

'Tie-ups to be based on ideologies and policies'

Sonia calls for secular alliance

75/12 — 57-1
SNS & AGENCIES

MUMBAI/NEW DELHI, Dec. 27. — Aware of the need to stitch up a coalition in view of signs of early Lok Sabha elections, Mrs Sonia Gandhi today said the Congress was ready to forge alliances with the country's secular parties to take on the BJP-led NDA.

Giving instances of Maharashtra and other states, the Congress president also sought to dispel the perception that her party had been averse to coalition politics. Making a strong pitch for alliances, Mrs Gandhi also slammed the Atal Behari Vajpayee government for its "failures on all fronts".

Addressing a massive rally at Shivaji Park (a Shiv Sena bastion) in central Mumbai on the eve of the 118th foundation day of the Congress, Mrs Gandhi said the party's proposed alliances would be based on "ideologies and policies". The bond with the allies, she said, will not be motivated by "selfish interests and lust for power", but only by the "national interest" and the desire to serve the country.

The drubbing in the recent Assembly elections was also not far from Mrs Gandhi's mind, although she sought to make light of the debacle. Victory or defeat, she said, keeps on happening, but the crucial thing is to stick to the journey, albeit tough and difficult, towards the goal.

Attacking the Vajpayee government for "increasing unemployment and decreasing jobs", Mrs Gandhi said the Congress, if it came to power, would focus on employment-oriented schemes to generate job opportunities. She said the party envisioned the creation of a new

India where the youth would play a bigger role in nation-building.

The Congress chief ridiculed the BJP's claim that the coming Lok Sabha polls would reflect the contrast in performance between the five-year-old NDA government and five decades of Congress rule. Dismissing the claim as "absurd", she said the Congress' role in securing Independence, developing a young nation, and establishing democracy in the country was "historic and unparalleled".

India's "self-sufficiency" and "remarkable progress" in the fields of science and technology became possible because of the "pioneering role of Congress governments", Mrs Gandhi said.

Taking a swipe at the NDA government's disinvestment policy, she said the previous Congress governments had set up public sector units to generate employment, but the divestment policy would only lead to their sell-off resulting in more unemployment.

Responding to the BJP's current emphasis on development, the Congress president said her party considered water, electricity and employment as crucial public issues.

Coming down on the Vajpayee government, Mrs Gandhi said "insurgency, terrorism, and unemployment" got a boost during its tenure. "We have also seen incidents of corruption", she added.

Chief minister Mr SK Kumar Shinde, and senior party leaders Mr Shivraj Patil and Mr Ranjit Deshmukh, among others, were present at the rally.

■ **Sonia and the art of party maintenance,**
on page 10

Govt shifts to emergency gear

NEW DELHI, Dec. 27. — An emergency of sorts has been declared in the government in view of the possible dissolution of the Lok Sabha in January. Most ministers have asked officials to get pending projects or programmes inaugurated by January.

Some ministers have held meetings with officials to take stock of their work, likely to be made public in the first week of next year. They're preparing a list of achievements and the recent initiatives.

A BJP leader, justifying the move, said this would not cut the government's clout since there's already a feeling that the NDA would be voted back to power. The move could have brought the government to a halt if a contrary impression had existed, he said.

Lending more credence to the possibility of the Lok Sabha's early dissolution, BJP chief Mr M Venkaiah Naidu called a meeting of some ministers to discuss ways to expedite development projects. The national highway and rural road projects are top on the priority list.

I&B minister Mr RS Prasad was present to get a feel of the achievements he would highlight in the national TV channel, sources said. — Sudesh K Verma

Marxist muddle

27/12/03 P.P. (u) 57-8
Congress debacle upsets CPI-M calculations

One has to observe the CPI-M's response to the Congress's disastrous performance in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh to be convinced about the special relationship between the two parties. On the one hand, Jyoti Basu is shocked and now wonders how in the new climate of anti-incumbency affecting the Congress-ruled states, the CPI-M can hope to produce a secular front against the NDA. On the other hand, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee speaks in a tone of anguish more than anger that the Congress has chosen to support a Trinamul-sponsored no-confidence motion against the Left Front. In Basu's case, it may amount to a rethinking on the proposed electoral arrangement with the Congress in states where the CPI-M has virtually no presence. The veteran leader had considered this the most practical way of gaining entry into barren areas and, if the party is fortunate, having a say in national affairs.

All these calculations may have been disturbed by the results of the assembly elections. There is one last chance in Andhra Pradesh where the CPI-M has joined hands with the Congress against the Telugu Desam in the assembly elections scheduled for April. If Chandrababu Naidu does pull it off, with or without a sympathy vote following the People's War attack that almost cost him his life, it will mean that Alimuddin Street will have to do some real rethinking on a Congress-led secular alliance for the parliamentary elections.

Buddhadeb speaks as if the Congress is part of his own flock that has strayed into enemy territory. His party leaves its choicest epithets for Mamata Banerjee and prefers to give "friendly" advice to the Congress. During the no-confidence motion he asks the Congress to do some rethinking on its ties with Trinamul, more so after the unflattering experience of the last assembly elections. In other words, the CPI-M is honestly concerned about the Congress in West Bengal as a minor opposition which can be managed and would much rather see Trinamul wither away on its own. That after all these meticulous calculations, the CPI-M can be taken by complete surprise is evident from its rout in places like Berhampore and Malda and the confusion that has gripped the party after the Congress debacle in three states.

Which means that it is not the West Bengal Congress but the CPI-M which may have to do some rethinking even as the RSP and Forward Bloc have reason to be delighted that Big Brother's politics of opportunism have now been cruelly exposed. Three years after retirement, Jyoti Basu may not be inclined to demonstrate his manipulative skills to enable the Marxists to record a presence beyond its bastions in Bengal, Kerala and Tripura. But opportunism is a game the Marxists have perfected. While shedding tears for their not so natural allies they can only hope that, with Laloo still in supreme command and Delhi reaffirming faith in Sheila Dixit, all is not lost.

Lok Sabha votes to banish defections

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Dec. 16: The Lok Sabha today unanimously passed a Constitution amendment bill that seeks to bar a defector from holding any public office as a minister or other remunerative political posts for the remaining term of an existing legislature or until fresh elections.

The bill, passed after a three-hour debate, also seeks to restrict the size of ministries at the Centre and in states.

Although the bill was passed with 416 votes in favour and none against, members like Prabhunath Singh (Samata Party), Devendra Prasad Yadav, of the Janata Dal (United), and Independent MP Pappu Yadav complained that the legislation would spawn dictatorial tenden-

cies among party leaders. The MPs — all from Bihar — added that members would not feel free to express their views.

Law minister Arun Jaitley, who piloted the bill, replied that if a member felt so convinced about his point of view, he was free to resign.

Jaitley said restricting the number of ministers at the Centre and in states to 15 per cent of the strength of the Lok Sabha and legislative Assemblies also showed the maturity of the Indian polity.

The bill has removed the earlier provision that legalised a split if one-third of a legislature party broke away. According to the amended provision, a split in the legislature party alone will not do. The national executive of the party itself will have to splinter, which will make defections extremely difficult.

The law minister said that most splits since 1985 were not based on any principle or ideology and the defectors, in most cases, joined the ruling party for ministerial posts. The bill, he added, was "intended to curb this mischief" and would also put a check on ballooning ministries.

The minister said both the Dinesh Goswami Committee, which reviewed the Constitution, and the Law Commission favoured such a measure. The provisions of the bill would, however, not apply to members who have been expelled from parties, he added in response to clarifications sought by some members.

During the discussion, several MPs pointed out what they felt had not been addressed by the bill. The CPM's Roopchand Pal said the bill is silent on how to deal with members who obey the

party whip inside the House but speak against the party outside.

Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, of the Rashtriya Janata Dal, said there was no definition of a "party" in the measure, which does not address the root cause of the malady and was only a "painkiller".

Dal (U) member Ramjeevan Singh wanted to know what to do with a person who gets elected on a party ticket and its symbol but speaks against the party and its policies. Senior Bahujan Samaj Party leader Rashid Alvi said that since the anti-defection law has been deliberately misinterpreted by several presiding officers, the powers in this regard needed to be given to a committee of the legislature.

Congress MP Priya Ranjan Das Munshi attacked the BJP-led central coalition, saying that some ministers speak in differ-

ent voices. He said the problem of "defection" has been addressed but not that of "deception". Lok Janshakti Party leader Ram Vilas Paswan expressed apprehensions that some provisions of the bill would make members of a party "bonded labourers" of their party bosses.

Delimitation bill

A bill to replace the ordinance for delimitation of Assembly and parliamentary constituencies on the basis of the 2001 Census was today passed by Parliament with the Rajya Sabha adopting it by voice vote.

Winding up a discussion on the bill, minister of state for law P.C. Thomas said the legislation was required since the Delimitation Act, 2002, as originally enacted, provided for delimitation of electoral constituencies on the basis of the 1991 Census.

BJP to use Jogi tape to blunt Congress charge

Sudesh K Verma
in New Delhi

Dec. 7. — After nearly demolishing Mr Ajit Jogi, the BJP has decided to use the tape episode to try to ground Mrs Sonia Gandhi's and the Congress' tall claims on corruption, particularly after the Judeo episode. The party leaders are working overtime to find out the bank from where wads of Rs 25 lakh were withdrawn.

The party is likely to be somewhat more defiant on the Judeo tape as no one has claimed to have done it for a purpose whereas in the case of the Jogi tape, the former BJP legislator, Mr Virendra Pandey, "has claimed the authorship making it an admissible evidence," a BJP leader said.

The party managers will decide whether the Prime Minister should use the Rai-

pur incident when he gives his statement on the Judeo episode in Parliament tomorrow.

The Union law minister, Mr Arun Jaitley, has, therefore, decided to be in Delhi rather than Bhopal where Miss Uma Bharati is slated to take oath as chief minister.

The ostensible reason is the need to reply to parliamentary questions related to the law ministry. His legal-political advice on the Jogi episode is the other pressing need, sources said. If Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee refuses to refer to the Jogi issue in his statement, the BJP is certain to raise it during the debate.

A senior party leader, who is also the party's legal luminary, said that under Section 10 of the Evidence Act, Mrs Sonia Gandhi could easily be implicated as both Mr Khunte (the BJP MP who joined the Congress) and Mr Jogi, had used her name during the

conversation taped by the BJP to lure the BJP leader Mr Virendra Pandey to engineer defections in the BJP legislature party.

Since the name was used for the conspiracy and during the course of the conspiracy, it would stand as truth in the court of law, he argued. Had it been used post-conspiracy, it was not an admissible evidence, he said.

The only way Mrs Gandhi could save herself was to disown the two Congress leaders, he said. The BJP may also try to make Mr Khunte an approver in the case as he had reportedly asked state BJP leaders "to protect his skin," the BJP leader said.

BJP leaders are reportedly making both ends meet to find out the bank from where wads of Rs 25 lakh was withdrawn to add to the evidences which the senior party leader said was conclusive enough.

