

# Early polls off Advani tongue

## Awaited: NDA rubber stamp

STAR PLAYERS HIT ROAD WITH ALLIANCE ACT

### OUR BUREAU

New Delhi/Mumbai, Dec. 30: Lal Krishna Advani today declared early elections, almost.

"By and large, it is correct to state that the results of the recent Assembly elections have had their effect far beyond these (three) states. The economic situation has created a feel-good factor and if these two reasons are combined, it looks like early elections can be good," the deputy Prime Minister said.

Although there have been hints in the past, Advani's statement — after a meeting in Mumbai with Shiv Sena leader Bal Thackeray — is the strongest indication yet that the Lok Sabha polls will be held before the October schedule.

The Sena, which is the third-largest constituent of the Vajpayee-led NDA coalition, is the BJP's oldest ally from crucial Maharashtra, which accounts for 48 seats.

More important, like the Telugu Desam Party, the Sena is pitching for early polls. Advani's smile after the talk with Thackeray indicated that the Sena chief needed no convincing.

"Advani's views are my views," Thackeray said. Advani tempered his enthusiasm by saying a final decision will be taken after consultations with other NDA partners. He said he hoped to get their assent

before the BJP's national executive meets in Hyderabad on January 11 and 12.

"The main issue is fixing the timing for early polls," he said.

BJP sources said Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee might convene a meeting of the NDA after his return from Islamabad. If the Hyderabad meeting votes for an early poll, the sources added, a brief Parliament session will be convened soon after to take a vote-on-account, following which the Prime Minister will recommend the dissolution of Parliament.

Lok Sabha Speaker Manohar Joshi was present when Advani met Thackeray. The Chief Election Commissioner told a TV channel there should not be any problem in holding the elections in April or May.

Advani claimed that the NDA is headed for a second win. "The general assessment is that the NDA can be reasonably confident of renewing its mandate for another five years."

Vajpayee and Advani have already secured Desam leader and Andhra Pradesh chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu's endorsement for an early election. Despite his reservations about holding Lok Sabha and Assembly polls simultaneously two months ago, the BJP's victory in the elections in Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan, combined with the feedback that the Desam itself is not



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on too good a wicket, caused Naidu to revise his opinion.

Desam sources said Naidu believes he can return for a third term if he can encash on the "feel-good" sentiment for Vajpayee and his government.

BJP sources said the Trinamul Congress leader and minister without portfolio, Mamata Banerjee, too, was sounded on early polls by Advani when she

recently called on him.

The NDA convenor, George Fernandes, has been taken into confidence, the sources said. Advani is in touch with the Biju Janata Dal leader and Orissa chief minister, Naveen Patnaik.

Another major ally, the Shivomani Akali Dal, will have no problems with an early election because of the "political mileage" former Punjab chief minis-

ter Parkash Singh Badal is thought to have gained from his spell in jail after being slapped with corruption charges by his Congress successor, Amarinder Singh. "Amarinder has ensured we will get all the Lok Sabha seats in Punjab," the sources said.

A section of the BJP, however, feels a rushed election may not give the party the time to firm up alliances in states like

### OUR BUREAU

New Delhi, Dec. 30: After mostly talking about alliances, Sonia Gandhi today took the first visible step towards building one by reaching out to DMK leader M. Karunanidhi and CPM general secretary H.S. Surjeet.

The Congress president rang up Karunanidhi in Chennai, signalling her party's reconciliation with the DMK. Relations had frozen after the puppet Chandra Shekhar government dismissed Karunanidhi in 1990 at the behest of the Congress led by Rajiv Gandhi.

Sonia congratulated Karunanidhi on his decision to pull out of the BJP-led coalition as a prelude to a pre-poll alliance. She met Surjeet to underline the importance of ties with the Left.

Her initiatives came within two days of her statement that the Congress would strive to forge alliances to fight the Lok Sabha polls and within hours of the submission of the Pranab Mukherjee committee report on the Assembly poll debacle.

The committee recommended that the task of identifying potential partners for the polls and initiating talks with them should be taken up with all deliberative speed, preferably within the month of January itself.

It said the alliance should be comprehensive to avoid a split in anti-NDA votes and include negotiations at "multi-state, re-

# Sonia reaches out to allies

gional state or sub-regional levels within the perspective of a national framework based on a national strategy with national objectives."

Congress sources said Sonia has farmed out the job of contacting prospective allies to specific leaders. "The call to Karunanidhi came after the spadework already done by the leaders entrusted with the task of negotiating with the DMK," they said.

The leadership intends to leave to the DMK the task of forming an anti-Jayalithaa front in Tamil Nadu, with the Left, the MDMK and the Muslim League being the other likely partners. In Kerala, an alliance already exists.

In Karnataka, H.D. Deve Gowda's Janata Dal splinter might be approached. Negotiations are under way with the Left, MIM and the Telengana Rashtra Samiti in Andhra Pradesh.

While Sharad Pawar is the identified ally in Maharashtra, the Congress is also prepared to accommodate the two Republican Party factions, and the PWP and the Left.

The committee has virtually plumped for Mayavati as the ally in Uttar Pradesh, but not made a formal recommendation.

Laloo Prasad Yadav's Rashtriya Janata Dal remains the automatic choice in Bihar and in Jharkhand, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha is the candidate. ■ See Page 8

The starter's gun went off on both sides on Tuesday with L.K. Advani meeting Bal Thackeray (left) in Mumbai and hinting at early polls and Sonia Gandhi (above) speaking to M. Karunanidhi and meeting Harkishen Singh Surjeet. Pictures by AFP and PTI

# Pak. team was invited by pseudo-secularists: BJP

By Neena Vyas

16/5  
NEW DELHI, MAY 15. Those organisations and individuals who invited the Pakistani parliamentary goodwill delegation currently visiting India were today described by the Bharatiya Janata Party spokesperson, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, as "pseudo-secularists" but he would not apply the same epithet to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, who had extended an invitation to Pakistan's President, Pervez Musharraf, for summit talks in Agra less than two years ago not long after the Kargil episode.

Lashing out at some of the comments reportedly made by members of the Pakistani delegation, Mr. Naqvi described the organisers of the event as "pseudo-secularists". He took strong exception to suggestions reportedly made by some of the Pakistani MPs that terrorism could not be ended in Kashmir, nor in Chechnya.

"The situation in Chechnya cannot be compared to that in Kashmir," Mr. Naqvi said. "Through the elections in Kashmir the people had shown that they were not for the separatists and the terrorists."

Ever since the Prime Minister's Srinagar initiative offering a "hand of friendship" to Pakistan, the party representatives have been issuing nega-

tive statements about the prospects for peace. They have welcomed the Prime Minister's initiative and then strongly condemned cross-border terrorism and suggested that no talks or peace was possible without ending it.

Mr. Naqvi said today that "no positive outcome" was possible from any talks held in this atmosphere.

The party has not clearly said whether it is in favour of a dialogue with Pakistan even if terrorist activities do not come to a grinding halt or whether no dialogue is possible unless all terrorist activities stop and all terror camps are dismantled. Pressed whether the party would oppose talks without an end to cross-border terrorism and the dismantling of terrorist camps, he said the party would support "whatever initiatives were taken by the Government".

About the Jaish-e-Mohammed leader, Masood Azhar, being banned from entering Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, Mr. Naqvi said: "They (the Pakistanis) are trying to establish that they are making efforts to curb terrorism and terrorists, but this cannot impress us, we have to see what happens on the ground." "What they have declared was '*dikhawa*' (just a show), but we have to see the '*zamini sacchai*' (reality on the ground)."

16 MAY 2003

B.J.P

## 'No differences with Govt. on peace move'

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MAY 12.** The Bharatiya Janata Party president, Venkaiah Naidu, today rubbished the growing perception that the party and the Government it leads have differing views on the steps to normalise India-Pakistan relations. He rejected the view that the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, North Block or the BJP were trying to sabotage the Prime Minister's peace efforts.

Clearly putting the onus on Pakistan for creating a conducive atmosphere for a meaningful dialogue between the two countries, Mr. Naidu said that it was not simply a question of insisting on certain pre-conditions for talks but "there is a universally accepted principle that one cannot have talks and continue with terrorism... there has to be an end to cross-border terrorism, the terrorist training camps must be dismantled and Pakistan must stop aiding and abetting terrorists," the BJP president said.

Mr. Naidu's assertion of "unity" of perception in the Sangh Parivar, the BJP and the Government has come amid various reports indicating that the party's attitude towards the peace process had been rather negative compared to the Prime Minister's positive stand and his spirited defence of the offer of a "hand of friendship."

He did not find anything wrong in the RSS rejecting any suggestion that a solution to the Kashmir problem could be found by accepting the Line of Control as the international border.

"They are reiterating the (1994) parliamentary resolution (on Kashmir)," he said. The whole country was committed to that resolution.

When the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, offered his hand of friendship to Pakistan he also spoke of the need to

end cross-border terrorism, Mr. Naidu said. "The BJP has to articulate the people's views. The people want peace but they also want an end to cross-border terrorism," he said.

Speaking informally to reporters here today, the party president said "the BJP was supporting the Prime Minister's initiative, but as a political party we have to see what is happening on our borders, what is happening on the ground."

Virtually blaming Pakistan for playing both sides, he said that it had joined the global coalition against terrorism on its western frontier, but on the eastern border it continued to actively encourage terrorism.

Asked why the peace initiative was taken if India's stand remained the same — 'that is no talks unless cross-border terrorism stops.' Why offer the hand of friendship and then point out no friendship was possible because the atmosphere was not conducive for a dialogue?

Mr. Naidu's response was a repetition of what the Prime Minister had stated in Parliament: The good reception Mr. Vajpayee got from the people in Srinagar where he had addressed a public meeting, the feeling that the people of Jammu and Kashmir want peace, the new international situation after the Iraq war and, finally, Mr. Vajpayee's desire to make a third and last attempt at peace were the reasons that impelled the Prime Minister to take the initiative.

In response to a question, Mr. Naidu said the visiting goodwill delegation of Pakistani MPs had not sought time to meet him or any BJP functionary. "They came, they did not approach us, they went, they did not meet us," he said, dismissing the visit as of no consequence and adding sarcastically: "They may have met those who were instrumental in organising their visit."

THE HINDU

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BJP  
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## VAJPAYEE WELCOMES COORDINATION

# RSS affiliates resolve 'to work together'

HD-1  
9/5

By Neena Vyas

**NEW DELHI, MAY 3.** The result of the three-day conclave of the top leadership of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh affiliates which concluded here today, described by the RSS chief, K.S. Sudershan, as "refreshing" and "good", was that each of the RSS organisations, though independent, would help and coordinate its activities with the others as much as possible.

The elections on the horizon may not have been directly discussed, but the silent message heard loud and clear was: when the chips are down, when the elections are round the corner, the Sangh organisations will work together and for each other. In short, everyone will work for the BJP in the run-up to the elections.

The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, who spoke for 10 minutes at the very end, welcomed the successful effort to coordinate Sangh Parivar activities and was elated enough by the success of the show to wish increased frequency of such conclaves even as he underscored the need for the RSS to work more intensely in remote regions to make the people there feel more connected to

the rest of India. On the India-Pakistan initiative, Mr. Vajpayee stated clearly that he had so far remained non-committal in his response to the Pakistan Prime Minister's invitation for talks. Later, the RSS spokesperson, Ram Madhav, said the organisation wanted a positive Pakistani response "on the ground" (they want to see the end of cross-border terrorism) and only then the "process" (of thaw in the India-Pakistan relations) should proceed further.

Given the fact of open squabbling and use of abusive language between leaders of the Bharatiya Janata Party and some of the other arms of the RSS such as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad, the Swadeshi Jagran Manch and the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, the meeting, it seemed, was held in an atmosphere of cordiality.

During the three-day deliberations, BJP leaders made it clear that the "party was as much committed to the Ram temple issue and to resolving the Ayodhya tangle as the Vishwa Hindu Parishad", Mr. Madhav later told presspersons. The BJP's total support for a legislation to resolve the Ayodhya issue as demanded by the VHP was promised. But it was for the VHP to

get the support from MPs of other parties, including allies and the Congress. The RSS' tacit approval of the VHP's "trishul diksha" programme was acknowledged when Mr. Madhav said the programme was symbolic, even as he insisted that the subject was not discussed — the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, had not raised it, let alone criticise it, he emphasised.

Disinvestment was apparently given considerable attention with the SJM and even the RSS bosses emphasising that companies in the oil sector should be treated as strategic and not be put up for sale and there should be careful reconsideration of the sale of profit-making PSUs. The Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, and the Disinvestment Minister, Arun Shourie, did not participate in the deliberations which were limited to those from the RSS stables.

The RSS spokesperson emphasised that the meet was "not a dialogue between the RSS and the Government" but an internal discussion within the RSS family organisations. Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani were there as RSS members and not as government representatives.

# MINISTERS TO RESIGN TODAY

# MDMK quits NDA

By K. Ramachandran and  
R.K. Radhakrishnan

**CHENNAI, DEC. 29.** The Marumalarchi Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (MDMK) today quit the National Democratic Alliance blaming the Bharatiya Janata Party for moving closer to the All-India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam in Tamil Nadu. The two MDMK Ministers in the Union Government, M. Kannappan and Gingee N. Ramachandran, will submit their resignations to the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, tomorrow.

Announcing this to mediapersons today after a two-hour meeting of the party's highest policy-making body, the MDMK chairman, L. Ganesan, said: "If we continue in the NDA, our party's credibility will be in question." There was apprehension that the BJP was moving closer to what he characterised as the "anti-people" AIADMK. "We also feel the need to strengthen the Dravidian movement today. The only way to do so is to continue our relationship with the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam [which has already withdrawn from the NDA]," he said.

Asked whether the MDMK would follow the DMK's example of providing issue-based support to the NDA Government, Mr. Ganesan said that whenever an issue came up, his party would take a decision

keeping in mind the interests of Tamil Nadu.

The MDMK was upset that the Centre had not come to the rescue of its general secretary, Vaiko, arrested by the Tamil Nadu Government under the Prevention of Terrorism Act on charges of extending support to the banned Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam. "That could also have been one of the reasons for our coming out of the NDA," Mr. Ganesan said.

Asked for his comments, Mr. Vaiko, who was produced in the Poonamallee court today, said that everyone in the party felt that the MDMK should have left the NDA the day the DMK made the decision. The delay was only on account of the need to discuss the issue in the party fora. Discounting rumours of a division in the ranks, he said that one view conveyed to him was that the party should remain in the NDA for a few weeks longer. "But we cannot remain in the NDA merely because there are a few benefits coming our way. That is not correct," he said and added that he had the highest regard for the Prime Minister.

Mr. Ganesan said the AIADMK was running an "anti-people and anti-democratic regime" in Tamil Nadu, giving the "go-by" to the principles of Dravidian leaders such as Annadurai and E.V.R. Periyar. The MDMK's major aim today was to campaign among people to oust the regime in the State. But

the State unit and the national leadership of the BJP were giving enough indications that they were not averse to aligning with the AIADMK.

