The Naga leaders later met Swaraj Kaushal, previous interlocutor in the decades-long peace process, but declined to comment on the substance of the meeting. Mr. Kaushal also did not go beyond describing the etiquette behind the hour-long interaction. "It was a

brother's visit to a brother. Muivah is my brother. The meeting is nothing different," he said, terming the talks as progressing in the "right direction."

The optimistic pro-peace statements by the Naga leaders come at a time when temperatures are rising in certain parts of the northeast, particularly Manipur Valley and its surrounding hills dominated by non-Naga tribes and communities.

There is consternation over the Naga leaders indicating on Friday that the demand for greater Nagaland, which imply certain portions of Manipur, had not been dropped.

See also Page 13

THE HINDU

SATURDAY, JANUARY 11, 2003

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A SHORTSIGHTED MOVE
9.6.23

A SHORTSIGHTED MOVE

THE DECISION OF the Vajpayee Government to suspend the passport of Mirwaiz Umer Farooq, a senior Hurriyat leader and an acknowledged moderate within the separatist conglomerate's leadership — indications are that the move is a prelude to the revocation or impounding of the travel document — reflects a very narrow mindset and makes little political sense, given the imperative of a broadbased dialogue for resolving the Kashmir imbroglio. And there are suggestions that similar curbs on travel abroad are under way in respect of quite a few other separatist leaders also, such as Yasin Malik and Sheikh Abdul Aziz. In a sense, this development is a sequel to, and has to be seen in the context of, what the Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani, had stated less than a fortnight ago on the scope of the proposed talks. He made it known that while the scope of the Government's dialogue initiative would not be confined to the participation of the elected representatives of the people, the groups whom he called "Pakistan's proxies" (read the All-Party Hurriyat Conference) would be kept out of the process. If the latest move to crack the whip on the Hurriyat and other separatist leaders is a signal negative enough, much worse is that the first target, ironically, is the Mirwaiz, who is no pro-Pakistan hawk but one who has emerged as a credible moderate force, speaking up for a negotiated settlement through a comprehensive dialogue.

In fact, one is inclined to think that the BJP-led Government at the Centre has, at various points in time, allowed its approaches to Kashmir related issues and developments to be significantly conditioned by its attitude towards the Hurriyat, as reflected in Mr. Advani's more recent description of it as an echo of its "master", Pakistan's "voice". Consider, for instance, the failed Ramzan ceasefire initiative (2000-01). The Hurriyat's well-intentioned offer to send a team to Pakistan for an interaction with the various jihadi groups, as also the Government there, in an attempt to make the ceasefire a two-way street was thwarted by New

Delhi which refused to clear the travel documents of the delegation for the reason that it included a diehard exponent of the 'merger with Pakistan' line. This, after having gone along with the idea during the backroom parleys and despite the Prime Minister's solemn promise (in his New Year musings from Kerala) that the Government "shall not traverse solely on the beaten track of the past" in looking for a solution to the Kashmir problem. Not that the Hurriyat mission would have met with great success. But the way the whole issue was handled betrayed a deep sense of distrust on the part of the Vajpayee regime towards the APHC. The current moves by the Government against the Mirwaiz would suggest, if anything, the same mindset, which in a way may be seen as an extension (on the domestic front) of New Delhi's inflexible stand on a dialogue with Islamabad, ruling out any engagement unless the Pervez Musharraf regime put an end to cross-border terrorism.

In the changed political context — the remarkably successful conduct of elections to the State Assembly, the advent of the PDP-led coalition headed by Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and the significant steps the new regime has taken by way of providing the much-needed 'healing touch' — the key to finding a political solution to the Kashmir imbroglio lies in a dialogue process that is inclusive particularly of all shades of the separatist platform. As for the Hurriyat, there has been a distinct shift in its policy line, away from its rigid pro-Pakistan position, in recent times and an influential section of its leadership has been responding positively to at least some of the peace initiatives, although in an ill advised move it chose to 'boycott' the poll process. If, on that account, its popular support base remains untested, there can be no gainsaying the outfit's widely-recognised image as an honest interlocutor of the Kashmiris. As such, the Vajpayee Government would do well not to let the imperative of an inclusive dialogue to be undermined by its deepseated prejudices vis-a-vis the Hurriyat, or other separatist groups for that matter.

THE HINDU

NAGA REBEL LEADERS MEET VAJPAYEE

A good beginning has been made, says Muivah

By Anjali Mody

NEW DELHI, JAN. 9. The meeting of the leaders of the Naga secessionist movement, Isak Swu and Thuingaleng Muivah, and the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, ended on a positive note with the NSCN (I-M) chairman, Mr. Swu, describing the approach of both sides as "mature" and "realistic". The Prime Minister and the leadership of India, he said were "very sincere" in finding a solution to the Naga problem.

Speaking to the media outside the Prime Minister's residence after the 40 minute-long meeting, Mr. Swu declined to discuss the details of the talks, which he described as "cordial and friendly". Asked what the core issue of the negotiations was, he said it was "to find a solution through peaceful means".

The meeting of the Naga with the Prime Minister is the first of its kind in 36 years and is being flagged as a milestone towards finding a solution to the longest secessionist movement that India has seen. Apart from Mr. Swu and Mr. Muivah, the Government's special emissary, K. Padmanabhaiah, and the Director of the Intelligence Bureau, K.P. Singh, were present at the meeting.