Secularism cannot be left to the mercy of political parties

Beware the core ideology

RUDRANGSHU MUKHERJEE

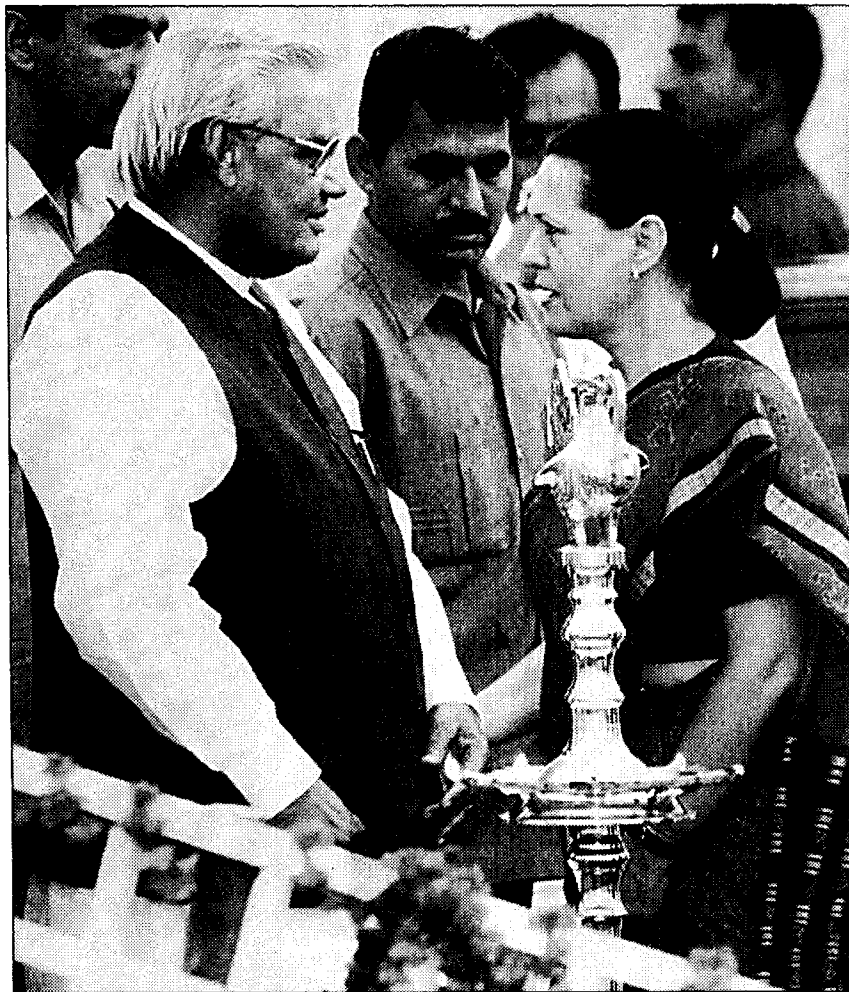
Standing in the courtyard of the Indian International Centre in New Delhi one morning in late October, a prominent member of the Congress think tank and an ardent advocate of the free market told me, "The Congress will have shot itself in the foot if Congress doesn't win three of the four states." He was referring, of course, to the elections the results of which are now known. Having shot itself in the foot, the Congress is no longer limping. It is hobbling and may even be close to collapsing.

It is not just the fact that the Congress has lost three of the four states but it is also the scale of the defeats in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh that makes the Congress somewhat of a non-starter as a candidate to unseat Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government next year. Add to the defeats the fact that in Uttar Pradesh, the Congress is not even an also-ran; that in West Bengal it is practically non-existent; that in Maharashtra Sharad Pawar is unlikely to play footsie with an obviously losing side — and you get a picture of a political party that is no longer in a position to provide any kind of challenge to the Bharatiya Janata Party.

The remarkable decline of the Congress has another grave implication. It means that the political party that was seen as a vehicle for opposing the communal politics of the BJP is now non-existent as a force. There are two factors that explain why this has happened.

There is the question of leadership. There is a widespread scepticism about Sonia Gandhi's abilities to lead the country. Even committed secularists feel if in a hypothetical presidential election they had to choose between her and Vajpayee, they would probably prefer the latter. This has nothing to do with her Italian origins which the BJP attacks. It is a more fundamental doubt about her abilities. As president of the Congress, she has done precious little to remove these doubts. She has failed to give to her party any programmatic and ideological direction. The Congress has been buffeted like a rudderless boat alternately by the currents of Nehruvian socialism and then by liberalization. Ms Gandhi is neither a liberalizer nor a socialist — even if one were to completely disbelieve the canard that she is a liberalizer after Manmohan Singh has spoken to her and a Nehruvian after a spell of conversation with Pranab Mukherjee.

Similarly, the Congress can no longer boast of a strong secular thrust. It has failed to reject completely a soft *Hindutva* line to counteract the BJP and woo the majority vote. One has only to re-



Dussehra mock battle

member Sonia Gandhi starting off the Gujarat election campaign in Ambaji temple and more recently Digvijay Singh's pathetic attempts to be more Hindu than the *sangh parivar*. The Congress's secular credentials have always been a trifle suspect, especially after the massacre of the Sikhs in the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination. Ms Sonia Gandhi, either through intent or through inactivity, has failed to reaffirm Congress's commitment to secularism.

Ms Gandhi has not even tried to put her stamp as a leader on the Congress. She is a leader by default because she has no challenger or, what is worse, because she is the widow of Rajiv Gandhi.

The other factor consists of the subtle changes in the BJP under the initiative of Vajpayee. Ever since he became prime minister, Vajpayee has been trying to distance his government's policies

and the BJP from the more fanatical proponents of *Hindutva*. Not that there haven't been instances of doublespeak on his part and a slew of clarifications. But overall there has been a move to put issues like the Ram *mandir* on the backburner and to concentrate on development. The grotesque aberration in this has, of course, been the pogrom in Gujarat but there has been no repetition of the experiment despite threats from Togadia and Modi. Significantly, *Hindutva* was not prominent in the election campaigns, not even in the states where the BJP has won against the tide of conventional wisdom. These elections were won and lost on the basis of performance and governance or the lack of them.

It is also important that despite pressure from sections of the *sangh parivar*, the BJP under Vajpayee has not abandoned the path of liberalization. In this

and in the highlighting of governance during the election campaign, Vajpayee and his deputy, Lal Krishna Advani, have spoken in one voice, whatever differences they may or may not be having on other matters.

Under Vajpayee, the BJP has usurped the political and ideological space that was previously occupied by the Congress: closet *Hindutva* plus liberalization. (It needs to be recalled that neither Indira Gandhi nor Rajiv Gandhi was beyond playing on majoritarian sentiments when it suited their interests.) The great Indian battle between communalism (read BJP) and secularism (read Congress) is no more than a piece of shadow-boxing: men of straw in a mock battle with Rama and Ravana easily interchanging places.

Does this mean the battle for secularism in India is over or actually non-existent? Has the BJP changed colour or is it that the anti-minority crusade has been abandoned? The answer to both questions is in the negative.

A journalist known for his loyal espousal of the cause of the BJP — arguably the only writer in English who does so with eloquence and a disarming and pernicious rationality — wrote in *The Telegraph* the day after the election results: "If the BJP steered well clear of emotive issues centred on its *Hindutva* ideology, it was not because the party is no longer interested in its core ideology." The verb "steered" is important. *Hindutva* has not been abandoned. The BJP stayed away from it because the particular political and electoral context demanded a different set of priorities and a different kind of campaign. There was a degree of political acumen in the choice. But this is no guarantee that *Hindutva* and majority-led violence will not be used in the future for political gains.

The battle for secularism has become more difficult because circumstances have forced the belated recognition that secularism cannot be made dependent on any political party. It is far too important for that. Political parties have betrayed India's past; India's present and its future cannot be left to them.

Secularism is an endangered value and an important one. It needs to be defended and upheld by individuals as individuals or in a group. For those who believe that secularism and tolerance are vital to civilized existence, the election results convey an urgent message. The results underline a danger of mistaking appearance with reality. The challenge is to combat the BJP's core ideology and not be swayed by a context-driven election campaign and the ensuing victories.

PMK, MDMK evaluating alliance options

By T. Ramakrishnan

CHENNAI, NOV. 16. The PMK and the MDMK, constituents of the National Democratic Alliance, are evaluating their electoral options in the context of increasing possibility of the DMK, dominant partner of the BJP-led alliance in Tamil Nadu, snapping ties with the BJP and aligning with the Congress.

The difficulties for the two parties arise from their valuing the alliance with the BJP at the Centre and with the DMK in the State. Both have been highly

critical of the AIADMK Government and would like to remain in a DMK-led front. Also, both prefer the BJP to the Congress.

Leaders of the parties realise that the DMK is maintaining a "friendly posture" towards the Congress, while remaining in the NDA. The Dravidian party leaders have shared platforms with TNCC functionaries.

As for their electoral options, the two parties say their position will be dependent on conditions prevalent at the time of elections. The PMK founder, S. Ramadoss, clarified that his

party did not believe that any party was "untouchable." He recalled, "when we held an all-party meeting on the Cauvery issue a couple of months ago, we invited the Congress too and the party's representative attended the meet". However, the PMK and the MDMK were not invited for Congress-organised public meeting in August to condemn defamation cases filed by the AIADMK Government. But the DMK was represented in that meeting.

More than the MDMK, the PMK may have to do walk a

tightrope, as it is closer to the BJP. "So far, we have not criticised the Centre's actions," says Dr. Ramadoss.

The PMK has participated in DMK-organised agitations. During Assembly sessions this year, its MLAs joined the Opposition in staging walkouts, though the BJP was not part of the protests.

As for the MDMK, its present strategy is to go along with the DMK. "This has been the stand of our leader Vaiko," says the party spokesman, G. Nanmaran.

CPM to back Cong against Naidu

OUR BUREAU

Calcutta, Nov. 15: The CPM central committee today formally ratified the Jyoti Basu-Harkishen Singh Surjeet line by adopting a resolution on extending support to Congress candidates even in Andhra Pradesh where chief minister N. Chandrababu Naidu has sought early elections.

The party has already clarified that it will support Congress nominees in four states —

Delhi, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh — which go to polls on December 1. The CPM has decided to contest only 35 seats in the four states in alliance with "other Left and secular parties".

CPM sources said both Basu and party general secretary Surjeet were happy with the outcome of the central committee meeting and consider its decision as a vindication of the pro-Congress line they have been advocating for a long time.

"I want to make it clear that the CPM will support Congress candidates in those places of Andhra Pradesh where we shall not be able to put up candidates. This is necessary to ensure the defeat of the ruling Telugu Desam Party, which is a BJP ally. We shall contest only in seats where we have effective presence," Basu told **The Telegraph** minutes after the meeting.

"However, we shall not go for any electoral alliance with the Congress nor form any plat-

form with them. Instead, we shall support them only to ensure the defeat of the BJP and its allies," he said.

The CPM was in a dilemma on the question of supporting the Congress in Andhra since the party has been its traditional political enemy there for a long time. There was considerable pressure from the Andhra unit of the CPM not to extend support to the Congress for electoral gains.

Briefing the media after the

meeting, Prakash Karat, a CPM politburo member, said: "Our party's main purpose is to defeat the TDP-BJP alliance in Andhra Pradesh. We have, therefore, decided to contest only in the seats where we are a force to reckon with. Our party appeals to all secular and democratic forces to support our candidates just as we will be extending our support to the candidates of the Left and secular parties which can defeat the TDP-BJP combine in areas where we are not contesting."

Asked if secular parties included the Congress, Karat said: "Our party defines the Congress as a secular party. Our aim is to support the strongest party fighting the BJP and the TDP and in Andhra Pradesh it means the Congress."

Elaborating on the other reasons behind the CPM's opposition to the Desam, Karat said the party was a staunch supporter of the BJP-led NDA. "Besides, we are totally opposed to Naidu's economic policies. The TDP government has taken a lead in pushing through policies of liberalisation and globalisation," he said.

6 NOV 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

... that can't be good...

98/10
29/10

Moving to and fro

EVEN AS pollsters have started predicting the results of the forthcoming assembly elections, politicians, too, have begun the process of reassessing their friends and foes. These are, of course, preliminary moves. The real manoeuvres will start once the outcome of the assembly polls are known. Depending on the performance of the BJP and the Congress, the lesser parties will begin to gravitate towards one or the other. As of now, however, only a few vague indications are available. As always, these may not be the most reliable since personal predilections can determine such trends.