To a question, he said there was no need to seek bail for Mr. Vaiko. In the light of the Supreme Court's interpretation of POTA, Mr. Vaiko would be acquitted in the trial court. If required, the party would move the Supreme Court to get the trial expedited in the POTA court in Chennai.

The MDMK chairman refused to discuss whether the DMK and the Congress would come together for the general election or whether the Congress would accept as an ally the MDMK, known for its moral support to the LTTE.

However, he said that as far as Tamil Nadu was concerned the DMK would be the leader of the anti-AIADMK alliance.

## Doors open to all except BJP, says Karunanidhi

By Our Special Correspondent

**CHENNAI, DEC. 29.** The doors of the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam are open to all parties except the Bharatiya Janata Party, the party president, M. Karunanidhi, said today.

Talking to mediapersons here, Mr. Karunanidhi said that whichever party wanted to join the progressive front mooted by him could do so and this was applicable to the Congress too.

Already, Mr. Karunanidhi said, the general secretary of the Communist Party of India (Marxist), Harkishan Singh Surjeet, talked to him over telephone today and discussed the political situation. The Pattali Makkal Katchi had also agreed to join the DMK front.

Referring to the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi's statement on Sunday that the issue of prime ministership would be decided by the people at the election, Mr. Karunanidhi said the DMK had never made an issue of her foreign origin.

Welcoming the MDMK's decision to withdraw from the National Democratic Alliance, Mr. Karunanidhi said that more parties were expected to withdraw from the front though he would not predict the fall of the Ministry before the next general election. He appealed to the MDMK general secretary, Vaiko, who has been arrested under POTA, to seek bail as he had to do more work in the field.

# MDMK pulls out of NDA

**HTC and Agencies**  
Chennai, December 29

HAVING BECOME dependent on the DMK to fight its political battle since its leader Vaiko's arrest under Pota, the MDMK on Monday predictably followed the DMK's footsteps in leaving the NDA.

"We need to maintain our present friendship with the DMK to fight the dictatorial Jayalalithaa government.

"And, since the BJP has now indicated that it's not averse to an alliance with the AIADMK, there's little option for us but to leave the NDA and the Centre", MDMK president L. Ganesan told reporters here on Monday after a meeting of the

party's district secretaries. Its two Minister M. Kannappan and N. Ramachandran would be submitting their resignations to Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee on Tuesday morning.

The decision of the MDMK, which has four members, including the two ministers in the Lok Sabha, was taken keeping in mind the BJP's overtures to forge an alliance with the AIADMK, which has been pursuing "Fascist and anti-people" policies in the state, L. Ganesan, chairman of the MDMK presidium, told reporters after the meeting.

Ganesan ruled out the possibility of the MDMK reconsidering its decision. Together, the DMK and MDMK have 15

members in the Lok Sabha.

He also admitted that the NDA government's much delayed response to undo Vaiko's arrest under Pota was also a contributory factor. "Our grouse on the Pota front has existed for more than a year, but this is the most opportune time to leave since elections are close and our continuance in the NDA at this juncture would affect our political credibility", Ganesan explained further.

Asked if the MDMK would extend its support to the NDA from outside, as has been decided by DMK, party treasurer and minister Kannappan said "the support will be issue-based". On his party's relationship with the BJP, Gane-

san said, "Our relationship was not very bad, but cordial, though there were some hiccups now and then".

The MDMK leader was also confident that the party's pro-LITE slant would, in no way, affect its entry into a DMK-Congress front. "The Congress may lead a front at the national level, but, in Tamil Nadu, the DMK will be the leader of the front and we don't see any problems in coexisting with the Congress in such a front", he said.

Asked whether Congress would accept the MDMK in the new front that might emerge later, Ganesan said he would not answer hypothetical ques-

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# DMK ministers' resignations accepted by President

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NDA

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Statesman News Service *SrA*

NEW DELHI, Dec. 21. — The President today accepted the resignation of the two DMK ministers on the advice of the Prime Minister.

Earlier, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee was reluctant to accept the resignations of minister of environment and forests, Mr TR Balu, and minister of state for health and family welfare, Mr A Raja. Sources said Mr Vajpayee told Mr Balu that if the DMK leadership had decided to pull out of the government, "I should have been informed about it beforehand".

Mr Balu expressed his helplessness before the Prime Minister and said that he acted as per the instructions of the party leadership.

The reasons for Mr M Karunanidhi to come out of the NDA are said to be his annoyance over pin-pricks of the state BJP leaders who locked horns with the DMK in Tamil Nadu and Mr Venkaiah Naidu's critical statement about the DMK's stand on Pota. In reality, however, internal conflict within the DMK is said to be the reason behind the party's decision to pull out of the NDA and the Vajpayee government.

Mr Karunanidhi wanted to nominate Mr Kalanidi Maran, son of Murasoli Maran, for induction into

## No patch-up now, says Venkaiah

CHENNAI, Dec. 21. — Ruling out any possibility of immediate reconciliation with the DMK, BJP president Mr M Venkaiah Naidu said here today his party cannot be blamed for the former's decision to quit the NDA government. Nor could the Tamil Nadu unit of BJP be faulted for DMK's sudden move to pull out of the NDA, he said.

Pointing out that DMK president Mr M Karunanidhi had, himself, stated that there was no question of his party reconsidering its decision, the BJP chief said that reconciliation in the immediate future might not be possible. Mr Naidu reiterated that an agitation by a coalition partner against a Central legislation was "against accepted political principles and coalition *dharma*". He was reacting to Mr Karunanidhi's statements that his party quit the NDA primarily because of certain critical statements by Mr Naidu about the DMK's 15 December agitation demanding withdrawal of Pota, among other things. Mr Naidu said even the Tamil Nadu unit of the BJP cannot be faulted for the pullout "as was being made out by the DMK". He, however, added that the state BJP "could have avoided issuing statements" from time to time. Asked whether there was any possibility of the two parties coming together again for the next Lok Sabha elections, Mr Naidu said: "Let's see." — SNS

the Union Cabinet without any change of the department held by Maran. However, many senior DMK MPs too staked their claim for inclusion into the Vajpayee government. The rift within the party forced Mr Karunanidhi to deny ministerial position to the party MPs.

The problem with Mr Kalanidi Maran is that he is not a MP. The only chance of his entering Parliament is through Rajya Sabha, for which the biennial elections are due only in late March or April next.

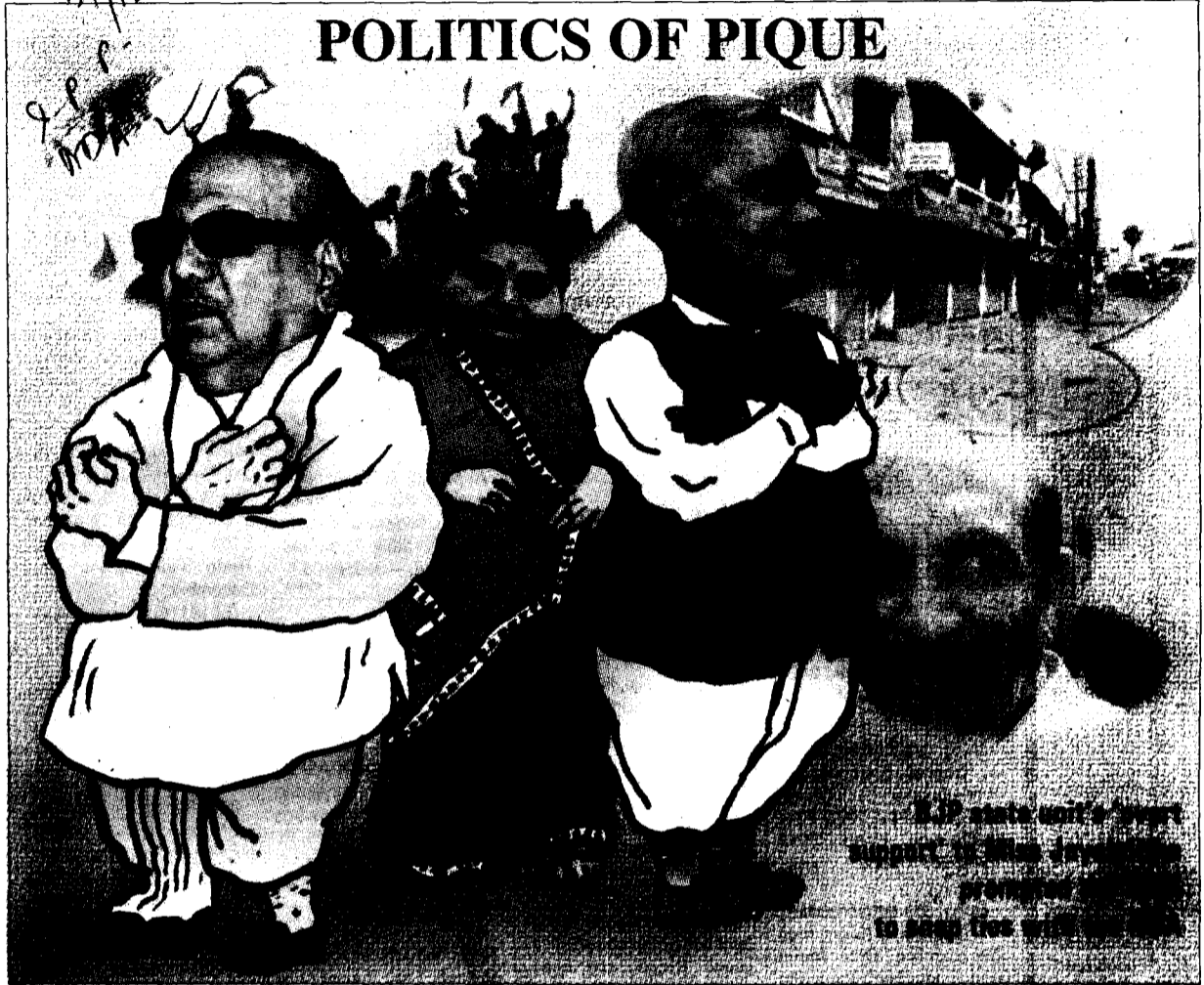
Though the DMK leaders have said that the party was open to

alliance with the Congress in Tamil Nadu, Mr Karunanidhi is not very confident of extending the hand of friendship to Mrs Sonia Gandhi in view of the drubbing the Congress had at the recent Assembly polls.

For the BJP, the DMK decision is a setback since the party is yet to warm up to Miss J Jayalalitha's AIADMK. The Central leadership of the BJP is wary of Miss Jayalalitha's ephemeral politics and has not forgotten her famous 'tea party' she hosted for Mrs Sonia Gandhi in 1999 leading to the fall of the Vajpayee government.

# DMK quits NDA, govt

## POLITICS OF PIQUE



STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

CHENNAI, Dec. 20. — The DMK today pulled out of the NDA as well as the coalition's government at the Centre, unable to bear any longer alliance leader BJP's "dual attitude" towards Miss Jayalalitha's AIADMK. The two Union ministers from the DMK — Mr TR Baalu and Mr A Raja — will put in their papers by tonight or tomorrow morning, but the party with 10 MPs will continue providing "issue-based" support to the Vajpayee government from outside.

"The DMK is no longer a member of the NDA," party chief Mr M Karunanidhi announced at a press conference. The DMK had been at loggerheads with the BJP over quite some time over Pota (which the former wants to be repealed), Ayodhya dispute and the Centre's flip-flop on the Sup-

reme Court order banning strikes.

These were the ostensible reasons for the Tamil Nadu party to snap its four-year-old ties with the NDA. But what acted as a catalyst was state BJP leaders' "overt support" to Miss Jayalalitha and the party central leadership's refusal to rein in the state leaders.

The resolution passed at the DMK meeting made no bones of this fact. It referred to a BJP MLA's remark in the Assembly that the leadership had approved the state unit's pro-AIADMK stand. (Incidentally, Miss Jayalalitha was instrumental in pulling down the previous NDA government.) It also recalled a statement by BJP state secretary Mr L Ganesan, that his party had "friendship" with the AIADMK and "alliance" with the DMK.

Mr Karunanidhi was asked at the press meet why did his party

support the Pota amendment Bill in Parliament a few days ago? Because, he said, the Bill sought to empower the review panel to examine even the ongoing cases. "This could secure the release of MDMK leader Mr Vaiko and others detained by the Jayalalitha government under the Act."

The DMK chief refused to commit whether his party will fight the next Lok Sabha polls with the BJP. Will he reconsider his decision if the Prime Minister intervenes? "There is no scope for reconsideration," he said.

While the Congress and Left parties welcomed the DMK's decision, the PMK, an NDA partner, said Mr Karunanidhi had acted in a haste. MDMK leaders said they would talk to their supremo Mr Vaiko before taking a stand.

■ More reports on page 10



# Pota Amendment Bill passed

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Dec. 16. — The government today got the Prevention of Terrorism (Amendment) Bill passed in the Lok Sabha amid a walkout by the Opposition, who demanded scrap of the Act.

Contrary to speculations, the DMK and the MDMK, NDA allies, who are opposed to Pota, today voted for the Bill, that would give more power to the Review Committee. However, the support came only after Mr TR Balu, Union minister for environment & forest, who spoke on behalf of the DMK and Mr Sri Krishnan of the MDMK, whose leader Mr Vaiko is under detention, registered their protest against Pota being misused by the Tamil Nadu government.

Mr Basudev Acharia of the CPI-M, who initiated the discussion on the statutory resolution, since the Bill would take place of the Ordinance with retrospective effect, failed to make his concluding statement after the reply of the home minister,

Mr LK Advani. Mr Acharia walked out of the House with other Opposition members.

Mr Advani said in his reply that the decision of the review committee would be binding on the executive. Should the committee decide that the application of Pota against any individual was wrong, all the provisions of the Act against the person detained would be treated withdrawn.

To a clarification sought by an AIADMK member whether the review committee can decide to withdraw Pota against anyone even in a case where the Supreme Court takes the opposite view, Mr Advani said that the decision of the Supreme Court was supreme and no Review Committee would have any power to override the decision of the Court.

Some Opposition members, including Mr PR Dasmunshi and Mr Raghuvans Prasad Singh, demanded Pota to be scrapped and argued that even the amendments being brought about was no solution to the problem of this Act being open to abuse by the executive.

# DMK flashes

## quit signal

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

Chennai, Dec. 15: The DMK today said it was no longer keen on being part of the coalition government at the Centre.

"The DMK's high-level policy-making body will soon meet and decide on whether it is proper to continue in the NDA and whether our nominees should remain ministers in the government," Karunanidhi announced this evening. The DMK chief was speaking after the party's statewide picketing agitation today to demand the revocation of the anti-terror law and press the Centre to declare Tamil as a "classical language".