Mr. Muivah, NSCN (I-M) general secretary, said that if the Government "would respect the reality of Nagaland, the Nagas would respect the reality of India 10 times more". He said a good beginning had been made and that "there is a better understanding now" with the Government acknowledging the unique history and circumstances of Nagaland. If things went along this path, he said, "We can talk and reach a meeting point."

Mr. Swu echoed the senti-



The Naga leaders, Isak Chishi Swu (left) and Th. Muivah, paying homage at Rajghat in New Delhi on Thursday — Photo: Anu Pushkarna

ment. The effort was to find a solution keeping in mind the history of the Naga people. "The Prime Minister and the leadership of India are very open. They are trying to solve the problem according to the history of the Naga people." Asked whether the final goal of the NSCN (I-M) remained the creation of a "Greater Nagaland", he said, "There is no greater or smaller Nagaland; there is just Nagaland."

Mr. Swu was among those

who participated in the failed talks of 1967 between the undivided Naga leadership and the then Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi. Asked about the difference between the talks in 1967 and that in New Delhi today, he said, "I have to be very frank. The previous talks were not mature on both sides and so we could not solve the problem. But this time the leadership is mature and wants to tackle the problem realistically."

Fear in Manipur: Page 13

Naga leaders coming for 'unconditional' talks

By Anjali Mody

NEW DELHI, JAN. 8. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, is set to hold talks with the leaders of the Naga insurgent group, NSCN (I-M) here tomorrow, marking a major step forward in the five-year-long peace process.

The NSCN (I-M) chairman, Isak Swu, and the general secretary, Thuingaleng Muivah, arriving here, are prepared for a dialogue "without conditions", K. Padmanabiah, the Government's special emissary, said.

Talks with the NSCN (I-M) leaders, initiated by the United Front Government, have taken place over the last five years in Thailand and various European capitals.

Their coming to India caps a slow but determined progress in the peace process, marked by a ceasefire sustained over five years and the lifting of the ban on the organisation, Mr.

Padmanabiah said.

The last time the Naga leaders met an Indian Prime Minister in New Delhi was in 1967. They have, however, over the last decade met successive Prime Ministers, for informal meetings, abroad.

Mr. Vajpayee has met with them twice before, in Paris in 1998 and Japan in 2001.

The Nagas' major demands are the creation of a single administrative area for the Naga dominated areas of the north east, and greater autonomy, befitting their 'unique' position in India.

These issues are expected to form the substance of the talks between the Prime Minister and the Naga leaders.

The meeting is considered a significant step in the on-going peace process and not one that will produce an immediate result.

There has been speculation about whether the lifting of the ban and meeting in New Delhi would lead to the NSCN (I-M)'s participation in the

legislative elections in Nagaland.

There is, however, little substance to this speculation. Informed sources in government, however, suggest that the progress in the peace process may buoy voter interest in an election which could challenge the dominance of the current Congress Government.

Mr. Muivah and Mr. Swu will also meet the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, and the BJP president, M. Venkaiah Naidu.

They have also expressed an interest in meeting with the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, and other leaders such as the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Chandrababu Naidu, and the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa.

The meeting with Mr. Vajpayee is set for 7.30 p.m. on Thursday.

In the morning, Mr. Muivah and Mr. Swu are expected to visit the Raj Ghat.

THE HINDU

9 JAN 2003

An officer, a gentleman

Tragically, our police have few like Bapi Sen
and very many like his attackers

IN a short span of six days Bapi Sen, a police sergeant based in Kolkata, had become a familiar name to thousands in this country. When he died on Monday morning numerous people, quite removed from his immediate circle, mourned. What made a hitherto unknown policeman so special was the exemplary courage he displayed in taking on five men whom he found misbehaving with a woman as part of their New Year revelry. Sen was not in uniform so he could well have looked the other way. It was the fact that he chose to act when most in the police force would have neglected to do so — even if they were in uniform — is what makes this man, this officer and a gentleman, so unique.

The tragedy is that while Bapi Sen's response was not typical of our police force, that of his attackers, was. Here were men, supposedly appointed to protect the citizen — particularly women — from assault, themselves turning predators the moment they were out of uniform. Their reaction once confronted was also quite typical. The instinct was to immediately gang up

and brutally assault anyone who stood in their way — they beat up Sen until he fell, apparently hit his head on a stone, and went into a coma. There was, initially, some attempt at hushing things up. It was only a while after the event that the culprits were actually apprehended.

Whether they will be punished in a manner commensurate with their crimes is, of course, a question that only the future will answer. Remember we are speaking here of a system in which police officials are constantly protecting each other, even when proved guilty of wrongdoing. The manner in which Haryana IG, Ravi Kant Sharma, succeeded in evading arrest for weeks on end is a case in point. All this makes it extremely difficult to take too seriously the initial pious squawks made by politicians and police officers over this case. Bapi Sen's memory must be honoured in three important ways. First, by publicly recognising his courageous intervention. Two, by taking care to see that his family is adequately looked after and not just in the short term. Three, by ensuring that his attackers are brought to justice.