The most noticeable among them is the move within the NDA to bring the Samata Party and the Janata Dal (United) together. The uncharitable may describe it as a case of the blind leading the blind. By coming together, they are only trying to convey an impression of strength to be in a better bargaining

position vis-à-vis the BJP. Whether the BJP will take them seriously is doubtful as it is aware of their weakness. But, then, the BJP itself is not on a particularly strong wicket in Bihar, where the SP and the JD(U) have their base.

In neighbouring UP, however, the BJP will have reasons to smile at the growing gulf between the Samajwadi Party and the Congress. It means that the earlier mistrust between the two had always simmered under the surface and that the more recent signs of bonhomie were essentially hollow. The Congress is having problems not only with the SP, but also with its partner in Maharashtra, the Nationalist Congress Party, not to mention the infighting in its Kerala unit. Rumours that rebellious leader K. Karunakaran may follow V.C. Shukla's example in Chhattisgarh to join the NCP in Kerala are not doing the Congress image any good. Clearly, there's never a dull moment in Indian politics.

Sonia meets Kanshi Ram, Mayawati

CL Manoj in New Delhi

Sept. 23. — A hospital room may be the most unlikely place to discuss political deals. Yet when Mrs Sonia Gandhi drove away from Delhi's Batra hospital this evening after visiting the bed-ridden BSP leader, Mr Kanshi Ram, speculation was rife about a deal having been struck. Adding to the excitement was the fact that Mrs Gandhi and Mr Kanshi Ram spent 45 minutes in the ICU room No. 559 where Miss Mayawati was also present.

Though earlier in the day, Miss Mayawati ruled out any BSP "alliance" with either the Congress or the BJP in the forthcoming Assembly elections, after Mrs Gandhi's meeting with the two BSP lead-

ers, not many take Mrs Mayawati's equidistance theory seriously. "Nobody is trying for a formal alliance between the Congress and BSP in the Assembly elections. What they must watch out for is a 'tacit understanding' between the two to start with," a Congress leader said.

Mrs Gandhi came alone and left the hospital without giving anyone any clue about the "hidden agenda" behind her "courtesy call to the ailing leader". But the visit of the Congress president has set the cat among the pigeons as it took place amidst hectic behind the scenes efforts to strike a "tacit understanding" between the Congress and the BSP for the Assembly polls in four north Indian states.

Another visitor for Mr Kanshi Ram today, sources said, was the Delhi chief

minister, Mrs Sheila Dikshit, one of the four election-bound Congress chief ministers who favour a tacit understanding with the BSP to check-mate the the BJP. Mrs Dikshit, like the earlier visitor Mr Ajit Jogi, knows the importance of the Dalit votes in Delhi, said a party leader.

Soon after Mrs Gandhi's visit, the AICC indicated that she would be soon visiting Uttar Pradesh "to assess the flood situation there".

The Congress party today criticised Mr Amarmani Tripathi. The Congress criticism of the MLA, at a time when the state chief minister, Mr Mulayam Singh Yadav, is praising him, is meant to signal yet another area of difference between the SP government and its unwilling supporters, Congress sources said.

SP to stay out of Congress-led national alliance

Sonia As PM Makes Mulayam Uneasy

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 12 SEPTEMBER

THE prospects of a grand anti-NDA alliance looked elusive on Friday with Uttar Pradesh chief minister Mulayam Singh Yadav ruling out his party, the Samajwadi Party's participation, in a Congress-led national alliance.

Mr Yadav, who made it plain that his association with the Congress would be issue-based, said his party has already ruled out being party of a national alliance. In other words, his relationship with the Congress is restricted to the current Uttar Pradesh set-up and that his party was still not enthused by the idea of a Sonia Gandhi premiership.

This has not come as a surprise as Mr Yadav has consistently resisted the CPM-led campaign for mobilising support for Ms Gandhi's leadership. In any case, the CPM is also finding it difficult to sell this line to its leaders of Kerala, where the party is involved in a direct fight with the Congress.

In his interaction with the media in the capital, Mr Yadav also indicated that the terms of the UP alliance will be dictated by him. While he downplayed the question whether he would thrash out a common agenda for the UP coalition, he ducked a query on the government's response to the Ayodhya case. "The matter is before the court," he said.

His friends in the anti-NDA alliance who have been expecting some proactive noises in the Ay-

dhya case must be disappointed as he did not spell out his stand on the issue in the event of the court seeking the UP response. "The Ayodhya issue will not see any mobilisation. Mr Advani and his party will realise this if they take it to the people once again. My government will concentrate on development issues," he said.



MULAYAM: HIS OWN MAN

Meanwhile, the Congress maintained on Friday that it was in no hurry to take a decision with regard to participation in the SP-led government. "The decision is that Congress is not going to participate in the ministry. Our earlier stand to support it from outside remains", party spokesman S. Jaipal Reddy told reporters.

Mr Reddy said he was not aware about Mr Yadav's remarks about the formation of a front at the national level but was merely repeating the stand taken by the party to support the SP-led government only from outside.

After BSP, Mulayam may split BJP

Pankaj Vohra

THE FAST-CHANGING political scenario in UP reflects how various parties are attempting to outwit each other by adopting deceptive postures and giving erroneous impressions.

The situation is still fluid and is an excellent case study for political observers and students of politics. While Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav is confident of proving his majority on the floor of the Assembly on Monday, political manoeuvring in the coming weeks could decide the future course of national politics. BSP leader Mayawati has made fresh overtures to the BJP in what is being construed as last-minute efforts to revive the relationship.

The BJP played a pivotal role in the invitation extended by the governor to its main adversary, Yadav, to form a government. It has now decided to issue a whip to its members to vote against the government. Senior leaders feel it was important to position the party against Yadav in the Assembly to revive the state BJP. It is another thing this may not nec-

essarily happen in the near future.

The Congress has decided to keep its cards close to its chest. While the party has decided to support Yadav, its central leadership is reluctant to join the government. The developments provide an opportunity to the Congress to emerge as an unquestioned leader of a secular formation at the national level. This would depend on how Yadav and the BJP's relations evolve and the company that the SP keeps while in government.

Yadav knows the art of keeping his vote bank intact. Despite praises showered on him by RSS mouthpiece Panchjanya in its latest issue, he will wait for an opportunity to dissect the BJP in order to dispel any impression of the two parties having a tacit understanding to keep the BSP and Congress at bay.

If decides to fix the BJP, he will have no option but to change the UP Speaker, who is a key figure in determining the status of members following a split. K.N. Tripathi, present Speaker of the UP Assembly, was elected to the Assembly on a BJP ticket and his continuation in office hinder Yadav's designs to dis-

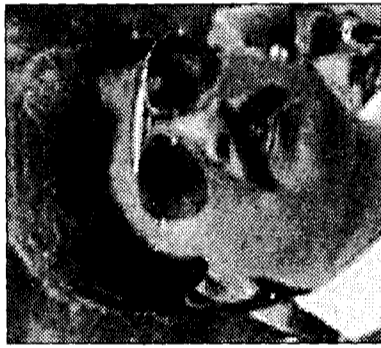
mantle the BJP.

Raja Bhaiyya cannot attend Assembly

A SPECIAL court on Saturday rejected the plea of jailed Independent UP MLA Raghuraj Pratap Singh, alias Raja Bhaiyya, seeking permission to attend the ongoing Assembly session.

Special Judge, Gangster Act, R.A. Kaushik observed that the state had in March 2003 ordered that Raja Bhaiyya was not to be shifted from his place of detention till further orders. This order is still in force and not reported to have been withdrawn till date.

PTI, Lucknow



Tripathi may also play a decisive role in determining the status of the BSP members after the official split. So, Yadav may have to keep him in good humour - at least till the confidence vote is won. Tripathi's attitude could give a hint of the BJP's strategy in this complicated drama which is unfolding.

Mayawati seems to have played a seasoned hand by keeping her doors open for yet another understanding with the BJP despite the recent fallout leading to her resignation. At her Press conference on Thursday, the BSP leader made overtures to what she described as the L.K. Advani group in the BJP and also

sought to draw a distinction between Vajpayee and Advani on one hand and Vajpayee and his group on the other. This clever move was aimed at highlighting factionalism in the BJP and isolating BJP functionaries like Lajji Tandon, Rajnath Singh and Pramod Mahajan.

While her move was interpreted as a desperate act to reduce the heat of investigations into the Taj corridor controversy, it was aimed at creating confusion in UP's political circles and reminding the BJP leadership of her importance in determining the outcome of the four state assembly polls later this year.

Even in Parliament, the support from the BSP members was a bonus for the NDA government. With the BJP may have to reinforce its relationship with other allies. In fact, the Prime Minister could be seriously considering reinducting Trinamool Congress leader Mamata Banerjee into his Council of Ministers in order to consolidate the support from the Trinamool Congress whose leaders have been unhappy with the BJP. There is already talk of a Cabinet expansion next week.

BSP-BJP coalition collapses

Statesman News Service

LUCKNOW, Aug. 25. — The sixteen-month mismatch coalition of the BSP-BJP government in UP collapsed today plunging the state into political turmoil after chief minister Miss Mayawati recommended dissolution of the state assembly and holding of fresh elections. The BJP withdrew support to the government. It does not support the recommendation and has demanded immediate dismissal of the "minority" Mayawati-led government.

All eyes are now on the Governor, Mr Vishnukant Shastri, who is said to be consulting legal experts and has promised an "appropriate decision" at the earliest.

Springing a surprise on her junior partner BJP, with whom she has been having problems ever since the Taj Heritage Corridor controversy broke out, Miss Mayawati called a cabinet meeting where she is reported to have offered to step down. She also severed BSP's ties with



BJP, slamming her erstwhile ally for its "non-co-operative" stand all through these months in a thirty-page letter to the Prime Minister.

The BJP went into overdrive and met the Governor. The leader of the BJP legislature party, Mr Lajji Tandon, handed over a letter to him withdrawing the party's support to the coalition government. Shortly afterwards Miss Mayawati rushed to the Governor and gave

him a letter claiming to contain the Cabinet's recommendation for dissolution of the Assembly and holding of polls at the earliest.

Mr Shastri said Mr Tandon had submitted a letter withdrawing his party's support to the government, and within half-an-hour Miss Mayawati visited Raj Bhavan. Significantly, Mr Shastri laid stress on this time gap by pointing it out while talking to reporters.

Miss Mayawati said there was no question of her resignation till her recommendation for dissolution of the Assembly was accepted. She said her decision was taken in the interest of preventing instability in an atmosphere of horse trading and attempts to lure away MLAs. Rejecting Miss Mayawati's recommendation, state BJP chief Mr Vinay Katiyar said the BJP did not agree with it as it was "one-sided".

EC stand: If the Assembly is dissolved, the EC will follow the rule book which states that polls should be held within six months of dissolution of the House.

The Taj factor..., page 3

Allies force govt retreat on slaughter ban Bill

HT Correspondent
New Delhi, August 21

22/8
THE COW slaughter ban Bill ran aground in the Lok Sabha on Thursday after MPs of the two Left parties, the RJD, the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) and the BJP's alliance partners raised a ruckus in the House, forcing a 10-minute adjournment.

Order was restored only after the government beat a quick retreat and promised an early all-party meeting to evolve a consensus on the controversial Prevention of Cruelty to Cows Bill, 2003.

Earlier, trouble started as soon as Agriculture Minister Rajnath Singh rose after Question Hour to move for leave to introduce the Bill, triggering a deafening barrage of slogans from RJD, IUML and Left party members, who said the government was trying to influence voters in the five poll-bound states. Even the TDP, JD(U), Trinamool, DMK and PMK — all NDA allies — openly opposed introduction of the Bill.

