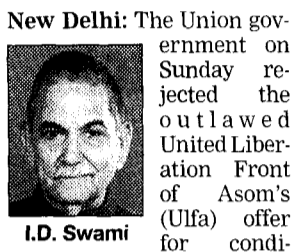


Centre rejects Ulfa's talks offer

TIMES NEWS NETWORK



I.D. Swami

New Delhi: The Union government on Sunday rejected the outlawed United Liberation Front of Asom's (Ulfa) offer for conditional talks through a neutral mediator on its demand for sovereignty.

Talking to reporters after a function marking the 64th anniversary of the Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), minister of state for home I.D. Swami said, "There is no question of any compromise on the sovereignty and integrity of the country."

Mr Swami was replying to a question on the reported statement of Ulfa 'commander-in-chief' Paresh Baruah that the outfit was ready for negotiations with the Centre on its main demand of sovereignty with a "neutral third party mediator" acting as facilitator.

Baruah was reported to have made it clear that the neutral third party had to be a "nation state" as Ulfa could not trust mediators from within the country to

be "neutral".

Mr Swami asserted that the pro-active policy against the banned outfit would continue. He, however, clarified that as a matter of principle, the government was ready for talks with any insurgent outfit provided it laid down arms and did not put forward any conditions.

He hoped that Ulfa would respond to the Assam government's amnesty offer and join the mainstream. Thanking the Bhutan government for having launched the military action against Ulfa, he said after the operation by the Royal Bhutan Army, Ulfa was demoralised and its cadres were on the run.

Earlier, addressing CRPF officers and jawans, Mr Swami lauded the contribution of the force in tackling terrorism. He announced that a major modernisation plan was in the pipeline for the Central para-military forces so that they could effectively tackle terrorists, Naxalites and other anti-social elements. The modernisation plan included equipping these forces with better weapons, equipment and communication facilities, besides improving their intelligence set-up.

Insurgent leader calls for ceasefire

Tezpur: Founding member of the United Liberation Front of Asom (Ulfa) Bhimakanta Burhagohain and three other leaders of the outfit were on Sunday remanded to five days' police custody.

Additional chief judicial magistrate H. Sarma granted five days' police remand to Burhagohain, Robin Handique, Bolin Das and Amarjeet Gogoi though the police had urged for 14 days' custody. The court also allowed the Ulfa leaders to meet their relatives as and when required and directed the authorities to ensure their regular health check-ups.

Burhagohain, who was earlier reported to have succumbed to his injuries during the flushing-out operation by the Royal Bhutan Army, was handed over to the Indian Army on December 25.

Burhagohain appealed to both his outfit and the Union government to agree on a ceasefire and solve the problems through negotia-

tions. Talking to the media here on Sunday before being produced in court, Burhagohain said New Delhi should halt its military action against the outfit while Ulfa should also hold its guns to sit across each other for a solution to the vexed issue.

He also asserted that the destruction of the Ulfa camps in Bhutan would not demolish the outfit as it was connected by Internet to other countries to carry on with its activities.

Meanwhile, Bhutan's efforts to flush out insurgents from its soil was progressing as expected, having dislodged them from all the 30 camps which were burnt and razed to the ground, a spokesman for the Royal Bhutan Army said.

In another development, the captured women cadres of Ulfa vehemently criticised the outfit's top leaders for leading luxurious lives elsewhere while they suffered cold and hunger in camps. PTI

Assam bleeds, Laloo on peace mission

HTC and Agencies
New Delhi/Guwahati
November 23

WITH NO let-up in the violence against Biharis in Assam — two labourers were lynched in Tinsukia on Sunday — Laloo Prasad Yadav is arriving here on Monday with an eight-member Parliamentary team to instill confidence among the people from his state.

The RJD chief will return to Delhi on Tuesday after assessing the situation and present a report to the Prime Minister, the Deputy PM and Congress chief Sonia Gandhi. "We will meet Chief Minister Gogoi and other political leaders. We will also talk to Biharis in the state," he said.

Meanwhile, Upper Assam remained tense with the pogrom against Biharis spilling over to new areas of Tinsukia where a frenzied mob lynched two labourers, taking the toll to 48.

A mob of non-Hindi speaking people attacked Rupai village under Doomdooma police station and hacked two people to death. The dead were identified as Nimachi Sonari and Kamal Kurmi. Sunday's killings forced the administration to continue with curfew in Tinsukia and night curfew in Dibrugarh, Nalbari and Bongaigaon districts.

The situation, however, didn't prevent leading parties from seeking political mileage. The AGP launched a tirade against the ruling Congress, accusing it of manipulating the situation to win the civic body polls slated for December 1.

"The Congress-ruled government has deliberately let the situation get out of hand to ensure continued curfew across the state," AGP leader Chandra Mohan Patowary said. "The idea is to use government machinery to win the civic body elections," he added.

Patowary said that the people had lost faith in the Gogoi government, and that the attacks on Biharis had come at an opportune time for the Congress to cash in on. "How come the militants are so active at a time when the government claims to have kept them on a leash?" he asked.

The Congress, on the other hand, alleged that the AGP was fanning the fire to keep Hindi-speaking voters away from the polling booths.

Meanwhile, a man suspected to have raped a girl from Nagaland at Ratanpura during the November 12 violence on train passengers from North-eastern states was arrested on Saturday night at Mungher in Bihar.