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Talks with Bodos in crucial stage, says Advani

7/1

UTTAN (MAHARASHTRA), JAN. 6. The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, today said that tripartite peace talks with Bodo insurgents in Assam had reached a crucial stage and something concrete might emerge soon.

He told reporters here that the Centre was willing to hold talks with separatist forces if they eschew the path of terrorism.

Mr. Advani said the NSCN (I-M) leaders would be reaching New Delhi on January 8 to hold talks for the first time in India.

"Even before we came to power, the Centre was holding talks with the NSCN (I-M) in European countries and Thailand but now they have agreed to come to New Delhi on January 8 to hold discussions with the Centre," he said.

He described the coming Nagaland elections as an important step in restoring peace in the north-eastern State.

He, however, refused to draw a parallel between the Government's talks with the separatist

groups in Nagaland and Assam and the exercise in Punjab and Jammu and Kashmir.

In an apparent reference to the Jammu and Kashmir's separatist conglomerate, the Hurriyat Conference, he said "if somebody is talking to us as a spokesperson of Pakistan, then we are not ready for it."

Recounting his talks with the Chief Minister, Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, he said the Mufti had stated that people of the Valley wanted peace, good governance and justice in socio-economic matters.

Good governance and socio-economic justice were the concern of the State Government but as far as security is concerned the Centre has an important role as peace in the border State was being disturbed by the neighbouring country.

The Home Minister said the Centre had made it clear to the Jammu and Kashmir Government that it should be consulted on security-related issues. — PTI

THE HINDU

[7 JAN 2002

MURDER CHARGE AGAINST THE CONSTABLES

Sergeant Sen is dead

KOLKATA, Jan. 6. — Traffic sergeant Bapi Sen was declared dead around 6.30 a.m. today at Calcutta Medical Research Institute.

Sen was beaten up by some Reserve Force constables on New Year's eve while trying to prevent them from molesting a woman.

Dr Mala Chatterjee, CMRI assistant medical superintendent, said: "He was already brain dead and on life support. His condition started deteriorating this morning. Medically, a person is not declared dead till his heart stops beating. In Sen's case, that happened at 6.30 a.m."

Sen's body was taken to the Kolkata police morgue for post-mortem and then to Lalbazar where the chief minister and the finance minister paid their last respects. It was then taken to his Behala house.

Officers and Sen's colleagues carried the body to Keoratala crematorium. A large number of people were present there to pay their respects to the brave sergeant. Mrs Jharna Bose was among them. "Bapi saved my life after I met with an accident near Rabindra Sarani a few years ago," she said. She had lost her legs in the accident.

Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said the government would try to arrange for a job for Mrs Soma Sen, the sergeant's widow. "We will try to take care of his family," he



REQUIESCAT: The chief minister pays homage to Bapi Sen at Lalbazar on Monday. — The Statesman

told Mr Anup Sen and Mr Joydeb Sen, Sen's brothers.

Mr Tapan Biswas, Sen's cousin, who was at the hospital last night, said: "At 5.45 a.m., doctors called me upstairs to say he was sinking.

They called me again after half-an-hour and said he was dead."

An inconsolable Mr Anup Sen said his brother could have been saved had he been admitted to CMRI earlier.

Mr Sivaji Ghosh, DC (Headquarters), said: "We have initiated murder charges the constables."

Editorial: Did Bapi die in vain? page 8

Managing nuclear weapons

^{2/1} **T**HE STRUCTURE of India's nuclear command was some six months overdue, but it has at last arrived. This is a relief. Possessing nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them without having a well-understood set of rules — pertaining to 'doctrine', operating principles, and chain of command — under which these are to be used can be both pointless and dangerous. If the rules are not clear, the capacity to respond effectively in the event of a nuclear threat — to head it off through a credible deterrence posture in a crisis or to order retaliation — can be compromised, pointing to the futility of possession. On the other hand, if confusion prevails in respect of rules regarding use, a panic reaction in an emergency can set off untold consequences.

Unlike us, our nuclear weapons neighbours are not democracies that reflect public debate and a representative government. Potentially, such systems can trigger nuclear weapons-related developments, as was evidenced recently through irresponsible observations of Pervez Musharraf, though these were later modified. In the absence of an effective nuclear command, the capacity of our nuclear deterrent to meet a serious situation would not be credible.

^{HR.6} ^{9-N 5 pm} Mercifully, that lacuna has now been addressed, though technical experts may still discuss the issue of state of readiness of NW deployment for establishing absolute credibility of deterrence. However, once the fundamental structure of the nuclear command has been put in place, it can be subject to refinement and revision depending on need. Indeed, a necessary modification has already been made. Now we are saying that we could conceivably order a nuclear strike even if India or its forces are attacked with biological or chemical weapons anywhere in the world. But we are yet to address the question of such weapons being used against us by non-State actors such as terrorists or terrorists instigated by State actors.