Objecting to M. Venkaiah Naidu's comment yesterday that it was "neither ideal nor healthy" for the DMK to be part of the NDA, Karunanidhi told reporters that the BJP president's choice of words was "unbearable".

"We are being accused of creating an unhealthy situation for the coalition, then we do not desire to be part of that central government," he added.

The DMK chief went on a token fast before the Chennai police commissioner's office this evening to protest against the arrest of party MLA J. Anbazhagan from his residence despite the high court's clear direction against any preventive arrests in connection with the picketing.

Referring to instances in the past when parties have staged demonstrations to draw the government's attention towards their demands, Karunanidhi termed as "motivated" Naidu's charge that "our agitation to picket central government offices today was unhealthy".

"Yes," retorted Karunanidhi when a reporter asked him whether there was a possibility of the DMK quitting the NDA now.

Asked whether the move would affect the DMK's political prospects in the light of the BJP's resounding victory in the Assembly polls, he said: "This is for our high-power committee to deliberate upon."

Karunanidhi was tight-lipped on what the DMK's response would be if Naidu withdrew his comment, merely saying: "It is hypothetical."

The DMK leader dubbed today's demonstration a "spectacular success", saying nearly 1.5 lakh party members have been arrested throughout the state. Key party leaders, including DMK treasurer Arcot N. Veerasamy, deputy general secretary M.K. Stalin and former ministers Durai Murugan and Ponmudi were arrested when they tried to picket central and state government offices.

All those arrested were released later in the evening except DMK legislator Anbazhagan who has been remanded in custody.

16 DEC 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

# Cabinet nod to draft bill on defection

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** The Union cabinet has formally approved a new draft anti-defection bill that will allow for the automatic disqualification of any legislator who defects.

Announcing this decision, taken at Wednesday night's cabinet meeting, parliamentary affairs minister Sushma Swaraj said on Thursday, "We will try to pass it in this session of parliament. It is a major milestone in electoral reforms."

The cabinet note proposes landmark legislation that will make it very difficult for politicians to engineer defections.

Under the new law, any legislator or group of legislators who defect will automatically have to resign from membership of the party and will not be eligible to hold any office of profit until re-elected. The earlier rule had made defection legal if one-third of a party broke away from the parent party.

The legislation also aims to downsize jumbo ministries and says the strength of any council of ministers can only be 15 per cent of the size of parliament or a state assembly. In small states, there cannot be more than 12 ministers.

The cabinet also decided to sign an extradition treaty with Kuwait to provide a legal framework to extradite fugitive offenders, including those charged with economic crimes. Extradition will,

however, be refused if the requested state is satisfied that the offence is political in character, but these will not include an assault against the President, Vice-President or Prime Minister of either country or offences relating to terrorism, murder, culpable homicide, robbery, firearms and explosives.

The cabinet also decided to:

- bring in legislation to ban advertising of tobacco and control its use, bringing India in line with the global Framework Convention on

Tobacco Control (FCTC).

- introduce a national youth policy, which encompasses education, training and employment, health, environment, sports and recreation, art and culture, science and technology and civics and citizenship.

- replace the outdated Public Debt Act of 1944

with the Government Securities Act, 2003, as well as introduce another comprehensive law to amend three acts governing chartered accountants, cost and works accountants and company secretaries.

- constitute a DNA profiling advisory committee (D-PAC) to recommend suitable legislation relating to DNA profiling to help set up a DNA databank to identify criminals.

- introduce a Cantonment Act in parliament, envisaging reservations for women on cantonment boards.

**Under the proposed law, any legislator or group of legislators who defect will automatically have to resign from membership of the party and will not be eligible to hold any office of profit until re-elected**

HD 12  
8/12

# Ojha removal: NDA calls for Bihar bandh

By K. Balchand

**PATNA, DEC. 7.** Protesting against the removal of D.P. Ojha from the post of DGP, the NDA has issued a call for a Bihar bandh on December 9 to demand the dismissal of the State Government. The State Government has served Mr. Ojha with a show-cause notice as to why departmental proceedings should not be initiated against him for violating service rules.

The Government handed him a 24-point memo seeking an explanation regarding the various statements he had made in his public speeches against the ruling party leaders and the recommendation of the CBI that departmental

proceedings be initiated against him in connection with the fodder scam case.

The constituents of the NDA held a meeting on Sunday, chaired by the State coordinator, N.K. Yadav, and decided to observe the bandh, alleging that the Government had acted under the pressure of the jailed RJD MP, Shahbuddin. The NDA also demanded the dismissal of the State Government.

The BJP took out a rally during which an auto-rickshaw was turned upside down.

Police halted the demonstrators at the periphery of the security zone and arrested among others the party's State unit chief, Gopal Narain Singh,

who was released later.

The LJP also staged a dharna against the "politically motivated action".

The LJP and the left parties are planning their future course of action.

On Saturday, the Excise Minister, Shivanand Tiwari, had to bear the brunt of public ire at the Patna book fair, when he spoke out against Mr. Ojha during an interaction with the public.

The trading community today honoured Mr. Ojha by giving him a platform to interact with them. Mr. Ojha said that the trading community was at the receiving end of the kidnapping gangs of which, he accused Mr. Shahbuddin of being the mentor.

THE HINDU

2003  
8 DEC 2003

# Ready for debate on Judev, Telgi issues: Sushma

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, DEC. 3. The Government today made it clear that it was agreeable to debates in Parliament on issues raised by the Opposition today — the Judev episode, the violence against Biharis in Assam, the Telgi scandal and the report of the Chief Vigilance Commissioner on alleged misuse of Public Sector Undertakings.

These were also some of the issues on which the Opposition members had submitted as many as 44 adjournment motions on which the Speaker, Manohar Joshi, has yet to take a decision.

According to the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, Mr. Joshi has written to the Cabinet Secretary asking for the factual positions on the Dilip Singh Judev issue — where the former Union Minister of State was seen on video allegedly taking bribe — and the alleged misuse of PSUs by Ministers and he was likely to take a decision on the adjournment motions based on that information.

Although no date has as yet been fixed for the debates, Ms. Swaraj indicated that the Assam violence could be discussed between 12 and 3.30 p.m. and then again after 5.30 p.m. on Friday. Since this was a sensitive issue the suggestion was that it should be broached

through a discussion on the Railway recruitment policy (which triggered the violence). All the other subjects would be discussed in the following weeks, she said.

At a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee of the Lok Sabha this afternoon, Ms. Swaraj articulated the Government's position.

When the Opposition members demanded that the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, make a statement on the Judev issue she readily agreed. But as Mr. Vajpayee was leaving for Nigeria tomorrow to attend the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, "that would be possible only after he returns on December 7 and at the Prime Minister's convenience," she added.

A debate could follow Mr. Vajpayee's statement. "The rules of procedure do not prohibit this," she said. Ms. Swaraj said the Government was keen on a full but "non-partisan" discussion on the Telgi scandal to which certain irregularities in the Nashik Security Press were closely connected. Some Opposition leaders, however, maintained that the Government was emphasising the "non-partisan" bit because the gross irregularities in the security press could directly point a finger at the Union Finance Ministry.

Rajya Sabha adjourned:  
Page 11

## Frames of shame

The NDA govt has many achievements to its credit, it should quickly clean this ugly blot

FOR the readers of this newspaper, *The Sunday Express* expose on Union Minister of State for Environment and Forests seen accepting cash isn't new. It's in tune with our commitment to keeping a watch on those who misuse power. It's also part of our ongoing investigative coverage of the elections that are soon going to take place in five states. When we received the video CD, we decided to bring it to public notice because, first of all, it involved a Union Minister of State. We ran this story because it concerned a vital and sensitive ministry like environment and forests, a ministry that often comes under the scrutiny of the Supreme Court because of the decisions it takes. We ran this story because there has already been great public concern over allegations of ministers in the NDA government putting pressure on the heads of public sector units for favours of every kind. We ran this story because it involved the principles of accountability and transparency in public life.

Above all, we carried this story because at *The Indian Express*, the bedrock of our journalism of courage is our readers' unassailable right, the right to know. Our front pages have testified to this in the past—whether it was the Bofors scam that had irreparably damaged the Congress party, or the Petrol Pump scandal that

had severely embarrassed the BJP—and they will continue to do so in the future. In fact, over the last fortnight, this newspaper has not pulled its punches when it came to reporting the campaign games and fiddles of politicians across the board. We have had Messrs Digvijay Singh and Ajit Kumar Jogi, chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh respectively, squirming in discomfort repeatedly. We extensively reported on Digvijay Singh's power sop to voters on the eve of the elections, a move that was later struck down by the Election Commission. We have been unrelenting in our exposure of Ajit Jogi's shrewd attempts to win over voters, whether by distributing schoolbags or by peddling religion.

As the tape plays and replays on TV screens nationwide, there will be charges and counter-charges. The Congress will flog the frames of shame, the BJP will try to discredit them. Our only advice: instead of wrestling with shadows, turn the gaze inward. The NDA government, which has several achievements to its credit—and this newspaper has been among the first to applaud them—must clear the stain these frames have brought. That's its appointed job, of delivering a transparent and trustworthy government. We, on our part, will continue to do ours.

THIS IS NOT A PRICE

H9-1  
22/8

# Allies force Bill banning

By Our New Delhi Bureau

**NEW DELHI, AUG. 21.** The Vajpayee Government was today forced to defer the introduction of a Bill banning cow slaughter.

Within 48 hours of helping the BJP defeat the Opposition's motion of no-confidence against the Government, allies of the ruling National Democratic Alliance joined hands with the Opposition to derail a move designed to propitiate the Sangh Parivar as well as woo the BJP voters in the four northern States going to the polls later this year.

Much to the BJP's embarrassment, the resistance was spearheaded by its allies, the TDP, the DMK, the MDMK, the PMK and the JD(U), with support from the CPI(M), the Congress, the RJD and the IUML.

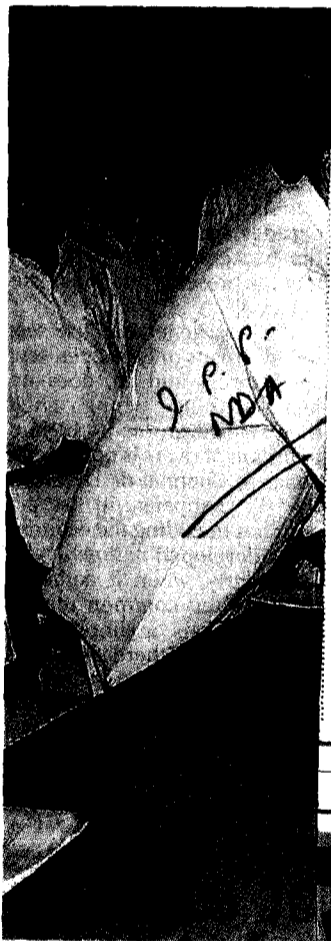
The Lok Sabha witnessed uproarious scenes, as soon as the Speaker, Manohar Joshi, asked the Agriculture Minister, Rajnath Singh, to move the Bill. Angry TDP, DMK, PMK and MDMK members were on their feet, demanding that the Bill be withdrawn.

Devendra Prasad Yadav (JD-U), Venugopalchari (TDP) and Ramachandran (CPI-M) were gesticulating at the Treasury Benches.

"This is not a part of the NDA agenda and cannot be forced on the people," said Mr. Yadav. In the midst of the din, Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M) asked the Government to explain why it was not making an effort to evolve a consensus on the issue. As heated arguments continued, the Speaker adjourned the House for 10 minutes.

When the House reassembled, the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj, announced that the Government would not press for the introduction of the Bill. "We will convene an all-party meeting to try and evolve a consensus on the issue."

The Government's parliamentary managers were obviously caught napping; in fact, the lobby correspondents were aware that the Telugu Desam Party was mobilising opposition



The Prime Minister, Chandrababu

to the Bill and was in touch with other NDA allies.

The opposition to the Bill was equally vociferous outside the House. The TDP chief and Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu, who was here, publicly cautioned the Government against acting with haste in the matter.

"This is not a priority item there should be no haste, we have asked the Government to discuss the matter with all political parties," Mr. Naidu told newsmen.

Asked to elaborate, he said that apart from the issue being a State subject, there was an economic dimension to it that needed to be looked into.

(According to a PTI report, Mr. Naidu met the Prime Minis-



Enforcers, reel and real. Surya meets the Co

## Reel policing

AFTER BEING repeatedly thrashed about, the police force and its reputation recently got a face-lift, in the movies. When the producers of 'Kaakha...Kaakha...' invited the city police Commissioner to watch the movie, the official declined the offer stating that he would watch it with his family later.

But after receiving encouraging reports from policemen that the movie indeed did pay a tribute to the 'force', the official, along with his family, watched the hit in the city recently.

And the city police boss was so impressed with it, that he invited Surya to his office.

The actor, who was away, shooting in Theni for 'Pitamagan' with Vikram (who also portrayed a cop earlier in 'Saa-

my') came down specially to catch Commissioner, tea last week.

That was how Commissioner K. Vijayan encountered ACP Anbuselvan who reportedly got a clasp from the police for and the Commissioner applauded the body language a

tail. The film, that dangers that a police officer's family faces in offices official maintain law and order families of the people uneasy, but the police top

By Sud

## Living Space

A 4-page colour supplement on Sunday, Sept. 14 featuring real estate, interiors, and allied products in Chennai.

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# PM wins no-thrust vote

'What was the motion's purpose? It isn't clear'

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, August 19

PRIME MINISTER A.B. Vajpayee summarily rejected Leader of the Opposition Sonia Gandhi's nine-point chargesheet against his government during the debate on the Congress-sponsored no-confidence motion on Tuesday. The motion was defeated by 312 votes to 186.