But Congress MPs sat through the pandemonium, even as their Samajwadi Party, Indian Republican Party and TDP counterparts



Chandrababu Naidu
Leading the charge

invaded the well of the House.

The party is undecided on whether to support or oppose the Bill. Digvijay Singh, the Congress chief minister of Madhya Pradesh, has written to the Prime Minister, seeking a national ban on cow slaughter. But Kerala, another state ruled by the party, has opposed the Bill.

But the party still sought to derive mileage from the government's "hasty retreat" and called it "a major reverse for the BJP".

Things threatened to get out of

22/8
hand when Left party and IRP members began to tear apart copies of the draft Bill which had been circulated among the MPs. NDA members tried to counter the Opposition's charges but were shouted down by opponents of the Bill.

When the decibel level kept going up and Opposition MPs remained deaf to appeals for calm, Speaker Manohar Joshi adjourned the House for 10 minutes. When it reassembled, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj announced that the government would hold an all-party meeting to reach a consensus on the Bill.

Earlier, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu met the Prime Minister in the morning and expressed his reservations. He suggested wider discussions among NDA partners on the sensitive Bill. "Nobody discussed the issue with us," he told reporters.

In Chennai, DMK chief M. Karunanidhi said it was "better to avoid" introducing the Bill which could "unnecessarily endanger religious harmony" in the country.

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

22 AUG 2003

THE HINDUSTAN TIMES

Dinner deal: Opp tables secular front

Udayan Namboodiri
and Saroj Nagi
New Delhi, August 13

HP
1/1/18

OPPOSITION HEAVYWEIGHTS decided at a dinner at CPI(M) MP Somnath Chatterjee's residence on Wednesday to hammer out ground-level tactics to develop a secular front and take on the BJP in the coming Assembly and Lok Sabha polls.

The leaders agreed to evolve a common campaign line and hold meetings over the next few months to identify the focus areas in the poll-bound states for a full-

scale assault on the BJP. In real terms, this means if two 'secular' parties vie to lead the anti-BJP campaign in a particular state, the state's dominant party, with assistance from its junior partners, will work out an acceptable arrangement.

The initiative was spearheaded by the CPI(M), which offered to campaign for the Congress in the ensuing state polls in Delhi, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. Jyoti Basu, in whose honour the dinner was hosted, said his party would hit the campaign trail for Congress

candidates, though he himself might not be able to campaign because of failing health.

There was no discussion on which party would lead the alliance. But Chatterjee hinted it might be the Congress.

The crucial question — what to do about rivalries within the front in states like Bengal and Kerala — was set aside for another day.

CPI(M) leader Harkishen Singh Surjeet asked the gathering if it was firm in its resolve to defeat the BJP. To this Sonia Gandhi said: "There are no two opinions on this".



Sonia (above) and Basu



Unity in diversity

- ▶ Pact to forge a broad 'secular' alliance against the BJP
- ▶ CPI(M) to campaign for the Congress in the November Assembly polls
- ▶ Leadership issue not discussed
- ▶ Dominant partners to set strategy in individual states
- ▶ Dinner gatherings at leaders' homes
- ▶ Next venue: Mulayam's house

Opposition leaders vow 'till the end' to fight BJP

10/1
14/8

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, AUG. 13. Leaders of various Opposition parties today arrived at a broad understanding that their prime political battle is to fight the Bharatiya Janata Party and agreed to continue with bilateral/multilateral meetings to work out the modalities.

The understanding was arrived at a dinner meeting hosted by the CPI(M) parliamentary party leader, Somnath Chatterjee, which was attended by a majority of the Opposition leaders including the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, the veteran Marxist leader, Jyoti

Basu, the Samajwadi party chief, Mulayam Singh Yadav, and others.

"All of us have decided that the BJP is a menace and the common enemy. We will fight it till the end," Mr. Chatterjee and Mr. Yadav told presspersons in the presence of the other leaders at the end of a two-hour meeting. The next conclave will be hosted by Mr. Yadav.

Mr. Yadav sidestepped queries on the differences within the Opposition over the ongoing boycott of the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, in Parliament. "These are small issues," he said. The Samajwadi Party has not been a party to the boycott and, even today, Mr. Yadav is understood to have underscored the need to review it.

Realising the necessity to carry the understanding forward would require more than merely identifying the

principal political adversary, the leaders agreed to continue the discussions individually and in groups to finetune it.

For instance, it is well-known that the Left parties face a challenge from the Congress in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura while the Janata Dal (Secular) of the former Prime Minister, H.D. Deve Gowda, has a similar problem in Karnataka. This is to be sorted out among the party leaders, keeping in mind the broader objective of defeating the BJP, the CPI(M) politburo member, Sitaram Yechury, said.

Mr. Basu was candid in stating that in the next round of Assembly elections to Delhi, Chhattisgarh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Mizoram, the CPI(M) would contest a few seats. "We would be happy if the Congress extends support to our candidates. Even if they do not do so, we will still

support the Congress in places where we are not in contest," Mr. Basu said.

Adding a note of caution, he said he hoped that all parties would stick to the understanding arrived at today.

Mr. Basu, it is believed, raised a series of questions on the economic policy of the Congress to the Congress leader, Manmohan Singh. Mr. Singh, a former Finance Minister referred to the policy as outlined at the party's Shimla conclave.

Among those who attended the dinner were the CPI(M) general secretary, Harkishan Singh Surjeet, his CPI counterpart, A.B. Bardhan, Mr. Gowda, the Congress Deputy Leader in the Lok Sabha, Shivraj Patil, the SP general secretary, Amar Singh, the RJD Lok Sabha leader, Raghuvansh Prasad Singh, and the CPI(M) Rajya Sabha leader, Nilotpal Basu.

14 AUG 2003

Babri issue: Oppn walks out of LS

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Lok Sabha speaker Manohar Joshi on Wednesday rejected the opposition-sponsored adjournment motion on the dropping of the conspiracy charge against deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, HRD minister Muri Manohar Joshi and others in the Babri masjid demolition case. In protest, the opposition walked out, accusing the government of misleading the house.

The speaker, however, said he would allow a short discussion on the issue, provided the members did not say anything that could influence the case. Although it failed to get its motion admitted, a united opposition succeeded in putting the government on the backfoot.

Law minister Arun Jaitley had a tough time fending off a belliger-

ent opposition which accused the government of putting pressure on the CBI to drop the specific charge of criminal conspiracy against the two ministers. Mr Jaitley delivered into the history of the case since 1993 but failed to respond to the specific query of Congress members P.R. Das Munshi and Mani Shankar Aiyer on whether the CBI had taken different positions at different stages of the case when there had been no material change in the case. Mr Das Munshi's question about whether the CBI had sought the inclusion of criminal conspiracy charges (under section 120 (b) against Mr Advani and Mr Joshi before the Lucknow court also did



Arun Jaitley

not elicit a clear response from the minister.

Instead, he said the first chargesheet, which did not contain the criminal conspiracy charge, had been filed in 1993 when Uttar Pradesh was under President's rule and the Congress was in power at the Centre. He said the charge had later been included in a joint chargesheet before a Lucknow court, but the merger of the two chargesheets was rejected by the Allahabad high court.

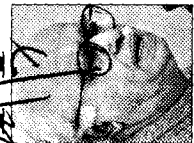
Mr Jaitley said that on May 31 this year the CBI had only revised the original chargesheet against Mr Advani and others.

The opposition members, however, maintained that he had not

answered their specific query on whether the CBI had, at any stage, incorporated this charge. They said the high court had never asked the CBI not to frame the conspiracy charge against the accused, as was being made out by Mr Jaitley, but only directed the bifurcation of the two chargesheets on technical grounds.

In fact, the minister came under opposition fire on more than one occasion for discussing the merits of the case and, thus, prejudicing the proceedings. The minister, the opposition argued, should confine himself to the motion at hand, which was about the admissibility of the adjournment motion.

Stating that the adjournment motion be rejected, Mr Jaitley argued that the case was sub-judice and never before had parliament discussed individual culpability.



L.K. Advani

SP, Cong move closer to alliance before LS polls

By Ambikanand Sahay
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Their strategic shadow boxing from time to time apart, the Congress and the Samajwadi Party are definitely moving closer towards an "understanding" that may ultimately pave the way for the formation of an alliance of all anti-BJP parties before the next Lok Sabha elections.

Both Mulayam Singh Yadav and Sonia Gandhi have taken U-turns from their respective rigid, non-negotiable positions. And what is more important is that they are on talking terms.

Already, the SP chief has recognised Sonia Gandhi's "Indianness". And, on her part, the Congress president has moved miles away from Pachmarhi, opening the doors for a possible alliance with like-minded parties. In informal discussions, both the parties see merit in the inevitability of coalition politics. It is, however, a different thing if the two parties adopt a more cautious approach when it comes to announcing formal policies. The SP's latest decision to go it alone in the four poll-bound states is more of a strategic state-



Sonia Gandhi

M. Singh

ment, and not something that reflects the party's futuristic approach.

There are three other reasons why Mulayam Singh Yadav's party has taken this line. First, the two parties are thinking in terms of a pact for the Lok Sabha elections — and not the states. Second, the Congress chief ministers of Madhya Pradesh and Rajasthan had already voiced their preference for going it alone in the ensuing assembly polls. And third, the SP hardly has any presence in these states.

Mulayam Singh Yadav's strength lies in Uttar Pradesh which accounts for 80 Lok Sabha seats. He knows that without his support, the Congress just cannot dream of bouncing back to power in New Delhi. Irrespective of its narrow loss in the Chirgaon assembly byelection, the SP has been going from strength to strength by default in the Gangetic plains, thanks to the performance of the Mayawati-led BSP-BJP coalition government and the lacklustre activities of the UP unit of the Congress.

Sonia, Mulayam, Ajit Singh confer

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, MAY 29. Almost a year after the break-up of the Peoples' Front, a fresh effort was made today by Opposition parties in Uttar Pradesh to regroup with the Congress, the Samajwadi Party and the Rashtriya Lok Dal breaking bread together and talking about providing a viable alternative to the BSP-BJP State Government.

Despite hectic parleys through the day, leaders of all the three parties kept their plans a closely-guarded secret insisting that a clearer picture would emerge after the RLD office-bearers met in Lucknow on Friday and decided whether or not to withdraw support to the Mayawati Government. Though they did not say as much, there were strong indications that the RLD would pull out of the ruling coalition in Uttar Pradesh.

As for the numbers, given that even with the support of Kalyan Singh's Rashtriya

Kranti Dal (RKD) and a few Independents, this coalition-in-the-making would remain short of at least half-a-dozen MLAs, the SP general secretary, Amar Singh, and the RLD president, Ajit Singh, said that "things will fall into place as the situation evolves" while denying any attempt to topple the Mayawati Government.

"A new political equation is being forged in Uttar Pradesh, and it will have repercussions beyond the State," Mr. Ajit Singh said adding that there was unanimity among all concerned about the need to provide an alternative to the 'jungle-raj' of the BSP-BJP. "The Mayawati Government will fall under its own weight," Mr. Ajit Singh said conceding that political compulsions were bringing the Opposition parties together.

For the moment, the focus is on narrowing the differences these parties have with each other. In the air since Mr. Ajit Singh resigned from the Vajpayee Cabinet and pulled out his Ministers from the Mayawati

Cabinet last weekend, the exercise gained momentum this morning after the SP leader, Mulayam Singh Yadav, met the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi.