As proper in a Westminster-style democracy, the nuclear doctrine and command structure announced last Saturday underlines that the PM will be the 'sole' authority to order a nuclear strike. But our present system of electing a PM is a matter of several steps even when an incumbent is suddenly incapacitated. This matter will now need serious consideration. A tangential outcome of Saturday's decisions appears to be that the country's strategic command will not be in the hands of the proposed chief of defence staff, as envisaged earlier.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

7 JAN 2003

MAYHEM IN BIHAR

Shockwaves from a fake encounter

THAT the police are part of the problem in Bihar was evident again when they went trigger-happy against three young citizens with no political connections and who were on the threshold of their careers in various disciplines. Why the police acted in the way they did is explained by the high-handedness that has become as much a part of the system — and is made worse by rampant corruption that no longer surprises anyone in the state.

No one can condone the unbridled violence during Friday's bandh that was called by the Opposition. Nor can one endorse under any circumstances the opportunism of political parties who were quick in trying to extract cynical advantage from the anger that has gripped the people. But the public response itself is understandable. Unlike the party-sponsored bandhs that take place in Bengal — another is on its way to protest against the proposed water tax — the 12-hour shutdown in Bihar was spontaneous. It was a clear enough signal that atrocities committed by police on innocent citizens have stretched tolerance limits to the utmost.

It will not do for the chief minister, Rabri Devi, to say that she is ready for a CBI inquiry. That is perhaps the best way to cool tempers and allow the situation to return to normal. It does not absolve the chief minister of responsibility of bringing the culprits in the police force to book.

Governments, perhaps more so in Bihar, are notorious for using the police to do what the ruling party wants. That includes tampering with evidence and circumventing the law. Shockwaves followed the killing when the police put out a concocted story of an "encounter" when the truth was that the three young men were unarmed and defenceless.

The conclusion is that the ordinary citizen in Bihar has every reason to feel unsafe and look upon the so-called defenders of the law as principal perpetrators of crimes and desperately in need of corrective action. It is pointless to expect Laloo to recover after abusing his position with help of the same police. But the instinctive display of resentment should provide the right signals. It is unfortunate that a human tragedy is sought to be politicised by both BJP and Samata Party. It is nothing short of cruelty on Nitish Kumar's part to ensure that long distance trains are stranded for a whole day with thousands of unsuspecting passengers are deprived of basic amenities like drinking water. The moot question is whether people want another prolonged spell of lawlessness engineered by the opposition or a constructive and organised political response to an inept and corrupt government with spontaneous support from the electorate. The NDA should look at the second option.

Bapi's friends in probe spotlight

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, January 3

THE GOVERNMENT wants to know why Bapi Sen's four friends did not rush to his rescue while he was being beaten to a pulp by five drunken constables of the Kolkata Police reserve force.

Home Secretary Amit Kiran Dev said on Friday that an inquiry would be launched into the reasons behind the surprising inaction on the part of the sergeant's friends. The Government would also try to ascertain whether the constables concerned were on duty on the night of the incident and had slipped out of the barracks.

The four friends have been lying low since the incident on

New Year's Eve. They could not be contacted for a reaction, but they have already given an explanation for their inaction in the FIR they lodged at Bowbazar police station. Asoke Sengupta, who filed the FIR, said the suddenness of the events had caught them off guard.

The four apparently were not as fast on their feet as their brave friend. The five had chased the constables, travelling in a taxi, some way before catching up with them. Sengupta says Bapi was away in a flash and tried to grab the constables.

The drunken constables surrounded Sen and everything was over in a split second. The FIR states that the four of them had, in fact, shouted out that their

ber before taking Sen to the Calcutta Medical College and Hospital and reporting the attack to the police.

Chief Minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee said on Friday that his Government was taking the matter seriously and had given specific instructions to the police commissioner.

The Government has promised to bear all medical expenses needed to bring back the 35-year-old officer from the brink of death.

Finance Minister Asim Dasgupta, who knows Sen personally, visited him at the hospital and held a brief meeting with his doctors and the police. Funds, he said, wouldn't be a problem. Apart from the doctors treating

him, a UK-based neurosurgeon now in the city will also be consulted, Dasgupta said.

"Bapi is a very daring officer and it is very depressing to see him fighting for life. We are with him in his struggle," said the Finance Minister.

Meanwhile, a section of the police top brass in Lalbazar discussed ways to take the five constables into their custody and considered appealing to a higher court. The process has been delayed so far due to the absence of the chief metropolitan magistrate of the Bankshall court.

"This will not be resolved easily. Two very senior officers are pursuing the case and working hard to file the chargesheet," said a traffic officer.



Bapi Sen
On his own

friend was a sergeant. Hearing this, the constables reportedly let go of Sen and fled. The sergeant's friends took down the taxi num-

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Pak. has role in Kashmir imbroglio: Mirwaiz

By Our Special Correspondent

HYDERABAD, JAN. 3. Mirwaiz Umar Farooq of the All-Party Hurriyat Conference has acknowledged Pakistan's role in the Kashmir imbroglio and said infiltration was continuing.

Taking part in the debate on "National Identities and Self-Determination" on the second day at the Asian Social Forum Summit here today, the Mirwaiz however urged the Indian Government and the people not to blame it all on Pakistanis or Islam.

"Yes, it is there. To what extent? There is a religious dimension to it too. It is secondary by nature. The fundamental truth is that it is a political problem. The land should

have been a natural part of Pakistan during the time of Partition. Or at best it should have remained a united Kashmir. It had not happened so. The problem remains. People did not get their due from the Indian Government and began asserting their identity. What is wrong with it," he asked.