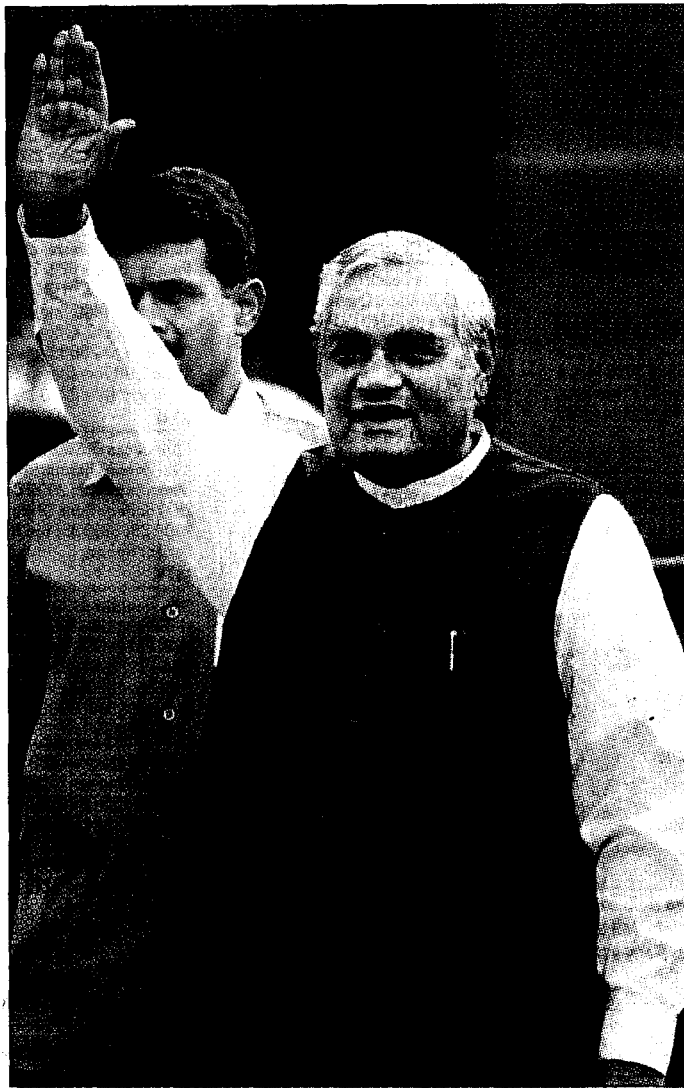
As the 20-hour debate — replete with personal attacks and pointless interjections from both sides — dragged to an end, Vajpayee objected to the manner in which the opposition conducted itself.

He took serious exception to the charges, saying that "they are unacceptable in a country with such rich democratic traditions".

Vajpayee came out in support of Defence Minister George Fernandes, saying he had done a commendable job to keep up the morale of the Indian armed forces despite the humiliation heaped on him by the opposition. Vajpayee said it was his prerogative to allow Fernandes to remain in the ministry. He added that there was no specific charge against Fernandes.

He was visibly upset that the government was accused of "mortgaging" its foreign policy. "Do you think India is so cheap that anyone can mortgage it?" he asked in an aggressive tone.

Contending that there was always consensus on India's foreign policy, Vajpayee said the



Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee arrives at Parliament to attend the vote of no-confidence against his government.

opposition was trying to divide the House on the issue.

Expressing shock over words like "insensitive, irresponsible and brazenly corrupt" used by Sonia Gandhi to attack the BJP-led coalition, Vajpayee said

there might be differences in the political field but this was not the way to express them. "The choicest words have been dug out of the dictionary," he said.

Another report on Page 5

Charges not answered, govt has a lot to hide: Sonia

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, August 19

LEADER OF the opposition Sonia Gandhi wrapped up the two-day debate on the no-confidence motion against the NDA government by adding another point to her chargesheet.

She told the Lok Sabha shortly before midnight that the government had falsely blamed the Congress's legacy for its failures. "The truth is, their so-called achievements wouldn't have been possible without the legacy bequeathed by our party" She accused the government of not replying to any of the charges.

"The Prime Minister is surprised by our account of the country's defence preparedness. He wouldn't have been if he had gone through the parliamentary standing committee proceedings as carefully as we have done," Sonia Gandhi said.

"Had the government not been under any external pressure, as claimed by the PM, would it have taken so long to condemn the war on Iraq or reject the US request for troop deployment in that country by India?" she asked.

Having been at the receiving end of a flurry of personalised attacks in the debate, the Congress president lashed out at the ruling combine for deflecting attention from key issues. The government, she said, had a lot to hide on the points she raised. "Mere poetry will not fetch jobs for our youth and Dalits."



# Sonia hits NDA, Advani cries India

## Past sin revisits as gaffe

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 18: Sonia Gandhi did not disappoint her anxious followers in the Congress camp, including her daughter Priyanka Gandhi, as she made a marathon, combative speech.

And then she ruined it all herself. The feel-good atmosphere in the Congress benches generated by her 70-minute speech did not last even until the members took a brief lunch break.

In her eagerness to consolidate the advantage gained from her speech, Sonia made a huge gaffe when deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani was intervening in the debate on the no-trust motion as the government's first speaker.

Advani was countering her charge that the government was brazenly denigrating parliamentary and constitutional institutions one after the other. "The leader of the Opposition should know that the Congress had imposed Emergency on the country for 19 months" before making such allegations, he said.

Trying to put Advani on the defensive, Sonia stood up to tell him that "some people (jailed under the Maintenance of Internal Security Act) had written to then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, seeking their release from jail".

She did not name the persons, but asserted that she was in possession of the letters, putting foot firmly in mouth.

Former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar rose from the Opposition camp to protest. Sonia's "sweeping" statement was highly "objectionable", he said. "If she has the letters, she should disclose them but not make sweeping remarks," he said.

Emboldened by Chandra Shekhar's strong words, BJP chief whip V.K. Malhotra went a step further. "In the 1975-77 period, Sonia was not even an Indian national. How did she get papers from the Prime Minister's Office?" he asked.

Advani challenged her to clarify her allegation. Such a clarification was necessary as thousands of people went to jail opposing the Emergency, he said.

Sonia chose to remain silent, realising — if a little too late — her attempt at offence had boomeranged, taking the debate away from the objective of parading what it considered the government's failures.

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Aug. 18: A divided Opposition came down severely on the Vajpayee government as the Lok Sabha today took up the debate on the first no-trust move against the ruling combine.

Oozing confidence that the numbers are on the government side, deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, as the first speaker for a "united" National Democratic Alliance, sought to ward off the threat from Congress.

Sonia Gandhi by denigrating the government with trying to deny the name of the government. Sonia Gandhi, however, saved the government facing some embarrassing moments, an Opposition leader like the CPM's Somnath Chatterjee, the Congress' Jaipal Reddy and the Samajwadi Party's Mulayam Singh Yadav refreshed the memories of many scams, particularly those relating to the Tehelka tapes.

Defence minister George Fernandes did get the opportunity he was looking for all these days to defend himself. But he was more into technicalities, including his explanation that rules prevented the "secret" Central Vigilance Commission report from being shown to the Public Accounts Committee — the fact that has led to the no-confidence motion.

Perhaps, the Opposition cause would have been served better had there been greater unity. Former Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar did not even support the no-trust move. The Left parties and Laloo Prasad Yadav's RJD members walked out the moment Fernandes opened his mouth.

In contrast, the BJP's difficult partners like the Telugu Desam, the Trinamul Congress and the DMK were firmly behind the government.

Conceding at the very outset that she did not have the numbers to get the motion through, Sonia sought to wrest the moral and political initiative as she launched an attack on the government's five-year record.

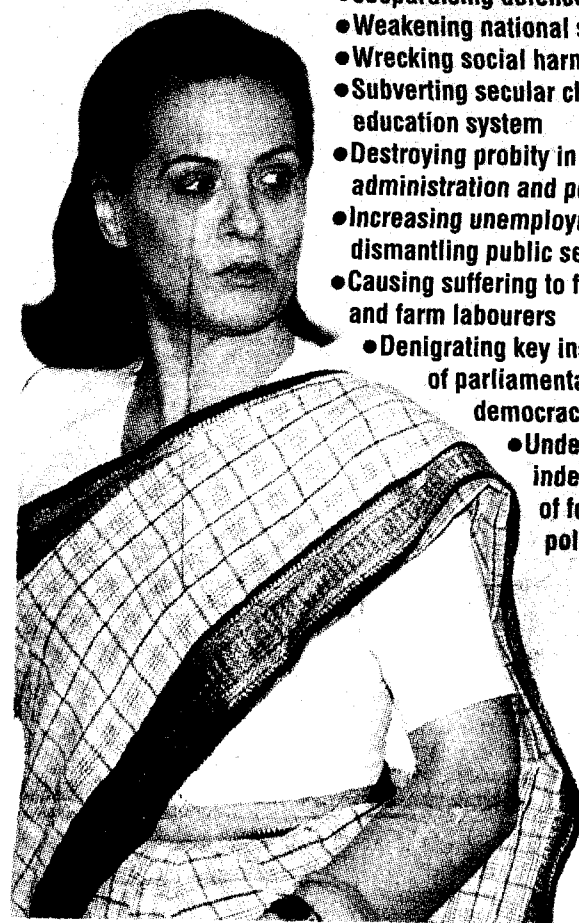
The move, she said, was not prompted because the Opposition had numbers on its side, but to expose Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's double-speak, the capricious and arrogant way of the government's functioning, the threat it posed to the basic tenets of the Constitution, freedom and justice system and denigration of parliamentary institutions.

Even as she was repeatedly interrupted by treasury bench members during her 70-minute speech, Sonia made it a point to take a swipe at Opposition leaders — Vajpayee, Manmohan Singh, Manohar Joshi, Jai Prakash Singh, Ashwani Kumar and, most important, Fernandes.

She did pick Fernandes and Advani as special targets as she highlighted the government's failures on defence and national security. She wondered how long the country would have to wait for the white paper Advani had promised on ISI activities five years ago.

Sonia charged the government with risking the lives of soldiers by its lethargic and irresponsible attitude. The government was not even spending the money allocated for defence modernisation, what with over Rs 24,000 crore remaining unspent. Even the money collected specifically for defence modernisation in the name of Kargil tax

## THE ATTACK



- Jeopardising defence
- Weakening national security
- Wrecking social harmony
- Subverting secular character of education system
- Destroying probity in administration and public life
- Increasing unemployment and dismantling public sector
- Causing suffering to farmers and farm labourers
- Denigrating key institutions of parliamentary democracy
- Undermining independence of foreign policy

was diverted, she said.

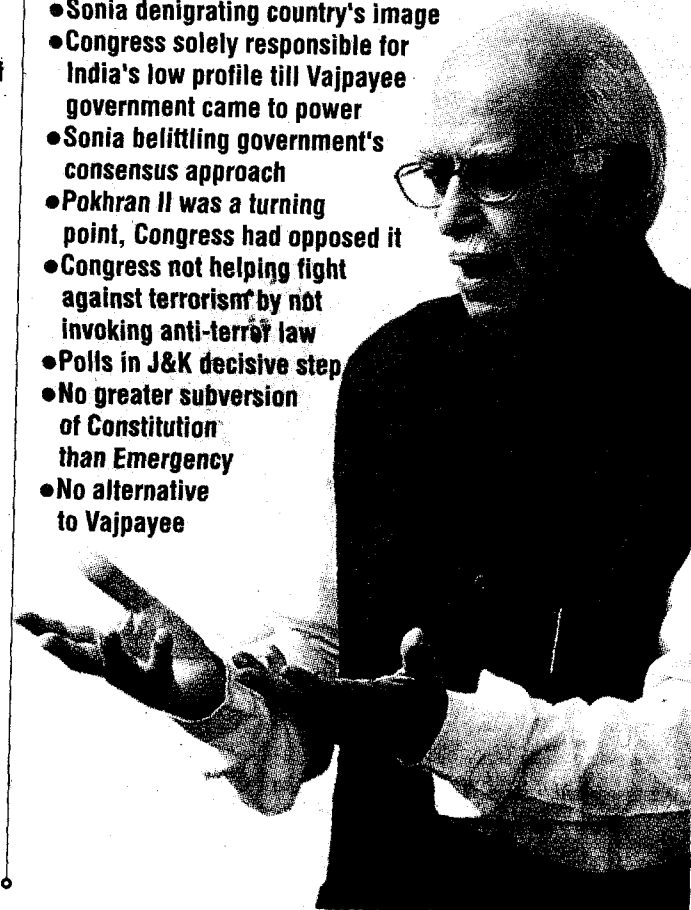
She was equally harsh in her attack on the government over alleged corruption, which, she said, had assumed monumental proportions with the disclosure of the Taj Heritage Corridor scam, preceded by Tehelka, the Delhi Development Authority

and UTI scandals.

Advani did not go for a point-by-point rebuttal of the charges. He cited recent write-ups by his ministerial colleague Arun Shourie and Amitabh Bachchan to present the case that India was on the road to growth and development and to a prominent place

## THE DEFENCE

- Allegations are an exercise in falsehood
- Sonia denigrating country's image
- Congress solely responsible for India's low profile till Vajpayee government came to power
- Sonia belittling government's consensus approach
- Pokhran II was a turning point, Congress had opposed it
- Congress not helping fight against terrorism by not invoking anti-terror law
- Polts in J&K decisive step
- No greater subversion of Constitution than Emergency
- No alternative to Vajpayee



in the international community under the Vajpayee government.

Quoting Bachchan, he said since the dawn of the new millennium, India's image abroad has gone up and the country was being taken seriously.

He wondered whether Sonia was trying to belittle these

achievements and India's growing image abroad. He accused her of undermining the successes of Vajpayee's consensus approach to decision-making because of which several important steps such as creation of three new states were possible.

■ See Pages 6 and 8

## Look to Europe for standards

OUR BUREAU

New Delhi/Calcutta, Aug. 18: The Bureau of Indian Standards today decided that standards for drinking water and for water used in the food processing industry should be aligned with European levels.

This would imply that the same European standards would apply to soft drinks also, where water is the main constituent. Soft drinks made by Coca-Cola and Pepsi have been caught in a controversy after the Centre for Science and Environment alleged in a report that their products contained pesticide residue higher than limits set in Europe.

Both companies have contested the claim.

The bureau had adopted European standards for bottled

water in July, after a similar controversy.

At today's meeting, the bureau considered proposals that European standards should apply to soft drinks since norms for drinking water and all water used in food products would be aligned to those standards. But no decision was taken, sources said.

Even if the bureau were to take a decision, the standards set by it are optional. Licences for carbonated beverages are issued by the ministry of food processing under different rules.

A notification last month had revised norms for bottled water to match European standards. These rules will come into effect from January.

The Prevention of Food Adulteration Act rules that cover soft drinks merely say that the water

used should be "potable" without providing a legally binding definition of potable water.

The controversy over soft drinks has been accompanied by allegations of high toxic metal content in the sludge that comes out of some of Coca-Cola's bottling plants. In a damage-control exercise, Coke brought over an environment expert from the US, who is a consultant to the company, to meet Indian officials.

Accompanied by a battery of senior officials responsible for the company's India operations, Harry J. Ott called on officials at the Central Pollution Control Board and the ministry of environment.

Ott also met officials of the West Bengal Pollution Control Board last week. "The Coke team had visited our office. The dis-

cussions revolved around the high proportion of toxic metals found in the sludge," confirmed board chairman Hirak Ghosh.

The board had found "significant amounts" of lead and cadmium in the sludge from all the three plants at Jalpaiguri, Taratala and Dankuni.

The Coke team made an hour-long presentation emphasising the company's adherence to international standards. But the presentation remained silent on the board's findings.

After a string of negative news, Coke today received a clean chit from Kerala, where the sludge controversy broke. Health director V.K. Rajan was quoted by PTI as saying there was no pesticide content in drinks samples tested at a government lab.