Accompanied by Mr. Amar Singh, Mr. Yadav was closetted with Ms. Gandhi and senior Congressmen, Manmohan Singh and Ahmad Patel, for half-an-hour at 10 Janpath. Earlier in the day, the two SP leaders had met Mr. Ajit Singh at Kisan Ghat where the death anniversary of his father, Charan Singh, was being observed.

The morning meeting at 10 Janpath was followed by a luncheon, which was attended by the two SP leaders, Mr. Ajit Singh, Mr. Patel and the AICC general secretary in charge of Uttar Pradesh, Naval Kishore Sharma. Though the effort to forge an alliance seemingly picked up only today, Ms. Gandhi had met Mr. Ajit Singh and Mr. Amar Singh separately over the past couple of days, paving the way for the day's turn of events.

SONIA BPL

TWAIN MEET: OLD RIVALS DON THE PRO-FARMER BANNER TO TAKE ON THE BJP

Ajit joins forces with Mulayam

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 26 MAY

RASHTRIYA Lok Dal (RLD) leader and former minister Ajit Singh may join forces with his old rival, Mulayam Singh Yadav. The UP leader, who draped himself with a pro-farmer banner while getting ready to take on the BJP and avenge his humiliation, is in touch with the Samajwadi Party.

Though the next course of action of the two leaders, who were together in the erstwhile Lok Dal before falling out in a bitter dispute over who should be the Uttar Pradesh satrap, will be determined by whether Mr Singh is able to hold on to

his flock of MLAs in UP. It is clear that he has few options left. Mr Singh is confident of keeping his team of MLAs intact, with the sole exception of rebel leader Samar Pal Singh.

But Ms Mayawati's departure for the US, as scheduled, shows she's confident of weaning away a section of his MLAs to cushion her government against any possible threat. While the Singh-Yadav combination is unlikely to move in for the kill immediately because of the bereavement in the SP leader's family, the former agriculture minister is getting ready to attack the BJP by accusing it of being anti-farmer. He had locked horns with the finance minis-



ter over drought relief and with the food minister over the sugarcane prices.

Taking cognisance of the fifth consecutive year of drought in states such as Rajasthan, Mr Singh had suggested that the interests on loans extended to farmers in the drought-hit areas should be waived off. Much to his chagrin, Mr Jaswant Singh decid-

ed to reschedule or postpone payment of interests.

Mr Singh's proposal that the sugar mills in UP pay cane growers the state advisory price also did not go down well with food and civil supplies minister Sharad Yadav, who wanted the matter referred to a committee.

Mr Singh's readiness to join hands with Mr Yadav reflects his loneliness. The two leaders fought bitterly to take over the mantle of Jat leader Charan Singh in UP. The latter edged past Mr Singh in the leadership sweepstakes in 1989 in the race to win the chief minister's post in Lucknow.

Since then, Mr Yadav has gone on to consolidate his base

and emerged as the most powerful kisan leader, while Mr Singh flirted with one combination after another while struggling to stay afloat and keep his father Charan Singh's legacy alive. This quest saw him joining the P.V. Narasimha Rao government in the early nineties, the United Front regime in 1996 and the Vajpayee government in 2001, despite contesting the 1999 Lok Sabha elections in alliance with the Congress.

Barring the 1998 Lok Sabha polls, the RLD leader has always managed to win his family pocket borough Baghpat, while the other western UP seats have been gradually slipping out of his control.

Party hijacks Vajpayee shuffle

RADHIKA RAMASESHAN

New Delhi, May 24: On May 18, sharing his views on the Cabinet shuffle with reporters in Manali, Atal Bihari Vajpayee made two things clear: Mamata Banerjee would be in and "overburdened" ministers holding two or more portfolios would be asked to shed weight.

Six days later, the Prime Minister has not achieved either intention. Mamata will probably have to wait a while before she is made a minister. And the "overburdened" ministers — Arun Shourie, Arun Jaitley and Sushma Swaraj — have preserved their turf because they were out of the country, leaving higher-ups to exert the pulls and pressures on their behalf.

When Vajpayee was on vacation, the buzz in the BJP headquarters was he was "busy" working out the shuffle because he was "keen to leave his imprint" and "undo the perception that the last exercise was an Advani-dominated one". Vajpayee's "imprint", sources said, meant he would honour his promise to accommodate NDA allies over the BJP, which was indulged in the last two rounds.

Barely was he back than the BJP unveiled its wishlist through sources said to be speaking on behalf of L.K. Advani and M. Venkaiah Naidu. One, it was made clear Mamata would not get rural development because the portfolio, involving a multi-crore budget, was linked to the BJP's *gaon chalo abhiyaan* and was always held by the party.

Two, there was no way any BJP minister would "shed weight". The subtext, sources explained, was M. Karunanidhi's request that commerce — under Jaitley — be given back to the

DMK since Murasoli Maran held it earlier. The BJP's spin was Jaitley had done the spade-work to articulate India's position on WTO at the Mexico conference and it was pointless to unseat him. Besides, the Centre was doing the DMK a "favour" by retaining the ailing Maran as a minister without portfolio.

Third, there was no way other NDA leaders — like Farooq Abdullah whom Vajpayee was keen on — could be taken. The message from the Advani-Naidu duo was that since the BJP was the nucleus of the coalition, it should have the largest number of ministries as well as keep the crucial portfolios.

With the list ready after endless rounds of consultations — in which Vajpayee sought to bolster his position with the presence of loyalists like Jaeswant Singh, George Fernandes and Pramod Mahajan — sources admitted there were no clear winners. "The only message is that the NDA has started to come apart."

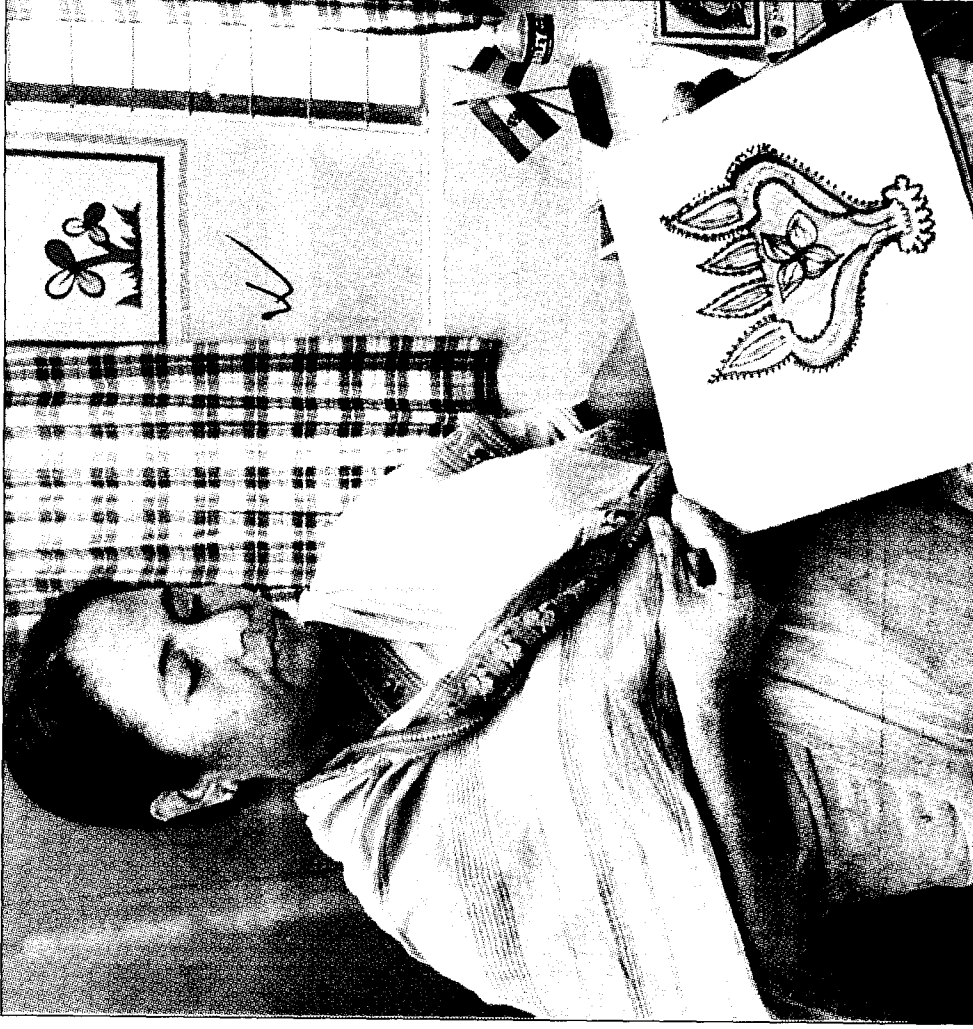
While Advani and Naidu nearly succeeded in keeping Mamata out by ensuring Sudip Bandopadhyay's entry, Vajpayee hit back by making sure he would not if Mamata was against it.

BJP sources spoke of how Vajpayee was "misled" on Bandopadhyay. "Before she (Mamata) went out of the NDA, she gave the impression she had no problems with Bandopadhyay, so on that basis the Prime Minister agreed to have him," claimed a source.

"There is a communication gap with Trinamul and we hope it will be bridged soon because Mamata and the BJP coming together will be useful to us as a counter against the CPM."

The other Advani-Naidu inspired changes were giving Kashiram Rana rural development and making former VHP leader Swami Chinmayanand a

BLOW BY BLOW: HOW THE PICTURE CHANGED



Mamata Banerjee displays one of her drawings at the Trinamul Congress office in Calcutta on Saturday. Picture by Pradip Sanyal ■ See Page 6

minister of state for home. Chinmayanand figured prominently in Advani's *rath yatra* when it traversed Uttar Pradesh in 1990. Sources said Advani insisted on giving him home though he is a member of a VHP committee looking after temple construction and he has

shared the dais with anti-Vajpayee elements in the Sangh. Sources questioned the "wisdom" of inducting Chinmayanand despite his public criticism of the NDA when Ajit Singh was thrown out on the same ground. Singh, who heads the Rashtriya Lok Dal, said his office-bearers

would meet in the next two days to decide whether to pull out of the Mayavati government. Five ministers have given in their papers to him. Other BJP-related changes were explained in caste terms. Rajnath Singh's induction as agriculture minister was to appease the Rajputs who were "drifting away" from the BJP in Uttar Pradesh. Madhya Pradesh MP Prahlad Patel was taken in to fill the OBC Lodhi Rajput vacuum caused by Uma Bharti's exit and Kailash Meghwal to send a "signal" to the powerful SC Meghwal caste in Rajasthan.

Mamata smells split, stays out

OUR BUREAU

May 24: Mamata Banerjee today ward off the BJP's attempts to split the Trinamul Congress in the name of revamping the Cabinet, forcing the Central leadership to beat a quick retreat and rallying the morale of her party. Ending the political drama that has been going on over the last two days, Mamata forced Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee to accept her position as the sole arbiter in Trinamul and defer her comeback into the Cabinet till his return from an overseas tour.

Late tonight, Vajpayee indicated that the doors were still open for Mamata. "There will be a minor reshuffle soon," he said, denying that the BJP had been trying to break Trinamul. Mamata's move was spurred by the BJP leadership's surprise overnight decision to rope in her *bete noire*, Sudip Bandopadhyay, as a minister without her sanction. The move was interpreted in Trinamul circles as an uncoordinated attempt to break the party.

Pushed to the wall by a series of cleverly programmed BJP moves, Mamata turned down Vajpayee's offer of a Cabinet berth, skipped the oath-taking and launched her personal battle for survival in the NDA. This stoked memories of last July's shuffle when she had opted out to protest Eastern Railway's bifurcation.