Mr. Farooq felt the 'gun' only highlighted the issue and brought international attention to the problem. The three parties — Kashmiris, the Pakistan Government and the Indian Government — must sit together and sort it out. "Everyone has a say in it and it should be so. The valley people, Jammu region, Ladhakis and Azad Kashmiris all have a right to self-determination."

The second day saw representatives of the "disturbed areas" urging the Indian Government and people to readjust their looking glass to understand the root cause of the ongoing struggles.

Sukhendu Deb Burman of the Indigenous Tribal People Development Centre, Tripura and Artex Shimray, advisor to the North-East Students Organisation, said the Government was stifling the north-eastern voices and what little was heard was also being misinterpreted.

The Government had "scant regard" for the hopes and aspirations of people of the region and using words like 'internal' or 'external' tried to segregate them. Branding a movement

seeking recognition of its ethnic identity and culture as secessionism was ridiculous, Mr. Burman said. Mr. Burman said some of the ethnic people had become a minority in their own regions. Tripura was one example of how Bangladeshis swarmed the area and reduced the ethnic tribals' percentage in the population to 30 with just 20 seats reserved for them out of 60 in the Assembly. Every Act passed and every law enacted had gone against the interest of the locals as they did not have much say in anything. The Forest Act would not allow the north-eastern people to cultivate more land, effectively reducing their right to food security.

THE HINDU

L 4 JAN 2003

George demands Rabri ouster

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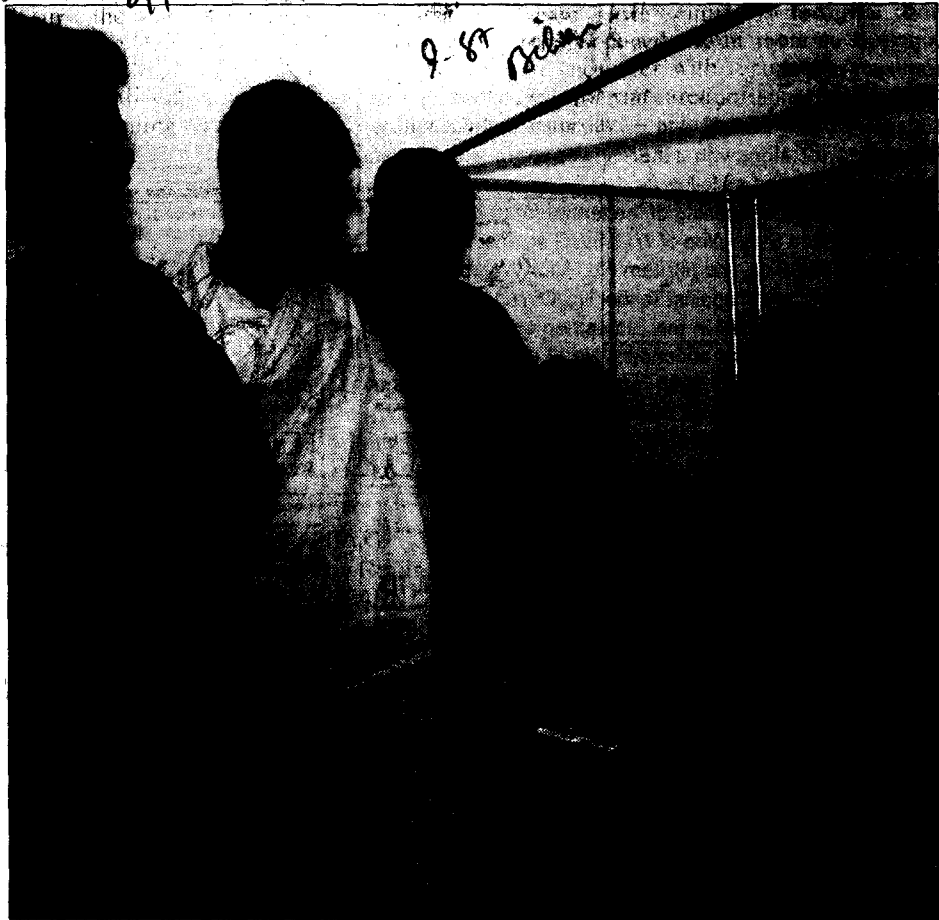
Statesman News Service

PATNA, Jan. 2. — Mr George Fernandes today demanded the "ouster" of the "ineffective" Rabri Devi government but ruled out the possibility of summoning a joint parliamentary session to dismiss it.

The defence minister expressed concern over the killing of three students in a "fake encounter" with police here on Saturday and the deteriorating law and order situation in the state. The Samata Party, he said, had been saying for the past 10 years that the "corrupt and ineffective" Laloo-Rabri regime should go. "In fact, the Samata was born to revolt against the corruption and all-out anarchy unleashed by the Laloo-Rabri regime."

Mr Fernandes said the Centre had twice tried to dismiss the Rabri government. "But we had failed because the Congress and Left parties had opposed our move and the NDA, on its own, didn't have the strength to get the resolution passed in the Rajya Sabha." On the suggestion of calling a joint parliament session to dismiss the government, he said: "The Constitution doesn't permit it. The resolution on dismissing a state government should be passed by both Houses of the Parliament separately."