DMK TO VOTE AGAINST NO-CONFIDENCE MOTION

# Advani, George to lead govt defence

9-PP - NDA 5/1 18/8

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI/CHENNAI, Aug. 17. — Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani and defence minister Mr George Fernandes would lead the defence of the government in response to the no-confidence motion to be initiated by Congress chief Mrs Sonia Gandhi tomorrow.

Speaking at a BJP-Shiv Sena meeting in Mumbai late tonight, BJP general secretary Mr Pramod Mahajan said the NDA government will defeat the no-confidence motion by a margin of over 100 votes.

The DMK today declared its support for the NDA government, saying it would vote against the motion, while the AIADMK executive may finalise its stand in Chennai tomorrow.

"We have decided to support the Vajpayee government and vote against the no-trust motion," DMK president Mr M Karunanidhi, an NDA partner, said in Tiruchirapalli today.

The DMK chief told newsmen that the decision was taken after consultations with senior leaders and the DMK Parliamentary Party. Mr Karunanidhi said the no-trust motion by the Congress was neither related to possible legislation on the construction of the Ram Temple nor the proposed cow slaughter ban, both issues on which the DMK differed with the BJP. "If there was voting on such controversial Bills, we would not have supported them," he said.

PMK leader Dr S Ramadoss, another ally of the BJP in Tamil

## Mulayam attacks Congress

LUCKNOW, Aug. 17. — Though the Samajwadi Party will vote with the Congress in tomorrow's no-confidence motion, Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav continues to be unhappy with Ms Gandhi's party. Addressing partyworkers here today, Mr Yadav rather aggressively made it clear that any alternative government at the Centre could not be formed without his party's support.

Particularly upset over the Congress calling the SP a regional party, Mr Yadav pointed out that his party had more MPs in UP alone as the Congress had in eight states. — SNS

Nadu, has also announced his decision to back the NDA.

At a meeting held today at the residence Mr Advani, it was decided that the Deputy Prime Minister would be the first speaker from the Treasury Benches and Mr Fernandes would be the second speaker of the debate that would end on Tuesday with a reply from Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, the leader of the House followed by Mrs Gandhi winding up the debate before the voting took place on the motion on Tuesday. Prof VK Malhotra, chief whip of the BJP would also be one of the speakers from the Treasury Benches.

Whips have been issued by all the major parties in Lok Sabha to their members instructing them to be present in the House tomorrow and the day after.

The two-day debate would be telecast live on all the Doordarshan channels.

Although the Congress today said it would respond to Mr Fernandes taking the floor only in consultation with the rest of the Opposition, it would be difficult to disrupt the defence minister since the motion is sponsored by the Leader of the Opposition. Besides, two Opposition leaders, Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav and Mr Sharad Pawar have already expressed their willingness to listen to Mr Fernandes in the Lok Sabha. This was much before Mrs Gandhi moved the no trust motion on last Thursday.

Only the CPI-M and the RJD are among the parties who along with some Congress members might make noises when Mr Fernandes speaks tomorrow.

It is going to be not only a test of strength between the Opposition and the ruling coalition during the next two days, but the floor of the Lok Sabha would also provide a nationwide platform to the main political players to put forth their points of view on the NDA performance over the past four years.

The Prime Minister and his men would have a testing time in the House highlighting their achievements and organising defence in a manner that could dilute the anti-incumbency factor.

Those taking the floor in the debate for the Opposition will include Mr Somnath Chatterjee (CPI-M), Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav (SP), Mr PR Das Munshi, Mr Sharad Pawar (NCP), Mr S Jaipal Reddy and Mrs Sonia Gandhi for the Congress.

18 AUG 2003

THE STATESMAN

10-1 ● AIADMK's HELP MAY BE SOUGHT ● DMK UPSET?

# 17/8 NDA partners close ranks, Govt. confident of facing no-trust move

By Harish Khare

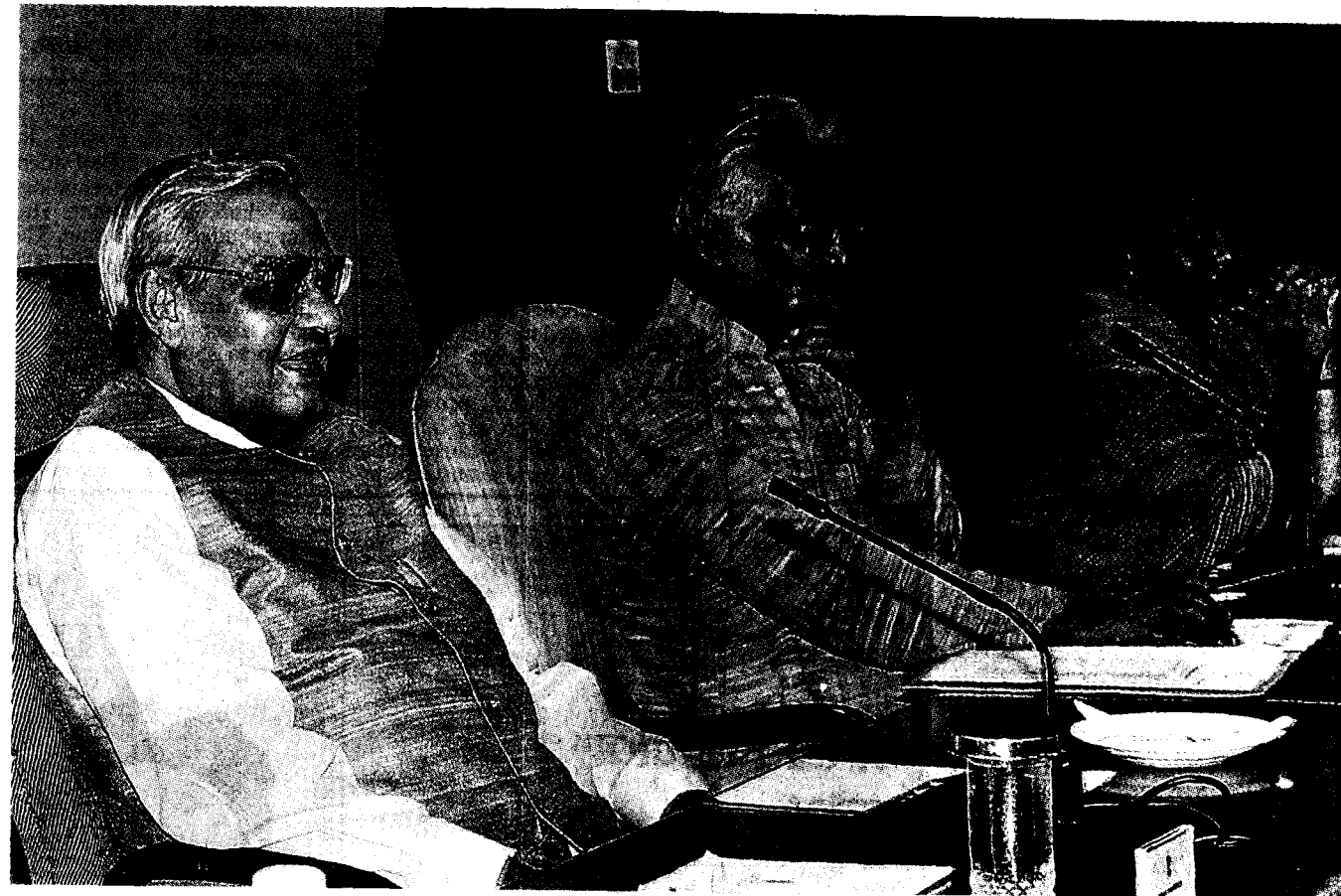
NEW DELHI, AUG. 16. Except for a somewhat contrary note struck by the DMK, partners in the National Democratic Alliance today closed ranks behind the Atal Behari Vajpayee Government, which is scheduled to face a motion of no-confidence in the Lok Sabha on Monday (August 18). The Government's parliamentary managers are counting on the support of 323 members (in a House of 543); besides, the Government hopes to get the AIADMK's 11 votes.

After a meeting this morning of the NDA leaders at the Prime Minister's residence, the alliance managers exuded confidence that the motion would not only be defeated but that the coalition Government would be able to present a picture of unity behind Mr. Vajpayee's policies and leadership; at the same time, the NDA strategy would be to expose the rather fragile unity among the Opposition parties behind the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi. All the NDA partners have issued a three-line whip to their respective Lok Sabha members to be present and vote with the Government.

## TDP's support

The NDA Government got a ringing support from the Telugu Desam Party, the major outside supporter, as well as an assurance from the Bahujan Samaj Party, the BJP's partner in Uttar Pradesh. The Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister and TDP boss, N. Chandrababu Naidu, decried the no-confidence motion move as "politically motivated and a waste of time".

On the other hand, the Opposition ranks were relieved with the Nationalist Congress Party



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, and the Trinamool Congress chief, Mamata Banerjee, at a meeting of the National Democratic Alliance in New Delhi on Saturday. — AP

declaring itself to be in favour of the motion of no-confidence.

The only ticklish problem for the NDA managers is how to hang on to the support of the DMK (an NDA ally since 1999) without having to spurn the 11-member AIADMK, a new and "unlisted" supporter.

At the NDA meeting this morning, the DMK representative, T.R. Baalu, is reported to have questioned the very desirability of the alliance wanting to enlist the AIADMK's support.

However, Mr. Baalu failed to get a categorical assurance that the NDA managers would not solicit the AIADMK's support.

Later, the NDA convener, George Fernandes, made it clear that if the AIADMK wanted to support the Government there was very little anyone could do about it.

Asked if the AIADMK had been asked to support the Government, Mr. Fernandes said that Jayalalithaa's party would be "approached, if necessary",

putting the onus on the DMK to create the "necessary" condition. But as far as Mr. Fernandes was concerned he saw "no conflict of interest" if the two Tamil Nadu rivals were to support the Government.

NDA sources indicate that the only concession that could be made to the DMK's sentiments is that an effort would be made to ensure the DMK leader, Vaiko's presence and participation in the no-confidence motion debate. Mr. Vaiko has been

linguishing in prison under the controversial Prevention of Terrorism Act (POTA); but the Centre has not been able to provide any aid and comfort to its Tamil Nadu allies.

Finding himself in a quandary, the DMK leader and party president, M. Karunanidhi, was reported to have observed that the "DMK has not yet taken any decision" on the Left parties' call to vote against the Government.

The Left has been nudging the DMK to break ranks with the NDA ever since Ms. Jayalalithaa has moved closer to the Vajpayee Government.

Apart from having to cope with the DMK/AIADMK zero-sum equation, the BJP leaders were asserting that the debate would allow the Government to take its case to the people. The decision, for now, is to field almost all senior Ministers — including Mr. Fernandes — during the nationally televised debate.

The Congress, on its part, will find itself in a quandary on how to react when Mr. Fernandes gets up to speak; so far, the Congress MPs have been boycotting the Defence Minister.

AUG 2003

THE STATESMAN

# Shekhawat queers pitch over Kargil

Our Political Bureau  
NEW DELHI 13 AUGUST

**V**ICE president Bhairon Singh Shekhawat on Wednesday kicked the bottom off the Opposition's campaign against the NDA over "Kargil report" by endorsing the government's stand that the CVC has not submitted any report on Kargil purchases.

Mr Shekhawat, who was shown the real CVC report — incidentally, it deals with the purchases made by the Congress government under Narasimha Rao and the two UF versions — by the government, ruled against a discussion on the issue. "CVC has confirmed in writing that it has not conducted any investiga-

tion into procurement for Operation Vijay," Mr Shekhawat said in a lengthy ruling.

Mr Shekhawat also revealed that the CVC had conveyed this to Mr Buta Singh, chairman of Lok Sabha's Public Accounts Committee, but the latter did not pass the communication on to members of the parliamentary panel. It was Mr Singh who triggered the unrest by accusing the government of withholding the purported Kargil report from the PAC. Emboldened by the ruling, an upbeat BJP immediately threatened Mr Singh with a breach of privilege notice.

This is the second time in the past 24 hours that two constitutional functionaries have said that the premise of the Opposi-

sition as all anti-NDA formations, barring the Samajwadi Party, kicked up a row in both Houses of Parliament, forcing adjournment of proceedings of the Lok Sabha for the day. That the Opposition was finding it difficult to sustain the agitation was, however, obvious when they returned to the Upper House after a walkout to debate the Science and Technology Policy, 2003.

Mr Shekhawat's ruling will help the government drive home its point that it did not withhold any report on Kargil purchases from Parliament. The ruling also lends credence to the NDA's accusation that Congress' Buta Singh, whose report provided the trigger for the current agitation, took a "scandalous route to create a

scandal." Earlier in the Rajya Sabha, Mr Shekhawat upheld the government's version — already seconded by the then CVC — that the vigilance body did not go into the Kargil purchases.

"The CVC's terms of reference included: All major contracts entered into by the ministry of defence and services headquarters for defence procurements since the ban on involvement of agents was imposed by the government; the contracts in respect of which specific allegations have been made by former MP Jayant Kumar Malhotra in Parliament in the course of short duration discussion; allegations of irregularities and corruption made in the writ petition of Rear Admiral S.V. Purohit," he said.



SHEKHAWAT: PM'S MAN

But it did not deter the Opposi-

## Sonia calls for NDA ouster

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE  
NEW DELHI, Aug 9. — Mrs Sonia Gandhi today accused the NDA government of "corruption and incompetence" and called upon the people to oust it.

Kicking off the Congress election campaign in Delhi by addressing a rally, Mrs Gandhi hit out at the Vajpayee government for its "unprecedented" denial of vital documents to the Parliament public accounts committee on Kargil arms procurement. She accused it of corruption in the purchase of coffins for martyrs in the conflict.

"What can one expect from a government that does not show respect to the nation's martyrs?" she asked at a rally, timed on the occasion of the anniversary of the "Quit India" movement.

Referring to the alleged dropping of charges against the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr LK Advani, and several others in the Babari Masjid demolition case, Mrs Gandhi targeted the Vajpayee government for "forcing" CBI to do so to "save" its ministers.

1 0 AUG 2003

THE STATESMAN

# NDA lacks majority to impose Central rule in Bengal: Fernandes

By Our Special Correspondent

**KOLKATA, JULY 21.** The Defence Minister and National Democratic Alliance convener, George Fernandes, has said that the BJP-led Central Government is unable to accede to the Trinamool Congress leader, Mamata Banerjee's demand for Central intervention in West Bengal because the Constitution did not provide scope for such a measure.

Addressing a Trinamool rally, organised to commemorate the death of 13 Youth Congress activists in police firing on this day in 1993, here today, he said that the party would do well to stitch up a nationwide campaign against the leftists instead. "We abide by the Constitution. Our Government does not have the requisite majority in the Rajya Sabha to impose Article 356 on Bengal."

Ms. Banerjee, who launched her party's campaign for next year's parliamentary polls with the rally, however, said she would continue to demand Central intervention in Bengal till the terror unleashed by the State's communists ended.