"They (BJP) cannot take upon themselves the responsibility of selecting who all will become ministers from my party," an angry Mamata reportedly told the Trinamul working committee in the morning. At an emergency meeting of the committee, a strongly-worded fax saying the decision to induct Bandopadhyay went "against the *dharma* of coalition politics" was sent to the PMO. Mamata told party members the NDA leadership had at no stage consulted her on Trinamul's probable representatives in the Union ministry. "How can the BJP decide our party's representatives in the Cabinet? This goes against the very spirit of coalition politics," she said. Mamata also hinted she might pull out of the coalition if Vajpayee disregarded her objections. Mamata's no-nonsense stand is believed to have pushed the BJP to "keep in abeyance" Trinamul's re-induction into the Cabinet. BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu called her up to say no decision on the shuffle would be taken without a discussion with her. Bandopadhyay, who was in Delhi, was also informed. He was not available for comment from the afternoon. In the morning, he had reacted sharply when told of Mamata's stand. "I will participate in the oath-taking ceremony if Vajpayee invites me to become a minister."

angry Mamata reportedly told the Trinamul working committee in the morning.

At an emergency meeting of the committee, a strongly-worded fax saying the decision to induct Bandopadhyay went "against the *dharma* of coalition politics" was sent to the PMO.

Mamata told party members the NDA leadership had at no stage consulted her on Trinamul's probable representatives in the Union ministry. "How can the BJP decide our party's representatives in the Cabinet? This goes against the very spirit of coalition politics," she said. Mamata also hinted she might pull out of the coalition if Vajpayee disregarded her objections.

Mamata's no-nonsense stand is believed to have pushed the BJP to "keep in abeyance" Trinamul's re-induction into the Cabinet. BJP president M. Venkaiah Naidu called her up to say no decision on the shuffle would be taken without a discussion with her. Bandopadhyay, who was in Delhi, was also informed. He was not available for comment from the afternoon. In the morning, he had reacted sharply when told of Mamata's stand. "I will participate in the oath-taking ceremony if Vajpayee invites me to become a minister."

Late in the evening, Mamata called on suspended Trinamul MP Ajit Panja, an arch rival of Bandopadhyay, at a Salt Lake hospital in an attempt to rebuild bridges with him. Panja responded warmly.

Chain of disruption

9.8.82 SUCI stir can be counter-productive

A constant worry for the SUCI is how to keep itself in business. Like other parties which felt the might of CPI-M goons in the panchayat elections, the party suffered in pockets where it has a base. Trinamul has responded with a boycott of the assembly in protest. The SUCI's influence is more limited but it does not diminish the vigour of its disruptions. The recent rise in transport fares had its activists in a pitched battle with police outside the assembly. Now the party plans a longer chain of disruption. It is to begin with roadblocks and extend to strikes and agitations involving farmers, industrial workers, even students, over the next two months. There is the ultimate threat of a 48-hour bandh in August to bring life to a standstill yet again. The Marxists in power don't look convincing as they seek to "break" a bandh when invented the tactic in the first place.

Past experience suggests that it is not difficult for a small group to work up hysteria, instil fear in the public so that a closure is inevitable. It is more difficult to act with responsibility. SUCI agitators in the past have regularly gone overboard. The campaign against the CPI-M's terror tactics can be easily diluted by the prospect of dangerous confrontations and consequent casualties to innocent bystanders. This will be the reality of its programme of agitations to conduct "public opinion polls" at street corners. The lack of this logic does not deter confirmed agitators. In a state that claims the country's record for "successful" bandhs, another closure is child's play. Finally, no one is convinced that all this will mobilise public support for CPI-M backed terror. On the contrary, it threatens to be counter-productive. But is anyone in the SUCI listening?

20 MAY 2003

20 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

Disunity in Front

51.6/5 Marxists are mostly to blame 1.8^n

A seamy side of West Bengal's sixth panchayat elections, apart from unprecedented terror unleashed by the CPI-M, is the inability of major partners of the Left Front to come to an agreement in about 11,000 of 58,357 seats where there will be not-so-friendly contests. This is a record and also a source of worry for big brother — CPI-M. Last time, LF partners had fought amongst themselves in 4,500 seats. This time CPI-M and RSP only are facing each other in about 5000 seats. There are another 2000, where other Front partners including the Forward Bloc and CPI have pitted their candidates against the Marxists. Besides, there are 4000 "independents" put up against one another to queer the Front's electoral prospects. Several rounds of talks have failed to narrow differences over seat sharing forcing "friendly contests" where a common candidate of the Front is not possible. The disunity has created such bad blood that clashes and attacks on each other's cadres and offices are routine. Candidates, including a woman belonging to the RSP, have been kidnapped. An election meeting of an RSP cabinet minister was vandalised by Marxists who later chased another RSP cabinet minister with arms to force him into hiding. This has led to RSP boycott of CPI-M rallies and vice versa. Appeals for restraint to lower level functionaries have not helped.

The reason for disunity is the ambition to increase their strength and influence at the grass roots by any means. This predatory Marxist approach has been resented. For instance in South Dinajpur and south 24 Parganas the CPI-M fielded candidates against the RSP in those panchayats which this junior partner by virtue of its overwhelming strength and presence had won in five successive elections. This was against the front's seat sharing formula of granting partners the right to nominate candidates for seats either won or almost won. The stakes are high as 50 per cent of the state budget is spent through panchayats. No one is prepared to sacrifice.

10 MAY 2003

A wishy-washy Bill

51-b 10/5 J.P.B. Will to prevent defection lacking

The NDA government, like the Congress government before it, lacks the will to prevent defections. Aya Rams and Gaya Rams have become very much a part of Indian political culture and any one who tries to change the system can do so only at his peril. If the Vajpayee government was sincere about putting an end to party hopping by elected representatives chasing filthy lucre or comfortable ministerial berths, it could have drawn on the recommendations of the Constitution Review Commission headed by former Chief Justice of India, MN Venkatachaliah. The CRC wanted the Election Commission to adjudicate all disputes related to anti-defection instead of leaving such powers with the Speaker or Chairman of the House concerned. The Speaker, once elected to that post, in theory ceases to be a representative of the party on whose ticket he or she was elected to the Lok Sabha or the State Assembly. But in practice, as experience of the last half century has shown, the Speaker invariably puts party loyalty above constitutional niceties.

The anti-defection legislation, introduced in Parliament by Law Minister Arun Jaitley on 5 May, while drawing heavily on the CRC recommendations, conveniently ignores the crucial one vesting the Election Commission with the power to adjudicate all disputes arising out of defection. When the Tamil Maanila Congress decided to merge with the Congress last year and four TMC MLAs wanted to join the ruling AIADMK instead but did not have the numbers to constitute one-third majority to qualify for a split in the party, they were recognised as the rump of the TMC by the Speaker of the Tamil Nadu Assembly, K Kalimuthu, even though the Election Commission recognised the winding up of the TMC. After a brief interregnum, the delinquent MLAs who should have been disqualified under the existing anti-defection law, were admitted into the AIADMK Legislature Party as full-fledged members. The BJP's compulsions to soft-pedal anti-defection, given the uneasy coalitions at the Centre and in Uttar Pradesh, is understandable but its professed intentions to put an end to political horse-trading lacks credibility.

10 MAY 2003

THE STATESMAN

More teeth to defection law

Our Political Bureau

NEW DELHI 23 APRIL

THE government, on Wednesday, acted on the BJP's promise to strengthen the anti-defection law with the Cabinet closing the escape route of split for the defectors. The Cabinet, on Wednesday, recommended the deletion of Para 3 of the Tenth Schedule which legalised defections if those seeking to break away constituted one-third of the party's strength in a House. This provision — loophole, according to many — has been used on a number of occasions in different settings, leading to bitterly contested disputes over what constitutes a split and when can it be said to have occurred.

A constitutional amendment will be required for the proposal to become operational and that leaves the BJP with the task of mobilising additional numbers in both Houses. Though few of the other players have come out to support the proposed law, the Bill can draw support from across the aisle because of its utility for the leaders who are often having to fend off poaching attempts.

The original framers of the Bill had provided for the "split" provision because they wanted to avoid the risk of what the veteran parliamentarian Madhu Limaye called the tyranny of whip.

It was presumed that defiance of the whip by as many as one-third of the total strength would reflect genuine policy disagreement within the party and should be differentiated from caprice-driven instances of individual rebellions. The argument lost its sheen after parties across the country used the exemption to bring down governments and form alternative political arrangements.



Adv

24 APR 2003

The Economic Times

Bill outlaws bulk defections

R.VENKATARAMAN

New Delhi, April 23: The Union Cabinet today decided to amend the anti-defection law to make any split in a political party illegal, even if a third of its members break away.

After the proposed amendment, legislators splitting from the parent party would not be recognised as a new unit and would have to face elections again.

The Cabinet also decided to amend the Representation of Peoples Act to limit the strength of a council of ministers to 10 per cent of the strength of the Assembly or Parliament.

The meeting agreed that delimitation of constituencies will be conducted on the basis of the 2001 census, not the 1991 census.

Cabinet spokesperson and parliamentary affairs minister Sushma Swaraj said the Bills needed to effect these changes

would be introduced in the current Parliament session.

The 10th schedule of the Constitution would be amended to change the anti-defection law which at present recognises a split by one-third of a party's legislators as legal, Swaraj said.

The Cabinet has decided to "omit" Para 3 of Schedule 10 which states that defection by one-third of its legislators would be recognised as a split in the party. Swaraj said this provision encouraged "bulk defections".

"This provision is grossly misused. Now, after the amendment has been brought in, legislators defying the party whip have to resign and recontest the elections," she added.

Explaining the delimitation decision, Swaraj said that making the 2001 census its basis would increase SC/ST reserved seats, both in Parliament and in state legislatures, by 15. Delimi-

tation on the basis of the 1991 census would have increased the reserved seats by 8.

The number of constituencies in the Lok Sabha, the Rajya Sabha and the state Assemblies and Councils — other than the reserved seats — will remain the same.

Though Swaraj iterated that there was "unanimity" among all parties on delimitation, parties from the south vehemently opposed a move to vary the number of constituencies according to population. Southern states have had success with population control programmes and should not suffer because of that, parties such as the DMK, MDMK and PMK argued. If the number of constituencies were to be linked to population, the southern states would end up with fewer seats in Parliament.

On the constitution of the council of ministers, Swaraj

said that if the House had two tiers (Assembly and Council), the ministry strength would be 10 per cent of the total number of MLAs and MLCs. In case where the House was a single-tier (only the Assembly), the ministry strength would be 10 per cent of the total number of MLAs.

In the case of Assemblies having 60 or less members, a maximum of "seven members including the chief minister" would constitute the council of ministers, Swaraj underlined.

Since there was "unanimity" among all political parties, it would not be difficult to push through these changes in Parliament, she said.

Sources pointed out that the BJP fears "poaching" of its MLAs in Uttar Pradesh by Mulayam Singh Yadav and hence has taken the step to stop defections. The Congress has already suffered a "split" in Uttar Pradesh.

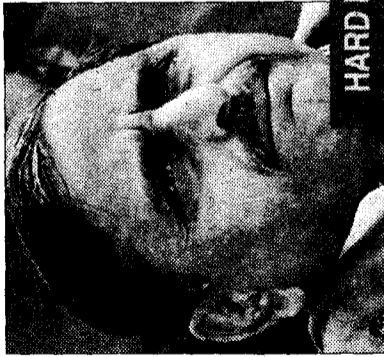
Congress tests SP waters, to gather anti-BJP forces

NEERJA CHOWDHURY
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 4

EVEN as Mulayam Singh Yadav ruled out the formation of a front with the Congress, the latter is moving towards consolidating anti-BJP forces nationally. An alliance may not fructify immediately but the seeds of it were sown over the weekend.