The Opposition leader in the Assembly, Mr SK Modi, has asked for a CBI probe into the "fake" encounter. But Mr Fernandes said there was no need for such a probe because "it was a cold blooded murder by police".



Mr George Fernandes talks to family members of one of the three students shot during the 'fake encounter'. In Patna on Thursday. — AFP

ded murder by police". Mr Laloo Yadav, however, said the probe would be handed over to CBI if the parents of those killed wished so.

Mr Fernandes and Janata Dal-U leader Mr Sharad Yadav met the family members of the slain students.

Mr Fernandes, also NDA convener, met alliance partners here to decide on the follow-up action. The NDA and other Opposition parties have called for a state bandh tomorrow.

Trains to be affected

KOLKATA, Jan. 2. — Following are the changes in the train schedule because of the 12-hour Bihar bandh: Howrah-Danapur Express, Howrah-Delhi Janata Express and Howrah-Patna Shatabdi Express, scheduled to leave Howrah today, have been cancelled. Howrah-Gorakhpur Poorvanchal Express, scheduled to leave Howrah on 4 January, too has been cancelled. Poorva Express and Udayan Abha Roofan Express, scheduled to leave Howrah at 9.15 a.m. and 9.45 a.m., will leave at 12.45 p.m. and 10.45 a.m. Brahma-putra Mail and Tata Danapur Express will end at Malda and Asansol. Howrah-Gaya and Sealdah-Varanasi expresses were terminated at Jamalpur and Sahibganj. — SNS

VHP hits out at Vajpayee's 'Hindutva'

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 2. — The Vishwa Hindu Parishad today questioned the very right of the Prime Minister to interpret Hindutva, and coined a new term — “pseudo Hindutva” — for such people “who strike a deal for political purposes”. “Those ready to make any kind of compromise to save their chair have no right to make such comments,” VHP senior vice-president Mr Giriraj Kishore said.

He was obviously hinting at the BJP leadership that rode piggyback on the Ram-Janambhoomi Temple wave to build the party's fortunes but did not do enough to facilitate the construction of the Ram Temple as was promised in its manifesto.

The VHP is opposed to the Prime Minister's statement, which formed part of his musings during his Goa retreat, wherein he said some sections were defaming Hindutva by stressing on rigidity and extremism. Stating this, Mr Kishore argued that “reaction to an action should not be seen as hardcore Hindutva”.

Mr Kishore clarified that he did not distinguish between Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani, Deputy Prime Minister, on the Hindutva issue. “I don't see any difference between the Prime Minister and the Deputy PM for as a politician I don't have faith in Advani.”

Elaborating, he said the first sincere efforts to facilitate construction of the Ram Temple were made by the Vajpayee government, but this was the first time that “the VHP got cheated”. He was referring, he said, to the “failure of the government” to hand over the land adja-

DMK presents 'Dravidatva'

CHENNAI, Jan. 2. — Adding a new twist to the ongoing spar over Hindutva, DMK president Mr M Karunanidhi today said “Dravidatva” — a term he coined to represent Dravidian principles — will reject Hindutva if it preached “irrational behaviour or ideology”.

Asked to comment on Mr Vajpayee's musings from Goa, Mr Karunanidhi said the DMK would reject any principle which was “against rational thinking or based on caste differences (and which) sought to segregate people over caste”. “I hope with my explanation the controversy over my recent remarks on Hindus will rest,” he added. — PTI

cent to the temple to the Ram Janambhoomi Nyas despite private assurances to the VHP on this score.

“They (the BJP leaders) must prove that they are Hindus by their actions too,” Mr Kishore said. The Vajpayee government, he added, must return the land around the makeshift temple to the Nyas before the VHP sponsored three-day “dharma sansad” (religious parliament) in New Delhi starting February 22.

Thackeray, too, is upset
Criticising the BJP for speaking in “different voices” over Hindutva, Mr Bal Thackeray today said “they (BJP) are not sure which path to tread on”, adds PTI from Mumbai.

Violence, arson mar Patna bandh

PATNA, Dec. 31. — Arson and violence marked the dawn-to-dusk Patna bandh today with protestors burning three police posts, a market complex and several vehicles. Police had to fire in the air at three places to disperse mobs.

All the major Opposition parties including the BJP, the Samata Party, the CPI ML-Liberation and the students' group had given the call for the bandh to protest the killing of three students here in a "fake" encounter with police on Saturday.

A group of protesters torched three police vehicles and pelted stones in the Ashiana Nagar area and adjacent localities. The angry protestors also set ablaze the Sammlen market, the venue of the encounter.

Police had to fire 12 rounds in air when a mob surrounded the SP and district magistrate, Patna.



BURNING ISSUE: A mob waving sticks (left) and another burning a jeep in different areas of Patna during the dawn-to-dusk bandh in the city on Tuesday. — AFP

The SP and DM, however, escaped unhurt. The SSP (Patna), Mr Sumil Kumar said: "Police have restrained using lathis and tear gas shells so far. But the mob indulging in

violence and arson on the streets consisted of criminals besides the common citizens and students."