The participation of Mr. Fernandes and leaders of the Bengal BJP in the rally was a sign that the Trinamool intends to fight the elections as part of the NDA. Mr. Banerjee also sent a signal to the BJP's central leadership that she was capable of projecting a unified face of the party when she announced the withdrawal of the two-year suspension on the party MP, Ajit Panja.

Mr. Fernandes said that terror, violence and lawlessness were rampant in Bengal where



The Trinamool Congress chief, Mamata Banerjee, with the Samata Party leader, George Fernandes, at a rally in Kolkata on Monday. — Photo: Sushanta Patronobish

the leftists had been ruling for the past 27 years. "Bengal is like Bihar and the leftists are responsible for the flight of capital," he said. On his return to Delhi, he would apprise the Prime Minister of the situation prevailing in the State.

It was the NDA's responsibility to devise ways to save the lives of the common people in Bengal who were victims of the Marxists' misrule. The report submitted by the NDA team, which visited the State a month ago, revealed that "the situation in Bengal is much more worse than what we read in newspapers or what the Trinamool says

in (the) Lok Sabha," he said.

Mr. Fernandes said that Ms. Banerjee could re-join the Central Government any day. "She (Ms. Banerjee) is welcome to join us."

Ms. Banerjee, for her part, criticised the leftists for unleashing terror on Trinamool supporters and held them responsible for the State's economic stagnation. She charged the Congress with teaming up with the leftists saying that party was not in a position to counter the leftists in Bengal. The Trinamool supporters must concentrate on strengthening the party's base in Bengal to

counter the leftists in the polls.

## Cong. campaign

The other Opposition party in Bengal, Congress, too, unveiled its campaign for the parliamentary polls today, with the AICC general secretary, Salman Khurshed, declaring at a Youth Congress rally that the party would fight the BJP as well as the leftists in Bengal.

"Our aim is to capture Writers' Buildings (the State Government headquarters) here and Lal Qila (Red Fort) in Delhi," he said. The Congress would try to regain power at the Centre under Sonia Gandhi, he added.

9-P.P. NDA

## THE POLITICS OF PULL-OUT

10/16/7

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE'S decision to pull out of the ruling National Democratic Alliance has been a long time coming. The eventual rupture may have been the result of a slew of causes, but the principal reason for the withdrawal is the looming Lok Sabha election next year. Having been roundly defeated in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly election last year, the National Conference is fully aware of the political cost of allying with the BJP-led NDA in a Muslim-majority State. The statement of Omar Abdullah, the party's president, that the chapter of having alliances with parties in Delhi is over and his admission that his organisation had become "Delhi's voice in Kashmir instead of Kashmir's voice in Delhi" are pointers towards the political space the National Conference wants to occupy as a general election nears. Indications that the party will adopt a strongly 'pro-Kashmiri' line were even more evident on the day after the National Conference withdrew support. Addressing a rally in Srinagar on Martyr's Day (to commemorate the protest against Dogra rule), Mr. Abdullah made a robust pitch for autonomy to Jammu and Kashmir and portrayed his party as the only one in the State that was neither New Delhi's ally nor Islamabad's handmaiden.

The National Conference would have preferred to dress up its pull-out in ideological clothing, a fact reflected in Mr. Abdullah's regret that his party did not withdraw support over the carnage in Gujarat or the controversial POTA legislation. But the timing of the severance leaves a sufficiently long spell for the party for a makeover, a period it could use to re-orient its image as an unattached party that stands strongly for 'Kashmiriyat'. At another level, the rupture between the National Conference and the NDA was helped along by a number of irritants. The

most important of these was probably the Prime Minister's less than helpful attitude towards the former Chief Minister, Farooq Abdullah, who, after losing the Assembly election, had banked on being suitably accommodated either as Vice-President or in an important Ministry. Another factor that introduced a strain in the five-year relationship was the Centre's periodic and fitful attempts to engage other groups in the Valley, most notably the parties comprising the Hurriyat Conference. The National Conference tended to regard these initiatives as attempts to undermine it; it was particularly upset last year when Mr. Vajpayee promised "free and fair elections" in Jammu and Kashmir, an assurance that was read as implying that the previous elections were far from impartial.

The withdrawal of support by five National Conference MPs will not affect the stability of the Vajpayee Government in any way. But it has an important symbolic impact. While the National Conference was merely one party in a discordant ruling alliance of some two dozen, its participation helped the BJP to project itself as leading a rainbow coalition, one that was both inclusive and eclectic. It was political opportunism that brought the National Conference to the NDA fold five years ago. The inherent contradiction involved in representing a Muslim-majority State and being a part of a BJP-led Government has manifested itself time and again. The most conspicuous instance of this was in 1999 when Saifuddin Soz, then a National Conference MP, defied the party decision to support the Vajpayee Government during the vote on the confidence motion. Ironically, the reason Mr. Soz advanced for defying the party whip ("the people of Jammu and Kashmir are against supporting the Government") is the very same reason Mr. Abdullah has advanced for pulling out now.

# Centre says no troops for Iraq

98-P NDA H.P. 15/7

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, July 14

IN DEFERENCE to a near national consensus after months of deliberations, New Delhi on Monday said "no" to America's request for deployment of Indian troops in Iraq.

The announcement followed a 90-minute meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), chaired by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The government, however, kept itself open to any UN-mandated request for troops to ensure stability, security, political progress and economic reconstruction of the war-ravaged West Asian country.

Briefing reporters after the CCS meeting, External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha clarified that the decision had been reached after "careful consideration against the backdrop of our national interest, our concern for the people of Iraq, our long-standing ties with the Gulf region as a whole, as well as our grow-

## What India lost

### Influence in Gulf

- ▶ Delhi's interests in the Gulf include oil imports, remittances and fight against terror

### Indo-US ties

- ▶ Delhi missed a chance to take relations with the US to a truly strategic level. As of now, Pak files reach Bush; India files don't

### Oil stakes

- ▶ India could lose rights to 2 oilfields the Iraqis had promised, and a few big construction contracts

ing dialogue and strengthening of ties with the US."

Sinha said Delhi could reconsider the issue "were there to be an explicit UN mandate for the purpose".

For now, the matter stands closed though the government would be glad to aid restoration of infra-

structure and help meet medical, health, educational and other civilian needs of the Iraqi people.

The rejection of the US request follows widespread opposition from political parties, including BJP and NDA leaders. Though some influential members of the government were not against sending troops, the scales were tipped by political considerations, especially the upcoming state polls and the Lok Sabha elections scheduled next year.

Besides, the US had failed to come up with a credible roadmap for Iraq's future — as demanded by India — the recently constituted governing council notwithstanding. New Delhi also took into account the feelings of the other Gulf countries.

In a guarded reaction, the US said it had hoped India would take a different stand. "But the transformation of US-India relations will continue as before," an American spokesperson said.



# PM rejects Nitish's resignation

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JULY 14. Factional feuds and inner-party tussles overshadowed the national-level Samata Party meeting here today, culminating in the Railway Minister, Nitish Kumar, resigning from the Government and the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, rejecting it.

High drama preceded Mr. Kumar's offer both to the Prime Minister and the Samata president, George Fernandes.

A spokesman for the Prime Minister's Office confirmed that the offer was rejected. Earlier, the Samata national council too had turned down the letter which Mr. Kumar submitted at the meeting.

The events in the latter half of the day overtook the earlier unanimous re-election of Mr. Fernandes as Samata Party president. The meeting which began on a smooth note turned turbulent in the post-lunch session after the party MP, Prabhunath Singh, let loose a tirade against the manner in which party affairs were being run and

objected to the sudden expulsion of Raghunath Jha, MP.

Mr. Singh's plain-speaking drew applause from the assembly but ruffled the feathers of some leaders. After hitting out against the party leaders, he offered to resign from the organisation if his suggestions were found unacceptable, and then walked out of the meeting. Some other MPs, including Renu Kumari and Manjay Lal, too suggested that those expelled be taken back.

When Mr. Kumar came to the podium as the penultimate speaker, he was unusually aggressive. Regretting the lack of party discipline, Mr. Kumar objected to the charge of corruption levelled against him by the now-expelled MPs — Mr. Jha and Brahmanand Mandal. Refusing to be humiliated by senior party colleagues, he said he would keep away from government work till he was cleared by a judicial probe.

At the end of his valedictory address, Mr. Fernandes put Mr. Kumar's resignation before the council which unanimously rejected it.

# Abdullah pulls out of NDA

98-7  
NC  
1-6  
18/7

9/2/03

OUR SPECIAL  
CORRESPONDENT

**Srinagar July 12:** National Conference president Omar Abdullah today announced that the party was parting ways with the National Democratic Alliance, saying it was never too late to make such a move.

"The decision to pull out of the NDA was taken by the central working committee, which met here two days ago to discuss in detail the causes of defeat of the National Conference at hustings last year. The meeting also discussed the political situation in the state," Abdullah said at the party headquarters here.

"The decision was unanimous," the party president said. "After deliberations on various aspects, the working committee

decided to pull out of the NDA," he said.

"They never listened to us. We got no answers when we raised the important issues of Gujarat, arrest of innocent Muslims under Pota. We wanted concrete steps to be taken on Kashmir, including a ceasefire and the involvement of Kashmiri separatists in the dialogue," he said.

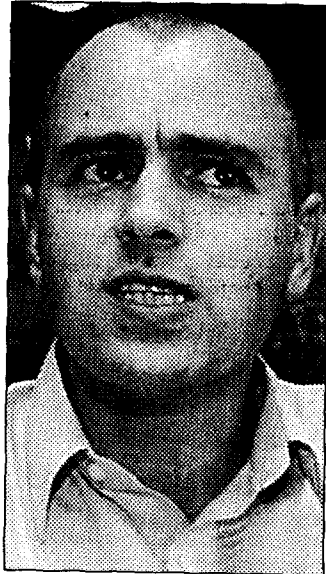
"I should have pursued my resignation after the Gujarat carnage. But it would have made our credibility suspect had we waited to capitalise on it," he said.

"Being a regional party, the National Conference has to safeguard Article 370 of the Constitution and seek greater autonomy for the state," Abdullah said. "During the past six years, we had become Delhi's voice in Kashmir rather than the people's voice."

Abdullah said people on both sides of the Line of Control should be involved in the resolution of the Kashmir problem. "Any solution has to be acceptable to the people." He, however, pointed out that "both New Delhi and Islamabad have sought third party intervention on Kashmir".

Omar said his father, former chief minister Farooq Abdullah, had wanted some international personality with "credibility and status to bring the two countries together" to play a role in resolving the row.

He criticised chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and his healing touch policy, saying: "Mufti is closer to the NDA and human rights violations are continuing in Kashmir."



Omar Abdullah

# More talks before troops to Iraq

196  
A.P.P.  
NDA

Rajnish Sharma  
New Delhi, June 15

AFTER AN hour-long meeting between Sonia Gandhi and Atal Bihari Vajpayee on the thorny issue of sending troops to Iraq, the government said it would be guided solely by "national interest" while considering the Bush administration's request.

"The government will hold consultations with countries in the region (West Asia) and with interested political parties, including NDA partners, and ultimately take a view which is in the national interest," External Affairs Minister Yashwant Sinha said.

A day before a Pentagon team arrives in New Delhi to discuss the exact role of the proposed stabilisation force, Sinha was at pains to explain that no decision had yet been taken on Indian participation in Iraq.

Sonia — and even some in the BJP — is opposed to sending troops except under the UN command. She had written to Vajpayee on June 4, expressing her reservations.

The Congress raised the



Sonia and Vajpayee at the Prime Minister's home on Sunday.

same objection at Sunday's meeting with Vajpayee at the Prime Minister's residence. Sonia was accompanied by senior leaders Natwar Singh and Manmohan Singh. Finance Minister Jaswant Singh and National Security Adviser Brajesh Mishra were also present.

Natwar Singh later told reporters the government will wait till a "national consensus" is evolved on the issue.

Sinha, who also briefed the press, ducked a question on the Pentagon team

arriving on Monday, saying a "lot of issues were involved". He also refused to comment on whether India was planning to send delegations to countries around Iraq, particularly Iran and Turkey, for holding consultations. "I will disclose this at an appropriate time," he added.

Natwar Singh said the Congress had told the government that it should hold consultations with other Opposition parties and Iraq's neighbours.

# Govt weighs plan to send troops to Iraq

P.P. M.A. **Our Political Bureau**  
NEW DELHI 12 JUNE

12/6/03  
about the time-frame of deployment, as well as their estimate of how the situation in Iraq is going to shape up.

THE Pentagon team, which is due here on Monday, will have its task cut out trying to persuade a sceptical New Delhi to send troops to Iraq. The BJP government is treading cautiously over the sensitive question of whether to send troops to Iraq to bail out the beleaguered Americans, while its rivals hurl charges of surrender to the US and betrayal of much-vaunted standards of Indian diplomacy.

Sources, stressing that the government is still weighing the pros and cons of the matter, said the Indian side will have some hard questions for the guests from Pentagon. The negotiations that are to be handled by the ministry of external affairs, according to the decision of a May 26 meeting of the Cabinet Committee on Security, will focus on the sensitive question of who will have the overall command of the Indian troops, if at all it is sent to Iraq.

New Delhi will also like to quiz the Americans

The command question is significant not only because all the Indian deployments so far have been under the UN aegis. A departure from the pattern is going to look even more controversial because of the unilateralist nature of the US-led attack on Iraq. It is recognised that the US' failure to locate the alleged weapons of mass destruction, Bush administration's central rationale for the war, and that it was its inability to get a handle on the post-war situation which forced it to turn to India, make selling the deployment that much more difficult.

What is also realised is that the UN Resolution 1483 — which recognises the US as the authority in Iraq and calls upon the willing member-states to contribute to the stabilisation efforts — cannot be an adequate buffer against the political costs of deployment, especially when the Opposition and the powerful Left-Liberal intellectual establishment has slipped into the campaign mode.

## GINGEE RAMACHANDRAN PUTS IN HIS PAPERS

# Ajit Singh quits on eve of Cabinet reshuffle

Handwritten notes: H.D.-1 29/5, J. Gov. P. P. P. L. OR. DR., J. P. P. MDA, v. 204, 3 copies

By Harish Khare

**NEW DELHI, MAY 23.** The Agriculture Minister, Ajit Singh, has resigned from the Vajpayee Union Government on the eve of the reshuffle/expansion of the Union



Ajit Singh

Cabinet. The BJP leadership had been gunning for Mr. Singh's ouster and instead of accepting a change of portfolio as was suggested to him, Mr. Singh opted to quit.