There are indications that Sonia Gandhi may host the meeting of Opposition parties on the eve of the Budget session which is done by CPM leader Somnath Chatterji to facilitate floor coordination.

There have been some straws to indicate which way the wind is blowing. One, there was the 75-minute meeting between Sonia and Mulayam yesterday which was described by the Congress as "significant". The two leaders were accompanied by Manmohan Singh and Amar Singh. In recent weeks



HARD BARGAIN



Karunanidhi, which decided to protest against the arrest of DMK legislator Parithi Ilamvazhuthi and the AIADMK's policies.

This marks a softening of the Congress' stance towards the DMK. So far the DMK, with its association with the LTTE, held responsible for Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, has been an untouchable for the Congress. The party had brought down the I.K. Gujral Government in 1997 for refusing to

the Congress had skirted around the issue of helping Mulayam's attempts to form a government.

Two, the Congress had yesterday sought the DMK's support for the Feb 26 Sathankulam bypoll in Tamil Nadu. Today, AICC secretary in charge of Tamil Nadu Ramesh Chennithala reiterated his party's appeal to secular forces to support it. State Congress leaders in Chennai had attended the all-party meet called by M.

dump the DMK.

And three, there was the launching of the People's Integration Council, ostensibly a non-party forum but a group which is geared to bring together the non-BJP parties. The meet, where Sonia gave the key note address, was attended by SP, RJD, Left parties, Lok Janshakti and other groups.

Ambika Soni, Sonia's political secretary, was tightlipped about what transpired at the Sonia-Mulayam meeting, but said: "The Congress has always stood for the consolidation of secular forces." As far as an alliance with other parties was concerned, she said: "An alliance can only take place after a realistic assessment of the ground realities in different states."

The Congress already has an alliance with the RJD in Bihar, the NCP in Maharashtra, the PDP in J-K, and with several smaller parties in Kerala. The TMC has merged with it in Tamil Nadu.

The Sonia-Mulayam meet, which was reportedly fixed even before the Congress split in UP, was necessitated by a mutually felt need. Both parties have to guard their respective flocks from a Mayawati on the rampage. Sonia could do with the SP help in the Feb 26 bypolls in Haidergarh and Gaurigunj, the latter falling in the Lok Sabha constituency of Amethi. As far as Mulayam is concerned, he has his eyes set on the Lucknow gaddi.

Both the SP and the Congress are considering the possibility of bringing a no-confidence motion against the Mayawati government when the state Assembly meets. However, there would be no point in bringing no-confidence motion if Mayawati has numbers on her side. The 15 remaining UP Congress MLAs called on Sonia today, making reassuring noises about staying on in the party.

Till not so long ago, Congress

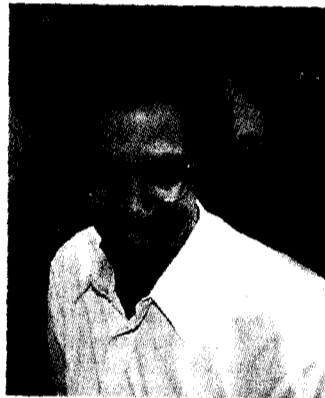
leaders were keeping their options open with regard to Mayawati but it is clear that this option is foreclosed, at least in the foreseeable future. After Priyanka Vadra took up cudgels on behalf of a Dalit in Amethi, Mayawati has been on the warpath. She has now made both the bypolls in the state Gaurigunj and Haidergarh — the seat was held by the Congress before Rajnath Singh was elected from here — a prestige issue.

Jayalithaa too has made the by-election in Sathankulam a prestige issue. Her entire Cabinet is camping there, her MPs have been despatched to the constituency and the CM herself will devote 2-3 days there. The BJP, which had come second the last time, has left the field clear for the AIADMK in the hope of consolidating the Hindu Nadar votes. The DMK has also decided to stay away from the contest and this is being seen as an indirect help to the Congress.

Uddhav to ✓ succeed ✓ Bal Thackeray

By Mahesh Vijapurkar, *J.P.P. Sena*

MUMBAI, JAN. 30. Now it is official: Uddhav Thackeray, son of the Shiv Sena chief, Bal Thackeray, is next in line in the party's succession game and it has his cousin, Raj Thackeray's apparent consent. At a meeting at Mahabaleshwar today, Raj formally proposed that Uddhav be elected executive president of the party's national executive committee though he has himself lost out. Soon after, Uddhav said he had his father's bless-



ings and he was chosen because "they all believe I can deliver."

Uddhav and Raj are two different persons with the same ambition: both want to get into the top slot. Uddhav, a former student of the J.J. School of Arts, with wildlife photography as his passion, has fine-tuned himself into the succession route by his skill in evolving strategies for the party's growth.

A reticent, shy person, he has grown more confident since his first public appearance in Nagpur at a rally organised by Raj in 1993. Raj, also a student of the J.J. School of Arts, is a well-known caricaturist. Known for his public speaking skills and ability to speak the language of the cadre, he is the more public face of the party.

Though the formalities were completed, Mr. Bal Thackeray insisted that his son be "elected" by all. "I asked them and they all agreed. I am not imposing. Those who get elected do so because of their work," he said.

The son rises: Page 13

THURSDAY, JANUARY 30, 2003

98.P. 2003
CRISIS IN THE PARTY SYSTEM 10-1 2003

THE CONGRESS PARTY in the Uttar Pradesh State Assembly has split once again. While the reaction of its leaders to this — charging the Speaker, Kesrinath Tripathi, with partisan behaviour — is indeed predictable, there is no way the failure of the party leadership to keep its flock together can be glossed over in this case. The fact that at least eight of the 24 Congress MLAs could walk over with such ease to a combine in which the BJP is an important player is reflective of the total lack of ideological conviction even among those handpicked by the party's leaders as its representatives in the State Assembly. Add to this the fact that the party's managers in Lucknow were unaware of the developments until the rebels gathered in the Speaker's chamber to announce their decision to float their own outfit and the picture — of how far the party leadership is alienated from its ranks — is complete.

A large number in the Congress Legislature Party in Uttar Pradesh had protested against the high command's prescription that the party shall stay out of the Mayawati Government and also away from any manoeuvres by Mulayam Singh Yadav to unsettle the present dispensation and form an alternative by gathering the necessary numbers from among the disenfranchised MLAs in the ruling combine. This stand by the Congress high command was certainly not in tune with the agenda of self-preservation that tops the list of priorities for a whole lot of independent MLAs as well as a number of the Congress MLAs. This, indeed, is the immediate cause for the development in Lucknow.

The sequence of events — the rebels managed to work with surgical precision and ensured secrecy to such an extent that the CLP leadership could do nothing to prevent the split; and then the idea of roping in Akilesh Singh, who stands expelled from the Congress, to ensure that their strength added up to eight, one third of 24 that was needed to evade disqualification from the

State Assembly — and the sense of urgency shown by the Assembly Speaker in deciding on their plea for being recognised as a separate group are all evidence enough to show the determination with which all of them worked towards decimating the party system. The reward, in terms of ministerial or other office, that has been offered to the eight Congress MLAs, is yet to be made public. The Congress Legislature Party, after all, had undergone a similar split even earlier in Uttar Pradesh and all those who walked out then to ensure the survival of the BJP Government were made Ministers. It is another matter that most of them, including their leader, Naresh Aggarwal, lost the elections subsequently, revealing the extent of anger against their moves among the voters. That such an experience did not deter the MLAs from switching parties (with an eye on the immediate gains that would accrue in the form of ministerial berths and the spoils that come with it) reflects a new low in moral values in the arena of electoral politics.

The BJP Legislature Party too is not free from problems of a similar nature in Uttar Pradesh itself as it was revealed in the past few months with a number of its MLAs revolting against the continuing alliance with the BSP. In their case too, the revolt is due to their exclusion from the State Cabinet and has nothing to do with ideological positions. The haste with which Mr. Tripathi acted in the present case and allowed the Speaker's office to be abused for partisan political games, even while he continues to sit on a notice by the BJP seeking disqualification of some of its MLAs who had revolted, is yet another matter for concern. The quasi-judicial powers vested in the office of Speaker have been abused to such an extent (and Mr. Tripathi's contribution to this list is ample) that the very spirit of the provision in the Tenth Schedule of the Constitution, based on the premise that the Speaker shall resist all temptations to play partisan games, seems to have been negated.

THE HINDU

30 JAN 2003

'OUR LEGISLATORS WERE COAXED TO LEAVE'

U.P. Speaker's action illegal, says Cong.

By J.P. Shukla

LUCKNOW, JAN. 29. The Congress today reaffirmed its claim that the ruling of the Uttar Pradesh Assembly Speaker, Kesri Nath Tripathi, recognising a formal split in its legislature group on Tuesday had no sanction of the law or the Constitution.

The party high command representative, Motilal Vora, who rushed here to take stock of the situation, told newsmen that no split had taken place. "The number of defectors was only seven while the total number of Congress MLAs is 23." The party is seeking legal opinion and would challenge in court the Speaker's decision, Mr. Vora said, adding that he would also write a letter to Mr. Tripathi, registering protest against his decision.

Mr. Vora claimed there was no parallel between the G. Vaidyanathan case and the present development. The two legislators, whose case was cited by Mr. Tripathi in his ruling with reference to the Vaidyanathan case, had voluntarily left their party, while in the present case the U.P. MLA, Akhilesh Singh, had been expelled from the Congress. Hence, there was a clear difference in the status of Mr. Singh and that of the MLAs referred to in the earlier case.

Mr. Vora alleged that official machinery had been used to "pressure his party MLAs to defect" and they had been "coaxed for five hours" before the Speaker gave his ruling. The defection had been "engineered in an atmosphere of severe fear among the legislators".

He said the Congress would fight against the Speaker's "unconstitutional decision" with all its might. The Congress leadership was aware that attempts were on to poach on its MLAs for quite some time.

The party president, Sonia Gandhi, had herself taken note of the fact and tried to control the situation by talking to legislators directly.

The Congress Legislature Party leader, Pramod Tiwari's style of functioning has come under attack following the recent developments. He had emerged as a parallel power centre in the party and never allowed it to function according to the high command's desires. And over the past several years, he has had his quarrels with every individual appointed as the president of the State party.

Of further concern for the Congress could be the open-ended nature of the Speaker's ruling in which he had mentioned that the MLAs forming the separate group had mentioned names of several other members, who, according to them, were also members of their group.

The Speaker did not give the names of those were said to owe allegiance to the new group but said that as they had failed to present themselves before him, he could not consider their cases.

Their issue could be decided only when they personally came to him to present their cases, Mr. Tripathi said. This concluding part of the Speaker's decision leaves scope for more Congress MLAs joining the group of the Bharatiya Congress Dal in future.

Fernandes silent on Mamata's return to Cabinet

KOLKATA, JAN. 6. The Defence Minister, George Fernandes, today refrained from making any direct comment on the Trinamool Congress chief, Mamata Banerjee's return to the Union Cabinet and targeted the ruling

Left Front's economic policies.

At a rally organised by the Trinamool Congress at the Brigade Parade Grounds here, Mr. Fernandes said: "I know that the people have expectations from the Centre and the Prime

Minister is also aware of it". Later, when asked by presspersons, he declined comment on Ms. Banerjee's inclusion in the Union Cabinet.

At the meeting, Mr. Fernandes' remarks acknowledging Ms. Banerjee's popularity and her ability to organise such a huge rally drew applause. Tableaux depicting "police atrocities" on lawyers and doctors and the acute financial crisis faced by the State under the prolonged Left Front rule were on display.

Commenting on the long spell of Left rule in the State, Mr. Fernandes said that after many years the former Chief Minister, Jyoti Basu, and the present incumbent, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, had admitted that the policies pursued by the Government prevented industrialists from investing in the State.