The protestors set ablaze police posts in Kankarbagh, Dumara and Mahatma Gandhi

Setu area. The protestors also roughed up the RJD legislator, Mr Ramkrishna Yadav, and torched his vehicle at Jagdeo Path area.

The SSP said about 500 persons, including political

activists, have been arrested.

Governor seeks report

The Bihar Governor today sought the details of circumstances leading to the killing of three

youths in the

encounter with the police on Saturday and asked the home secretary to conduct an inquiry into the matter and submit his report within three days, a Raj Bhavan spokesman said.



Violence mars Patna bandh

Patna: The police burst tear-gas shells and resorted to lathicharge on Tuesday to quell rioting mobs during the day-long Patna bandh which was called to protest the killing of three students in an alleged police encounter. About 25 people, including policemen, were injured in the riots.

The police resorted to bursting of tear-gas shells and lathicharge as bandh supporters attacked them and set on fire a shopping complex and several vehicles, director general of police R.R. Prasad told the media.

The agitators vent their ire on policemen holding them responsible for Saturday's alleged encounter that left three students dead triggering a wave of public protest, he said. The protesters also fired at police personnel.

Though the bandh evoked mixed response in the rest of the town, it drew angry reaction in the Ashiana Nagar locality, where the alleged encounter took place, and which has been observing an undeclared

bandh since then, he said.

Large hordes of angry residents brandishing iron rods and lathis poured into the streets from early morning on Tuesday and set afire a few shops at the Sammelan market, the scene of the alleged encounter, he said. The mob also set ablaze some police patrol vehicles and stoned their occupants injuring at least six policemen.

The bandh supporters also damaged more than a dozen vehicles at Ashiana Nagar and smashed wind-screens of many others parked in front of the offices of a newspaper on Buddha Marg. Over 500 agitators were arrested for vandalism, Mr Prasad said.

The bandh has been called by the opposition parties—the BJP, the Samata Party, the CPI-ML, the Lok Janshakti Party, the Indian Federal Democratic Front and several students' organisations—to press for the immediate arrest of the policemen who were involved in the incident, the institution of cases under Section

302 of the IPC against them, besides an ex-gratia payment of Rs 10 lakhs to the families of each victim.

Meanwhile, Bihar governor V.C. Pande has sought a report from the state government on the killing of the youths. The governor sought details of the circumstances leading to the encounter after a delegation of opposition parties met him on Monday, a Raj Bhavan spokesman told the media.

Mr Pande asked the home secretary to conduct an inquiry into the matter and submit the report within three days, the spokesman said. Following his directive, home secretary R.J.M. Pillai asked district magistrate Dipak Prasad and senior superintendent of police Sunil Kumar to probe the entire incident.

Official sources said that the removal of DSP Ajit Kumar Sinha of Sachiwalaya police station had already been recommended. An official inquiry by additional director general (CID) into the incident is underway. PTI

Patna bandh turns violent

By K. Balchand

PATNA, DEC. 31. The day-long 'Patna bandh' in protest against the killing of three youths allegedly in a 'fake police encounter' on Saturday turned violent today. Hoodlums resorted to violence and arson, forcing the police, who maintained restraint for most of the day, to burst teargas shells and fire in the air.

Most of the disturbance was witnessed in the Ashiananagar area, where the three youths had been allegedly gunned down, and the Kankarbagh residential area.

Life in most of the other parts of the city was more or less unaffected though many shops remained closed and traffic was thin.

The major political parties, including the NDA constituents and the CPI-ML, which remained on the fringe today, have given separate calls for a Bihar bandh on January 3, demanding the arrest of the 'guilty policemen'.

The Government said the

CID probe was likely to be completed by tomorrow.

The trouble started with a mob setting ablaze some shops in the Sammelan Market complex.

They attacked the police who tried to protect the complex, hurling bricks at them and setting on fire at least half-a-dozen police vehicles, injuring at least six policemen.

The scene was similar in Kankarbagh where a check-post was set ablaze and government vehicles being reduced to ashes.

The mob allegedly also opened fire and used crude bombs. About 15 vehicles were burnt and 25 people were hurt in lathicharge.

Over 300 people were rounded up during the bandh called by the Indian Federal Democratic Party and which was later supported by some political parties and local groups.

Most of the Opposition leaders who came to take part in the bandh found the situation out of control and

hastily went away.

The DGP, R.R. Prasad, denied that the situation had gone out of control and said the police maintained restraint.

Arrested

The Shastrinagar police station officer-in-charge, Shamsi Alam, and a telephone booth owner, who allegedly used police connection against the three youths protesting against excess charges, were also arrested.

Six police personnel have been placed under

~~suspension. After orders from the RJD president, Laloo Prasad Yadav, cases of murder were instituted against the policemen.~~

Mr. Yadav announced an ex-gratia payment of Rs. 5 lakhs to each family of the three youths killed.

He charged that the shopkeepers were all BJP supporters while those killed were RJD followers, all of them being backwards — a Yadav, Kurmi and a Bania. He charged that the BJP was trying to 'foment trouble'.