While the Prime Minister could exert himself against Mr. Ajith Singh, whose party the Rashtriya Lok Dal commands only one vote in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Vajpayee and his senior Government and party colleagues had a difficult time trying to persuade the Minister of State for Finance, **Gingee N. Ramachandran**, to put in his papers. Mr. Ramachandran's continuation in the Vajpayee Government was deemed untenable after the arrest on Thursday of his personal assistant by the Central Bureau of Investigation for allegedly accepting a "bribe"

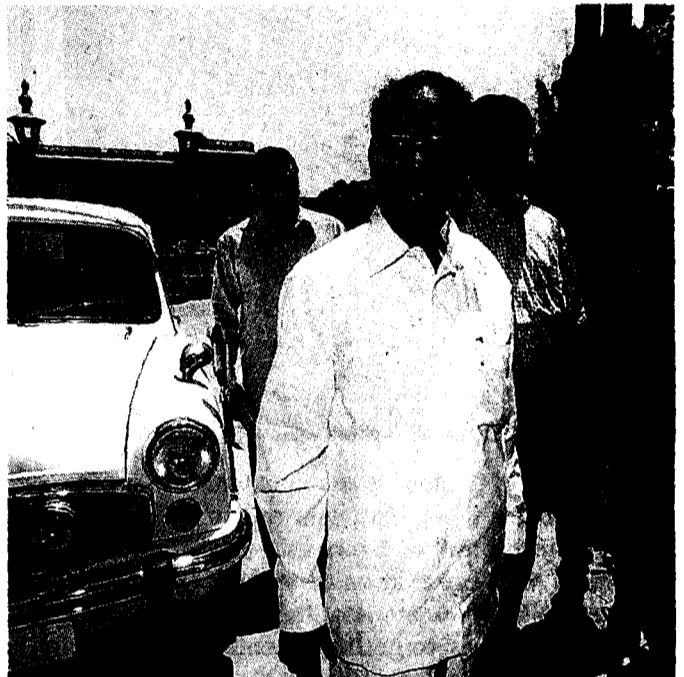
from an Income-Tax official for transferring him to a place of his choice.

It was only late in the evening that Mr. Ramachandran had sent in his resignation. It was immediately accepted by the Prime Minister and forwarded to the President with the advice that it be accepted.

There was the belated realisation that the Ramachandran caper and the Minister's public stance of defiance have taken the gloss off the scheduled reshuffle of the Union Cabinet. The die was cast against Mr. Ramachandran when Mr. Vajpayee was briefed by the CBI Director, P.C. Sharma, on the nature of evidence in the matter. The Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, was for his deputy's ouster from the moment Mr. Ramachandran's personal assistant was arrested. But managers of the National Democratic Alliance — of which Mr. Ramachandran's MDMK party is a partner — had to bereckoned with.

The Cabinet expansion is due to take place tomorrow evening, when the President would administer the oath of office to the new entrants. The Prime Minister again had two rounds of consultations with his colleagues on the nature of the reshuffle/expansion of the ministerial team. Besides the usual participants — the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, the Finance Minister, Jaswant Singh, and the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu — this morning's conclave was attended by Pramod Mahajan, BJP general-secretary.

The shape of the reshuffle remains "inconclusive" even after five rounds of consultations in the last few days. Informed sources are unwilling to say with any degree of certainty on who is coming in and who is going out



The Union Minister of State for Finance, **Gingee N. Ramachandran**, outside his South Block office in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

(besides Ajit Singh and Mr. Ramachandran).

However, the return of Mamata Banerjee is a certainty, and she is likely to settle for the Ministry of Coal. The Trinamool Congress leader is still insisting on dictating who would be the second nominee from her party. The BJP leadership is reported to be pushing for Sudip Bandopadhyaya, the friendly "dissident".

With the departure of Ajit Singh, Rajnath Singh becomes the most obvious choice to head the Ministry of Agriculture. The Civil Aviation Minister, Syed Shahnawaz Hussain, is in danger of losing his portfolio and may have to move over to the Ministry of Textiles; that should suggest that incumbent Minister,

Kanshiram Rana, goes to the Ministry of Rural Development.

There is a suggestion to induct a nominee of the newly-formed group in the Lok Sabha, the Indian Federal Democratic Party; P.C. Thomas is the likely choice.

Even though Mr. Ramachandran's resignation has been secured, the ruling NDA appears to have lost the battle of public perception. The resignation came after the principal Opposition party, the Congress and the Communist party of India (Marxist), demanded that the Minister be immediately removed. Earlier in the day, Mr. Ramachandran, who arrived here from Chennai ruled out his resignation and asserted that his "conscience was clear."

24 MAY 2003

22 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

## Shuffle to ease load on 'overburdened' ministers

# Atal eyes Mamata, not Kalyan

### OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

**New Delhi, May 18:** Trinamul Congress chief Mamata Banerjee's long wait for a Union Cabinet berth may end soon. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee today indicated that Mamata might make a comeback in the shake-up he is going to effect in his council of ministers.

Talking to reporters at Manali at the end of his six-day sojourn in the hill town, Vajpayee said he will undertake the exercise on an "auspicious" day, but did not give a date. Speculation is rife that he will effect the changes very soon, before he leaves for a week-long tour of Europe on May 27.

Vajpayee also put to rest rumours about the return of former Uttar Pradesh chief minister Kalyan Singh to the BJP and his possible induction into the Cabinet with a curt "no".

Singh had floated the Rashtriya Kranti Dal after a scathing attack on the Prime Minister and his style of politics. Two BJP parliamentarians and deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani's loyalists had approached Singh recently and reportedly discussed his possible return.

Sources said Mamata is likely to get the health portfolio held by Sushma Swaraj, who is also in charge of parliamentary affairs. Earlier, it was thought that she might be given rural development, vacated by

Shanta Kumar after the BJP was crushed in Himachal Pradesh. But a section in the BJP does not want the high-profile portfolio to go to allies.

The virtual rout of Trinamul in the just-concluded Bengal panchayat elections had sparked speculation that the BJP might have a rethink on rehabilitating Mamata. But NDA sources said the BJP leadership fears that since the Trinamul-BJP alliance did not work, Mamata might be tempted to experiment with the Congress again and the Prime Minister does not want that.

Vajpayee also said there will be some new faces in his ministry and spoke of "lightening" the burden of some of the ministers. "Some new ministers will be added. Some of the ministers are overburdened. Their burden will be lightened," he said. Asked whether Mamata will be re-inducted, he said: "The possibility is there."

However, he parried similar questions on National Conference leader Farooq Abdullah, who, too, is waiting in the wings for a slot in the Union Cabinet.

Besides Sushma, there are several others holding multiple ministries. Arun Jaitley has law, justice, company affairs and commerce while Arun Shourie holds telecommunications and

information technology besides his original ministry of disinvestment.

There are reports of an effort to rehabilitate Shanta Kumar.

### QUOTE

**Some of the ministers are overburdened. Their burden will be lightened**

A.B. VAJPAYEE

# Sonia flays NDA's 'lopsided' policy

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, May 8

CONGRESS PRESIDENT Sonia Gandhi set the tone for the next round of assembly elections by launching a scathing attack on the NDA's lopsided policies, ruling party's involvement in scams and the BJP's hate campaign to divert attention from the issues of governance and development in the states.

Addressing the session-end general body meeting of the Congress Parliamentary Party on Thursday, Sonia did not refer to the BJP moves to bring a bill to ban cow slaughter or to VHP leader Praveen Togadia's *trishul* programme, but the allusion to the latter was clear when taking a dig at the Centre, she emphasised that the rule of law must apply to all those who disturb the social peace and harmony. She accused the BJP and the Prime Minister of having tried to communalise the Himachal poll campaign.

Sonia also appeared concerned over the possibility of yet another year of drought compounding the anti-incumbency factor in the Congress-ruled states where elections are due.

Contrasting the Congress government's "solid achievements" with the BJP regime's failures on

## 'ILLS OF GOVERNMENT'

- The rule of law must apply to all those who disturb the social peace and harmony
- Atal Bihari Vajpayee's BJP has always tried to communalise election campaigns
- The NDA deferred the Women's Reservation Bill and also shrugged off its responsibility on VAT
- The DDA and defence scandals are the latest additions to the BJP's scam-ridden regime
- The Centre took dubious decisions in telecom and disinvestments



several fronts, Sonia acknowledged the implications of these polls on the 2004 Lok Sabha elections by stressing: "Succeed we must and, with the support of the people and with our collective commitment, succeed we will." She renewed the party's commitment to the ideology and slogan of "Congress *ka haath, garib ke saath*."

Sonia's exhortations to maintain unity among leaders came in the backdrop of the Rajasthan and Kerala crisis. Shortly after the meeting, four MPs boycotted

George Fernandes whose ministry, Sonia earlier charged, had failed to utilise over Rs 23000 crore between 2000-03.

Sonia also blamed the Centre for deferring the Women's Reservation Bill, shunning off its responsibility on VAT and not acting effectively in the Tehelka and petrol pump scams. The DDA and defence land scandals were the latest additions to the scam-ridden regime, she charged, while taking note of the dubious decisions in telecom and disinvestments.

## Three-day brainstorming on polls

Saroj Nagi  
New Delhi, May 8

THE 10-MEMBER Congress Election Strategy Committee (ESC) headed by Manmohan Singh will meet here on May 17, 18 and 19 to take stock of the party's preparations for the assembly polls in the major Congress-ruled states of Chhattisgarh, MP, Rajasthan and Delhi. Mizoram is also slated to go for elections later this year.

Chief Ministers, PCC chiefs, general secretaries and members of the manifesto implementation panel will give assessment reports of the party and government's performance and the organisational and administrative loopholes that need to be plugged in these states.

The exercise would be carried forward at a meeting of the CPM's Council, which would be convened shortly, as Congress president Sonia Gandhi told the Congress Parliamentary Party general body meeting.

But the three-day brainstorming session of the ESC will be the first comprehensive meeting of the panel, constituted last year to hammer out the party's strategy for the polls where it will have to battle the BJP and its Hindutva challenge, the incumbency factor and the impact of bad monsoons and continuing drought.

"We intend to devote at least half a day to discussions on the election issues and strategies for each of these states", a senior member on the panel said, highlighting the significance of these polls in setting the atmosphere for the 2004 Lok Sabha polls — unless the general elections are advanced.

Perhaps with this in mind, Sonia set up two weeks ago six panels to gear up the party ideologically, politically and organisationally for the challenges that lie ahead. Each panel is chaired by a senior Congress member and has experts from outside the party fold in it.

## Amendments not for NDA's benefit: PM

RAIPUR, APRIL 6. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, today said the proposed amendments to the anti-defection law for disqualification of an MP who leaves his or her party were not aimed at benefiting the NDA Government.

"The Congress is the worst sufferer in Uttar Pradesh due to defection. Hence, it is not proper to say that (the proposed amendments were aimed at benefiting the NDA Government)," Mr. Vajpayee told reporters here before leaving for Delhi.

He was replying to a question on the Congress' allegation that the BJP was bringing in the amendment for its own benefit in the backdrop of the defection by 13 BJP MLAs to the Congress in Chhattisgarh.

On allegations of the misuse of POTA, Mr. Vajpayee said the Centre would look into them.

Asked about the Chhattisgarh Chief Minister, Ajit Jogi's allegation of the "misuse" of the Intelligence Bureau by the Centre against political opponents and the demand for a Joint Parliamentary Committee probe it, Mr. Vajpayee said "I am not going to reply to that question."

On Mr. Jogi's demand for conferring special status on his State, he said there was no such proposal right now. To a question on whether he would contest the next elections, the Prime Minister said he would go by the public wishes and opinion. Intervening, the BJP national general secretary, Rajnath Singh, said Mr. Vajpayee would definitely contest the elections. — PTI

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THE HINDU



# NDA rule a period of all-round disaster

By Our Special Correspondent <sup>X.D.S.</sup> such issues. <sup>J.P. NDA</sup>

**NEW DELHI, APRIL 5.** The Communist Party of India (Marxist) viewed the five-year rule of the BJP-led NDA Government as a period of "unmitigated and all-round disaster".

The CPI(M) general secretary, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, said that it seemed that the BJP leaders had forgotten the days when the Congress used to claim that only it could provide a stable Government and these leaders used to say that stability was not the same as working for people's welfare.

"Now the circle has moved a full 180 degrees. No matter how much Vajpayee & Co may shout that completing 5 years is an achievement, the fact remains that these 5 years have been perhaps the worst period in our people's life since independence — a period of unmitigated and all-round disaster," he said in an article in the latest issue of party organ 'People's Democracy'.

Mr. Surjeet said the NDA was a "product of opportunism par excellence" and the BJP's opportunism was dangerous since it agreed not to raise some contentious issues, though the RSS-controlled outfits continued to rake them up. Calling this part of a "calculated game", he said, of late the BJP had given up that 'pretence' and made it clear to the allies that it would raise

"This is what earned Mr. Vajpayee the blessings from the RSS chief, Sudarshan, when they recently met. The RSS, on its part, has already moved all its pawns on the political chess-board. But the BJP also knows that it would not have much opposition from the self-seekers."

More than the BJP, he saw 'real danger' in the attitude of the allies who swore by secularism but remained silent when it was attacked.

On the economic front, he said that in the last three years the final estimates of the GDP growth had been giving the lie to the budget estimates and the actual growth rates for the period had been the lowest since Independence.

The Government's promise to create 1 crore jobs a year was a 'cruel joke', since employment had declined in the public sector and grew by a mere 0.1 per cent in private sector, most of which were contract jobs.

On the war on Iraq, he criticised the BJP for refusing to even condemn the aggressor and wondered whether the 'contemptuous servility' with regard to the U.S. was in the hope that Washington would back India against Pakistan. "Is it not a pipe dream? Remember the infamous Dixon plan? That the Americans want to bring Kashmir under their tutelage is undeniable," he said.

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## NDA HOLDS 'SELECT' MEET

# Vajpayee seeks larger mandate

By Our Special Correspondent

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 30.** The National Democratic Alliance (NDA) today held a meeting of "select" top leaders to virtually announce that it plans to get its act together and put the ruling coalition into top gear for the general elections due next year.

It seems the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, told the meeting of leaders of seven NDA constituents and the Bharatiya Janata Party's leaders in the Government and the organisation that the ruling coalition needed a "larger mandate". It must take full advantage of the "feel good factor" to move towards that goal in the next election.

Although it is the BJP which will be facing crucial Assembly elections this year in Madhya Pradesh, Chattisgarh, Rajasthan

and Delhi where the NDA does not count, it seems that the party leadership wants to ensure that lack of cohesion in the NDA does not mar its own prospects even as it wants to start preparing in earnest for the bigger battle in 2004.

The defeat in Himachal Pradesh and the Congress conclave and rally here seems to have unnerved the BJP somewhat.

Thus, it was at the suggestion of the BJP president, Venkaiah Naidu, that a large number of BJP leaders met with the top NDA brass at Mr. Vajpayee's residence for a day-long brainstorming session.

At the meeting, the party leaders attacked the Congress for claiming to represent the poor and for its "double speak".

It was felt that although the NDA Government led by Mr.

Vajpayee had "many achievements" to its credit, it could not afford to sit back and celebrate. Most importantly, the NDA must present itself as a cohesive force speaking in one voice.