Referring to the January 3 attack on the Editor and Managing Director of *The Statesman*, Ravindra Kumar, and the general manager (P&A), Anand Sinha, Mr. Fernandes said it was only possible under the Left Front rule.



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

THE HINDU

7 JAN 2000

Naxalites trying to create Nepal-Andhra belt: Advani

By Our Staff Reporter

PUTTAPARTHI, JAN. 19. The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, has said that naxalites and Maoists have been making efforts to create a belt from Nepal to Andhra Pradesh in the Indian sub-continent. The Union and State Governments, however, are committed to preventing it, he said.

Addressing a press conference here today, he said that the Centre had formed a coordination committee with all the naxalite-affected States — Andhra Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh, Orissa, Maharashtra, Bihar and Jharkhand — four years ago to tackle the problem.

The problem had also external dimension with the Maoists becoming active in Nepal.

The panel chaired by the Union Home Secretary had been meeting once every three months to review the situation and to initiate appropriate measures. The Centre had also been extending assistance to the affected States in the form of sophisticated weaponry, training of the personnel and intelligence support, Mr. Advani said.

Referring to the BJP-led NDA Government's successes so far, Mr. Advani said after completing its term in 2004 it would be remembered as the "initiator of several revolutions" in the highways, rural roads and telecommunications sectors. The decision to accord dual citizenship to the NRIs would also be lauded, he said.

About the Centre's generosity in tackling drought, Mr. Advani, who is the Chairman of the National Task Force on Drought, admitted that the problem was acute and forcing the Government to find enduring solutions. Accordingly, foodgrains were given to the people under the Food-for-Work scheme.

On suicide by farmers on large scale in recent years, the Deputy Prime Minister said that the phenomenon was not a fallout of the present conditions. The Government had been making efforts to provide remunerative prices for farm produce. "It needs a better deal than what it has been getting now," he felt. He allayed fears of an adverse impact of WTO on the country's agriculture sector and said the policies would, in fact,

benefit the farmers in the long run.

Mr. Advani said there were problems concerning waiver of interest on crop loans, which had failed to benefit the farmers. They would be taken into consideration if brought to the Centre's notice by the States. He would also speak to the Finance and Agriculture Ministers.

He, however, said the States should also share the responsibility.

'Centre keen on inter-linking rivers'

By Our Staff Reporter

PUTTAPARTHI, JAN. 19. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, has been taking care of every aspect of development of the country and doing justice to all, the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, said here today.

Speaking to BJP leaders and workers, he said the conspirators who had been trying to topple the BJP-led NDA Government had failed in every attempt.

Mr. Advani told them that the Centre was keen on inter-linking of at least 32 rivers from the Ganga to the Cauvery as a permanent solution to drought.

The BJP leaders submitted a representation to Mr. Advani on the Hindupur issue along with a copy of the FIR. Among those who called on the Minister included the BJLP leader, N. Indrasena Reddy, the Kadiri legislator, M.S. Parthasarathi, B.S. Vidyasagar and P. Venkataramanappa.

Mr. Reddy, who has been demanding action on the SP and other policemen over the Hindupur incidents, incidentally introduced the SP, Anjana Sinha, to Mr. Advani.

In their representation, the Anantapur

MP, K. Srinivasulu, and the Hindupur MP, B.K. Parthasarathi, urged Mr. Advani to sanction Rs. 500 crores to the severely drought-affected Anantapur district including Rs. 100 crores for employment generation. He also requested allocation of another 2 lakh tonnes of rice under the food-for-work programme and Rs. 50 crores for drip irrigation and horticulture.

Asking for long-term measures to overcome drought, he sought sanction of 300 watersheds apart from normal allocation for replenishing the depleting groundwater table. Further, he also requested the setting up of a research centre on artificial rains in the district and technical support to the farmers on medicinal plants by the National Horticulture Board.

The people of the town and devotees of Saibaba, led by the PCC secretary, Kota Satyam, also submitted a representation to Mr. Advani for sanction of a medical college to the Satya Sai Institute of Higher Medical Sciences, increasing the frequency of domestic and international flights to the town, diversion of all trains passing from the district via Puttaparthi and formation of Satya Sai district.

Equating Hinduism with Hindutva is sinister: Cong.

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 5. Conveying its stand on national security, terrorism and Hindutva in unambiguous terms, the Congress today described as "sinister" attempts by the Bharatiya Janata Party to "equate Hinduism with Hindutva."

At the end of the Congress Working Committee meeting, the party sought to meet head-on the BJP's ideological challenge and its attempt to set the political agenda. The Congress also stated its readiness to consider the possibility of electoral alliances "with like-minded secular parties," provided there was a "reasonable appreciation of ground realities."

The nine-hour meeting discussed threadbare the recent electoral debacle in Gujarat, with the AICC general secretary in-charge of the State doing a lot of explaining.

However, the significant feature of the exercise was the Congress' statement of its position on issues of "national security and terrorism, and the BJP's attempts to blur the distinction between Hinduism and Hindutva." The CWC resolution accused the BJP and its affiliates of hatching a "diabolical design to confuse, mislead and misguide the people."

Making a clear distinction between Hinduism and the BJP's "Hindutva," the resolution said "the Hindu dharma has nothing to do with narrow, bigoted Hindutva propounded and propagated by the RSS, the BJP and the VHP that distorts the very culture, values and legacy..." It also reaffirmed "not to let these moves go un-

challenged." Expressing its resolve to combat "all forms of communalism and religious fundamentalism," the resolution described secularism as the battle for rescuing India's great religious traditions, teachings and practices from the "forces of bigotry and hate."

The Congress approach and belief in secularism "is anchored in a vision of Indian tolerance, with emphasis on harmony, national unity and integration."

The party accused the BJP of "grossly misusing the great Hindu faith, for pernicious, partisan political purposes which can only divide our people and damage the country's unity, amity and integrity."

Striking a combative note on terrorism, the Congress said that three of its leaders — Mahatma Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi — had fallen victim to it.

On the other hand, it was a BJP Foreign Minister who had personally escorted three hardcore terrorists to Kandahar, and it was during the BJP rule that the Godhra carnage and the Gujarat riots, followed by the attack on Akshardham took place.

The Congress also took on the BJP for its handling of national security. Despite the Opposition's support, the BJP-led Central Government had failed to maintain security.

Calling for an immediate end to Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism, it deplored the "calculated effort of the BJP and its affiliates to use the confrontation with the country on communal lines."

THE HINDU

6 JAN 2003

'ADVANI IS NO DIFFERENT'

VHP calls Vajpayee a 'pseudo-Hindu'

By Neena Vyas

NEW DELHI, JAN. 2 (Acharya Giriraj Kishore, senior Vishwa Hindu Parishad leader, today hit out at the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, describing him as a "pseudo-Hindu". He saw "no difference" between Mr. Vajpayee and the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani.

The Bharatiya Janata Party, like other political parties, was not interested in any cause, Hindutva or any other, it was only interested in power, he said. "Those who are in politics, those who make deals and compromises to get political mileage and stay in power have no right to criticise or judge others as extremist or fundamentalist," Acharya Kishore said.

Addressing a press conference here, he took exception to Mr. Vajpayee's musings from Goa on New Year-eve that it was "unfortunate and unacceptable" that Hindutva was "being projected by some people in a narrow, rigid and extremist manner."

Acharya Kishore said: "In Goa, a new interpretation of Hindutva was given by the Prime Minister. In his view, Hindus were not liberal but fanatic or fundamentalist. But to describe a reaction to an action



Giriraj Kishore

(the massacres in Gujarat as a reaction to the Godhra carnage) as 'kattarvad' (fundamentalist) is wrong." Those politicians who themselves made deals and compromises to get political mileage and stay in power had no right to judge others. "I would say such people are pseudo-Hindus."

Asked whether he was describing Mr. Vajpayee as a "pseudo-Hindu", he replied that "he (PM) did not mention the VHP when he made his comments from Goa, similarly I am not mentioning him by

name." But it was made as clear as possible that the description of "pseudo-Hindu" was meant for Mr. Vajpayee.

Apparently, ever since the fiasco of the 'shila daan' in Ayodhya organised by the VHP in March 2002, there has been no contact in person or even over telephone between senior VHP leaders and Mr. Vajpayee and Mr. Advani. *Unhonen hame dhoka diya hai* (they betrayed and cheated us), he said. "The Prime Minister had promised he would resolve the Ayodhya tangle and give us land which belonged to us (before it was acquired by the Centre) but later he backtracked and said he had never made any promise." Since then communication between him and the VHP leadership has completely broken down.

Referring to the recent meeting of the VHP's central organising committee in Pune, Acharya Kishore said Hindu religious leaders would meet here for three days from February 22 to take a decision on starting construction for a Ram temple, and "even if a hundred governments fall, we will continue with our struggle for the cause of the Ram temple." The VHP would help implement whatever the 'dharam sansad' (religious par-

liament) of 'sants' decides, and for this a three-member committee headed by S.C. Dixit, retired IPS officer and former MP from Varanasi, had been set up.

On Mr. Advani, the VHP leader said that when "some people" began to describe him as Sardar Patel-II, "I even at that time said 'let him first act like Sardar Patel', but now we see daily attacks by terrorists who have become emboldened... He is no different from Vajpayee."

'DMK unconvinced'

Our Chennai Special Correspondent reports:

Despite the explanation offered by Mr. Vajpayee on Hindutva, the DMK remains unconvinced as it feels that acts of communal divisiveness and denial of human rights carried out in the name of Hindutva, were not in harmony with the description.

THE HINDU

3 JAN 2003

9-P-P
BSP
HD-1

2/1

Hindutva will liberate minorities: BJP

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, JAN. 2. The BJP has predicted that the next electoral battle will be fought between "cultural nationalism" (Hindutva) and "pseudo-secularism" (the terminology used by the BJP to describe secular parties which oppose Hindutva).

The BJP spokesperson, Mukherjee Abbas Naqvi, said today that a "wave of cultural nationalism was sweeping through the country (desh mein sanskritik rashtravad ki aandhi chal rahi hai)." In fact, the party's view was that "Hindutva will liberate Muslims and other minorities from being second-class citizens."

He said that the statement on 'Hindutva' made by the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, in Goa on New Year's eve had "created confusion among people who use secularism as a political weapon to gain power". Referring to the Congress and the Left in particular, he said these forces had "lost their mind (baukhla gaye hain)".

"Hindutva", he said, was "the culture of this country", and a "guarantor of its secularism." But when it was pointed out that the culture of this country was thousands of years old and the word 'Hindutva' was coined in the 1920s by RSS ideologues, Mr. Naqvi at first said he did not know when and by whom the

word was coined, but as an after-thought added that "it was coined by Rabindranath Tagore".

Was this "cultural nationalism" the same as defined by M.S. Golwalkar, the former RSS chief, or Savarkar, another RSS ideologue? Mr. Naqvi did not answer the question but claimed that "cultural nationalism" was the "same as secularism defined in the Constitution".

The BJP said that "neither Godhra was secular nor were the riots in its aftermath 'Hindutva'." No party or person has described the Godhra carnage as a manifestation of secularism.

For the last one week, Mr. Naqvi has been talking of cultural nationalism and 'Hindutva'.

In Uttar Pradesh, the State unit president of the party, Vinay Katiyar, has also taken the Hindutva theme forward by stating that Muslims should give back to Hindus the Varanasi and Mathura mosques adjacent to the Vishwanath and Krishna temples respectively (although the BJP claims that Kashi and Mathura mosques are not on its agenda). In Madhya Pradesh, the Cabinet Minister, Uma Bharati, has been chosen by the party to carry forward its 'Hindutva' agenda aggressively.

INDIA KE 29 JAN 2003