Picture on Page 12

THE HINDU

WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 1, 2003

A SENSIBLE MOVE

IN VESTING MORE financial and administrative powers in the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Council (LAHDC) for Leh, the Mufti Mohammad Sayeed Government in Jammu and Kashmir has taken a significant step towards addressing the much-neglected regional autonomy concerns, which have remained a source of enormous discontent and even frustration and have in their own way contributed to the compounding of the larger problem of Kashmir. This and the assurance that the Government would create a similar autonomous structure for Kargil by the end of June should serve substantially to neutralise the demand for making Ladakh a Union Territory which acquired greater stridency during the recent Assembly elections, as it came to be projected as a common poll plank by virtually all parties across the political spectrum in the region. Broadly, the Government's latest decision would mean greater executive powers over the use and management of land, better control over the staff at the higher echelons and enhanced sanctioning authority over development works, apart of course from the conferring of a higher status in the official hierarchy on the Executive Councillors as also their chief. Whether the powers now proposed to be devolved go far enough, especially when measured against the suggestions made by various expert committees that had examined the question, may be open to debate. But there can be little doubt that what is envisaged goes some way in fulfilling the regional aspirations. This initiative on the regional autonomy front is only the latest in the series of measures the barely two-month-old PDP-led coalition regime has taken by way of providing the 'healing touch' it had promised under the Common Minimum Programme, an agenda it is pursuing methodically, in all earnestness, with a positive bent of mind — as evidenced, for instance, by its keenness to avoid any confrontation with the Centre on the question of releasing the imprisoned militants/sep-

aratist leaders — and in the midst of heightened pressure on the security front due to continuing terrorist attacks.

If all these moves are salutary from the standpoint of building up the goodwill of the hitherto alienated sections and preparing the ground for starting a dialogue in an effort to find a political solution to the Kashmir imbroglio, the signals put out by the Centre are far from encouraging, coloured as they are by the sectarian ideological mindset of those at the helm in New Delhi. The Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani, has of course indicated that the Centre would initiate "talks" not only with the elected representatives — meaning, the new State Government — but also with "other sections" who had not participated in the democratic process. This is as it should be for the simple reason that, unless broad-based, no purposeful dialogue is possible and that, given the nature and complexities of the Kashmir problem, while primacy should be given to elected representatives it would be totally unrealistic to ignore outfits that did not participate in the electoral process. But the trouble lies in the caveat Mr. Advani has chosen to enter: that the Government would not have 'talks' with those who considered Pakistan as their "master" and echoed its "voice". And the reference here is to the separatist umbrella outfit, the All-Party Hurriyat Conference, which has always been an anathema to the BJP-led coalition at the Centre. The Hurriyat, all its failings notwithstanding, has of late revealed a definitive attitudinal change, moving away from a hard pro-Pakistan line, and while its support base remains untested it has earned a reputation among Kashmiris as an honest interlocutor. As such, any attempt to keep the Hurriyat out of any serious dialogue may be self-defeating. What needs to be realised is that it would be inexcusable to let slip the new opportunity the latest people's mandate has opened up for finding a political solution to the nagging Kashmir problem.

THE HINDU

1 JAN 2003

Scrap English at primary level: School panel

HT Correspondent
Kolkata, December 31

THE SCHOOL Education Committee wants teaching of English stopped at the primary level.

In its report submitted to the department of school education on Tuesday, the committee has conceded that English was important but added that there was no need to start with it before Class V.

"The question of introducing English from Class I does not arise," committee chairman Professor Ranjogopal Mukherjee said. Taking the cue from the Pabitra Sarkar Committee report, he suggested that the SCERT conduct a study in 2004 to decide which would be right

class to introduce English to students in Bengal. At present, English is taught from Class III.

School and Madrasa Education Minister Kanti Biswas wouldn't commit himself on whether all the committee's recommendations would be implemented. "Normally, not all recommendations of a committee are accepted. In this case, however, we will try to accommodate as much as we can," he said.

Mukherjee told reporters that the committee was dead against starting English education at the primary level. "Leave aside English, students in the villages need time to get associated with formal Bengali, as used in textbooks and classes. How can one possibly teach English to such chil-

COMMITTEE SUGGESTS

- No English till Class V
- Make Bengali compulsory at Classes VI-VIII for students who don't study it as first or second language
- Integrate Science into one subject till Class VIII
- Rename History as History & Elementary Civics
- Revamp vocational training with realistic goals and make it popular

dren?" Mukherjee asked. These students, he pointed out, constituted the majority of school students in the State.

"Besides, we feel that renewed stress must be put on the teaching of Bengali at all levels," Mukherjee said.

The committee has suggested that Bengali be made a compulsory third language from Classes VI to VIII for students who do not study Bengali as a second language.

"You have to have a grip on your own language first, only then you can pick up a foreign one," Mukherjee said.

The committee, set up in September last year, has included 42 pages of recommendations (250 in all) in its 125-page report.

The committee has suggested that the different streams of science be taught as an integrated subject till Class VIII, that the

history paper be renamed "history and elementary civics", and that a portion on elementary economics be introduced to the geography paper.

The committee has also made strong recommendations for the introduction of vocational training at high school level, suggesting that a separate regulatory body be set up for this.

"We have to concentrate on making vocational training feasible, effective and popular as well as receptive to changes. But we also have to set realistic goals. There is no use creating a hype about the possibilities of vocational training as we have to accept the constraints of the current situation of the job market,"

he said.

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