And all the parties would have to work hard to ensure that the "perception of the people" about the Government was the same as the NDA's own self-assessment that the Vajpayee Government had progressed rapidly on many fronts.

The NDA leaders present at the meeting were: George Fernandes and Nitish Kumar (both Samata Party), Sharad Yadav (JD-U), T.R. Baalu (DMK), Prakash Paranjape (Shiv Sena), Mamata Banerjee (Trinamool Congress), Om Prakash Chautala (INLD) and Prakash Singh Badal (Akali Dal).

Advan's call: Page 11

## Bid to oust DMK-led allies?

By Neena Vyas

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 30.** The Centre's affidavit filed before the Supreme Court in the MDMK leader, Vaiko's case, is being seen in political circles here as one more effort by the BJP to virtually push the DMK-led alliance, of which the MDMK is a part, out of the ruling NDA.

Significantly, the MDMK was not invited to today's "select" meeting of top NDA leaders. However, the official word was that some of the smaller parties would be invited later for an interaction with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee.

Although, informally, some BJP leaders hinted that the affidavit would be "corrected" tomorrow, legal circles see difficulties in this as the Government would then be forced to contradict its earlier affidavit and could attract unflattering remarks from the court.

Politically, it has become increasingly clear — particularly since the DMK bit the dust at the hustings in Tamil Nadu — that the BJP was inching closer to its former ally, the AIADMK, and would like to rid itself of DMK-led allies before the next general elections. On her part, the AIADMK leader and Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, has demonstrated that she was will-

ing to meet the BJP more than half way.

The BJP leadership has shied away from criticising the AIADMK. While the party welcomed the passage of the Bill on religious conversions, the AIADMK refrained from asking for the resignation of the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi. More recently, in the Assembly by-election to Sattankulam, the DMK-BJP alliance virtually fell apart with both parties leaving the seat uncontested. At the State level, the BJP leaders have been as generous in their denunciation of the DMK as they have been open in their praise for Ms. Jayalalithaa. Ideally, the BJP would like the DMK and its allies to walk out of the NDA, leaving the field clear for the party to formally announce its alliance with the AIADMK. It does not want to be seen pushing the DMK out — for fear of being seen as opportunistic — although it has been deliberately provoking the DMK (and now the MDMK) hoping they will walk out.

The "affidavit" episode has placed the MDMK in an awkward situation and it will not come as a surprise to anyone if it decides to walk out of the NDA sooner rather than later. However, the fact that Mr. Vaiko has completely burnt his bridges with the AIADMK may be the only inhibiting factor. He may be forced to wait till the big brother — the DMK — decides enough is enough.

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P.P.P.  
M.A.

## NDA has failed on all fronts, says Sonia

10/1/03

By Javed M. Ansari

**NEW DELHI, MARCH 30.** The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, today virtually put the NDA Government on notice, and asserted that the Congress alone can provide peace, prosperity and security in the country.

Addressing a party rally here, she said the NDA Government was "corrupt and ineffective" and had failed the nation on every front. "This Government has failed on every front. It is neck-deep in corruption."

She made it clear that the Congress was undeterred in its decision to take the Government head-on in the run-up to the next round of Assembly elections, leading to the next general elections.

As a part of the party's exercise to re-position itself on the

side of the poor and weaker sections, Ms. Gandhi said, "We are committed to the poor, we are with the poor irrespective of their caste or religion."

All the Congress Chief Ministers and even Ms. Gandhi referred to the BJP's attempt to divide society and communalise the situation.

Ms. Gandhi said the greatest damage done during the NDA Government's rule was to the country's social fabric.

**S**ocial amity and national **u**nity were indivisible. By dividing society along communal lines, the Sangh Parivar was weakening the country's ability to deal with threats, she said.

The BJP's claim on national security came under severe attack as speaker after speaker at the rally referred to the killings

in Kashmir, the attack on Parliament and terrorist strikes on the Akshardham and Raghunath temples.

References were also made to the escort of three terrorists to Kandahar by the then External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh.

Chief Ministers Digvijay Singh and Ashok Gehlot said the party would not rest till it had thrown out the NDA Government, while S.M. Krishna and Ajit Jogi said it was just a matter of time before the Congress came back to power at the Centre.

At the end of the rally, leaders on the dais, as well as the crowd, clapped hands to the refrain of the old battle song, 'Hum Honge Kamyab Ek Din' (We shall overcome one day).

See also Page 11

THE HINDU

3 1 MAR 2003

# NDA to release another booklet on achievements

ANURADHA RAMAN  
NEW DELHI | MARCH 7

WITH the recent drubbing in Himachal Pradesh and with major Assembly elections in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Delhi and Chhattisgarh round the corner, it's that time of the year in the Government to take stock.

And media advisor to the I&B Ministry/Prime Minister's man in Shastri Bhavan Sudheendra Kulkarni is doing just that. He, it is learnt, is busy giving finishing touches to a booklet — this time celebrating five years of the Vajpayee-led NDA Government.

An instruction was sent out to information officers on February 24 — asking them to update the material related to their ministries for *Unique Initiatives Landmark Achievements* from March 19, 1998 till date. Officers attached to the ministries said the information has been sent to Kulkarni's office.

So what if a similar exercise was carried out just three months ago in the form of a booklet, *Unique Initiatives Landmark Achievements Three Years of NDA Government*, brought out by the Directorate of

Audio Visual Publicity of the I&B Ministry. That was brought out to mark the completion of three years of the Government on October 13, 2002.

If the five years are coming too soon after the October 13 celebrations, officers say they are counting the date from the time the Vajpayee Government was elected to power in 1998. Though that Government was in power for 13 months, with a break to stage a comeback in 1999, post Kargil, officers are not bothered.

"The government was not voted out of power. The BJP was there in caretaker capacity," officials reminded.

And if the previous booklet brought out by the DAVP is anything to go by, then be prepared for praises such as this: "One cannot but get convinced when facts are substantiated with figures. Such unprecedented achievements could not have been possible without firm commitment... and unique policy initiatives. These have been provided by our Honourable Prime Minister under whose able leadership the NDA Government has completed three years and is marching ahead."

# Rebels now set 24-hour deadline to oust Marandi

AGENCIES  
RANCHI, MARCH 7

THE five rebel NDA ministers in Jharkhand have set a 24-hour deadline for the acceptance of their demand to oust Chief Minister Babulal Marandi. Samata Legislature Party leader and rebel Land Reforms Minister Madhu Singh said that they would not budge from their stand for a change in leadership of the NDA government in Jharkhand.

"We have apprised our senior leaders of the decision and are waiting their reply till midnight," Singh said, adding that "from tomorrow we will be free to go ahead with our plans to oust Marandi."

The rebel ministers have held a series of meetings with Samata Party senior leader and Railway Minister Nitish Kumar, Janata Dal (U) president and Civil Supplies Minister Sharad Yadav and NDA convenor George Fernandes in the past three days. Today again they met the trio for a fi-



nal decision on the matter and are believed to have expressed themselves in favour of continuation of the Marandi leadership at least for the time being.

Sources said the leadership did not favour any change at this stage. "We are convinced about the genuineness of the grievances of our ministers, but change is not an answer. The leaders are working for some kind of mechanism for a smooth running of the coalition," they added. However, they conceded that the leadership was having problems in

convincing the rebels.

The central leaders have even assured the rebel ministers that they would intervene by summoning Marandi.

The BJP, on its part, has already summoned the Chief Minister and issued a direction that he should address the concerns of the allies and take everyone along. The party is not interested in changing the leadership as it does not want to send a signal of buckling under the pressures of smaller parties.

In Delhi, JD(U) legislature party leader and rebel Power Minister Lalchand Mahato reacted sharply to media reports that the rebels may go for a rapprochement if the post of deputy chief minister was offered to one of them.

Mahato said: "We want change in leadership and nothing else in the interest of the NDA. We have also informed the Central leaders that our first priority was to ensure continuation of the NDA government for which our demands must be conceded."

## SUPPORT FOR AYODHYA MOVE

# Allies rally behind govt

1372 5-1  
Stateaman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 16. — On the eve of the budget session of Parliament, the NDA partners today rallied behind the government on the Ayodhya issue at a dinner meeting hosted by the Prime Minister.

The meeting was attended by two partners of the NDA who are no longer in the government. The Trinamul Congress leader, Miss Mamata Banerjee, and Mr Omar Abdullah of the National Conference were present when Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee assured the leaders that the government had not deviated from the agreed stand on the Ayodhya issue.

The better part of the discussion centred around the Ayodhya dispute. Some of the allies wanted to know the rationale behind the Centre's decision to approach the Supreme Court to release the undisputed portion of the acquired land so that it could be handed over to the VHP.

Mr Vajpayee explained that at the all-party meeting held last year it was agreed that the dispute could be resolved through a negotiated settlement between the parties involved or through the decision of the court.

"The government has gone to the

Supreme Court and the decision of the court shall be binding on the government", the Prime Minister told the allies.

Mr George Fernandes, NDA convener, told reporters after the meeting that the allies were convinced about the bonafides of the government on the subject and there were no differences on the issue.

Bihar too figured at the meeting. Several leaders expressed concern over what they called the collapse of the administration under RJD rule.

Mr Vajpayee assured them that the Centre was monitoring the situation. There was no commitment, though, on Central intervention, as demanded by some of the allies.

Another issue raised was the detention of Mr Vaiko, an ally of the NDA and now a Pota detainee in Tamil Nadu. The government will react when the Centre is asked to give its opinion by the special court, the meeting was told.

The meeting also dwelt on the subjects likely to figure during the budget session. Apart from Ayodhya, the other issues are disinvestment and the situation in Iraq, according to Mrs Sushma Swaraj, Minister for Parliamentary Affairs.

Naidu backs Centre, page 4

### Opp plans united floor strategy

NEW DELHI, Feb. 16. — Opposition leaders today sunk their differences and ego over a dinner at Mrs Sonia Gandhi's residence. They decided to close ranks against the Vajpayee government in Parliament.

The two issues they'll initially use to take on the government will be UP and the Centre's moving the Supreme Court on Ayodhya. An adjournment motion on Ayodhya is on the cards. — SNS

Details on page 4

THE STATESMAN

# Muslim law board opposes Centre's move

TIMES NEWS NETWORK AND AGENCIES

10/2  
11/1  
9-8-1 NDA

**New Delhi:** The All-India Muslim Personal Law Board said on Sunday that it would oppose the Centre's application in the supreme court seeking a vacation of the stay on conducting religious activity on the 67 acres of undisputed land in Ayodhya, drawing sharp criticism from the BJP.

On the other hand, the VHP demanded that the 1994 apex court order on handing over 43 acres of the undisputed land be implemented by the government within the deadline of March 15.

"Although the government had taken over the land, it had not given any money for it. As such, the 43 acres belonged only to Hindus. The land issue could be dealt with in favour of the original owners," VHP leader Ashok Singhal said.

S.Q.R. Ilyas, convener of the Muslim law board's committee on Babri masjid, said the board's opposition was only against the government's review petition against the apex court's order of last year.

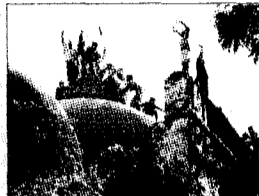
He said an emergency meeting of the board's legal committee on Sunday decided not to oppose the government's plea for an early and expeditious hearing in the case pending before the supreme court in which Aslam Bhure is the main petitioner.

"The board is an intervenor in the Aslam Bhure case. We will oppose the government's move to get the stay vacated as and when the case comes up for hearing," he added.

He also said the board was willing to consider any fresh proposal from the Kanchi Shankaracharya on the issue but ruled out any dialogue with the Sangh Parivar.

Ahead of the VHP's 'shiladaan' programme in March last year, the board had shot down a peace move by the

## Different chants



### AIMPLB stand

The board opposes the Centre's review petition but is not against the government's plea for an early hearing of pending cases

### BJP criticism

The Muslim law board has no stake in the issue and should desist from creating confusion, says the BJP president

### VHP demand

Forty-three acres of undisputed land should be handed over to the original owners

pontiff describing his formula as "incomplete."

However, the BJP criticised the board's decision saying that it had no stake in the issue and should desist from "creating confusion".

BJP president Venkaiah Naidu said, "Why are they making comments and taking a stand? The government has not made any move with regard to the disputed land."

Stating that he was "surprised" by the criticism of some political parties, including the Congress and the CPM, Mr Naidu said the Centre's plea to the apex court was only in relation to the undisputed land and that the attempt was only to expedite the matter.

Meanwhile, VHP leader Ashok Singhal announced that a meet of sadhus scheduled for February 22 in New Delhi would take a final decision on the ultimatum given to the government on the construction of a Ram temple.

✓ **ALLIES' STAND ON PM'S MUSINGS**

# Secularism must replace 'Hindutva'

HT Correspondent  
New Delhi, January 1

ATL BIHARI Vajpayee's New Year message ticking off Hindutva's champions has pleased the allies, but they say they still have apprehensions about the Sangh Parivar's intentions.

The Samata Party welcomed the Prime Minister's statement linking secularism with Hindutva, but said secularism, and not Hindutva, should be used in future reference. Like other allies, the Samata leaders agreed Vajpayee's statement was aimed at sending a strong message to the VHP and other hardline elements.

"But," said Samata general secretary Shambhu Srivastava, "several times, there have been problems due to the use of the word Hindutva for it seems that one is talking about religion. We agree that Hindutva is a way of life. But in its place, the word secular, which has been used in our Constitution, should be used".

Allies say Hindutva has always been used in a political context by the Sangh while pressing for "cultural nationalism". They point to the first reaction of the RSS and the VHP, which shows the Parivar can be easily contained by the PM.

Reacting to the PM's musings, the RSS had quickly reminded Vajpayee of his own poetic description of a real Hindu as one who wages relentless war against the evil. The VHP asserted that no Hindu can be "narrow, rigid and extremist".

RSS joint spokesman Ram Madhav said, "It wouldn't be out of place to remind Vajpayee of his own

poem Hindu Tan Man, Hindu Jeevan, which described the real Hindu as the one who wages relentless war against evil. Those who are being wrongly portrayed as proponents of extreme Hindutva are in fact the followers of the spirit which was enunciated in that poem."

He, however, said Vajpayee's views on Hindutva have always been "thought-provoking... Most thoughts in Vajpayee's musings are completely in line with the thinking of a Swayamsevak, which Vajpayee is. Hindutva on the one hand is liberal and all-encompassing while on the other, it represents the strength of the noble".

Speaking in Pune, senior VHP Vice-President Acharya Giriraj Kishore said: "No Hindu can ever be narrow, rigid and extremist. Hindutva is the main current of the country and the country is fast realising its strength. Those who say Hindutva cannot be the basis of progress are mistaken." He defended the VHP's aggressive Hindutva.



**Atal Bihari Vajpayee**  
*Pleasing allies*