Fifty other people were arrested from in and around Jamalpur during police raids in connection with the violence against people from the North-east.

● ULFA STRIKES AGAIN ● CENTRAL MINISTERS VISIT AFFECTED AREAS

28/11 **16 more Biharis killed in Assam**

By Barun Das Gupta
and agencies

Centre State News 110-1

GUWAHATI, NOV. 22. Violence erupted again in Assam today after a relative lull for 48 hours, resulting in the death of 16 Biharis, even as the Union Minister for the North-East Region, C. P. Thakur, and the Union Minister of State for Home, Swami Chinmayananda, arrived here to take stock of the worsening situation. With this, the toll in the weeklong violence against immigrant Bihari labourers has gone up to 51.

In probably the worst attack in Tinsukia district, militants struck near the Mahakali Tea Estate in Bordubi area today and shot dead 8 Bihari workers. They struck again near the Lankesh Tea Estate killing three labourers and injuring two. Most of the victims were from Muzaffarpur and Chhapra districts of Bihar. One person was killed in a group clash in Kakopathar area of Dibrugarh district, while in Guwahati a gas cylinder in a tea stall exploded, following arson, killing one.

In Tinsukia district, three Biharis were thrown into the Brahmaputra with their hands tied. Curfew was imposed in Bordubi, Kakopathar, Dholla and Makum in Tinsukia district following the attacks.

The 'commander-in-chief' of the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA), Paresh Barua, owned responsibility for the attacks and warned of more violence if the Biharis did not leave the State.

The State Government ordered today the closure of all brick-kilns, mostly employing Bihari labour, after the attack. It also suspended the Superintendent of Police of Tinsukia, Satyen Gogoi, and transferred the Deputy Commissioner, B.M. Das.

The Union Ministers, immediately



Bodies of Bihari workers gunned down by ULFA militants lying on the roadside on the outskirts of Tinsukia town in Assam on Saturday. — Reuters

after landing here, flew by helicopter to Bongaigaon and visited the site of an earlier massacre where seven persons were killed.

Addressing a press conference here this evening, Dr. Thakur said the Prime Minister, Atal Bihari Vajpayee, and the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, were concerned about the sit-

uation and the Centre was determined not to allow the violence to escalate.

He said what was happening in Assam now was "part of a big game to create trouble in the eastern part of the country." He blamed the ULFA for its involvement in the killings and drew attention to discussions in the Bangladesh Parliament where

the insurgency in the North-East of India was reportedly described as a "freedom struggle".

The two Ministers reviewed the situation with the Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, and senior State officials. Mr. Gogoi was present at the press meet.

Kalam's concern

Our Special Correspondent

reports from New Delhi:

The President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, today expressed concern over the violence in Bihar and Assam. The Rashtrapati Bhavan spokesman said that the President had received several representations in this regard.

Meanwhile, sources said that the President had been in touch with Mr. Vajpayee.

Delhi hugs no-strings Hurriyat

9-Centre - free

SEEMAGUHA 294

New Delhi, Nov. 21: The Centre today took its Kashmir peace initiative a step forward, assuring the Hurriyat Conference that it is ready for unconditional talks.

"We are ready for an unconditional dialogue with the Hurriyat. In fact, we have been making it clear umpteen number of times that we have only one condition — that the opposite side should abjure violence, which the Hurriyat has done," junior home minister I.D. Swamy, who is in charge of Kashmir, said.

Swamy's assurance came a few hours after Hurriyat chairman Abbas Ansari announced in Srinagar that the separatists would talk to the Centre, provided there were no conditions and

the discussions were on the Kashmir dispute.

As Swamy said, the Centre had not attached any conditions when the talks offer was made and deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani was tasked to lead the talks with the Hurriyat.

But an element of uncertainty had crept in following a statement by Advani that the negotiations would be held within the parameters of the Constitution and would focus on "decentralisation".

The assertion had tied the hands of the moderates, led by Ansari. However, after a meeting yesterday, former Hurriyat chairman Mir-waiz Umer Farooq said the conglomerate was ready for talks.

The initiative gathered steam

in Delhi this morning with Advani taking time off the Assembly election campaign and squeezing in a meeting with the Centre's Kashmir emissary, N.N. Vohra.

The retired bureaucrat briefed Advani for about 45 minutes on the Hurriyat's Thursday meeting. "The position will become clear after the Friday prayers today when the Hurriyat will make a public statement," Vohra told reporters when he came out.

Once the prayers on the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan were over, Ansari spelt out his stand in Srinagar: "The talks should be aimed at resolving the Kashmir issue."

Advani's deputy, Swamy, reciprocated in Delhi: "The talks will be Kashmir-centric."

This does not mean that the

dialogue will be delinked from the Constitution, but a studied silence on it will take a burden off the Hurriyat.

Swamy said the Centre appreciated that the Hurriyat had not insisted on including Pakistan in the negotiations.

The Hurriyat had so far been proceeding cautiously. Immediately after the Centre made the proposal, the pro-Pakistan faction, led by Syed Ali Shah Geelani, had turned it down. It had also warned the moderates not to consider the offer.

By taking the peace initiative further, the Centre wants to strengthen the hands of the moderates and isolate the Geelani faction, which has sabotaged Delhi's moves many times by insisting on roping in Pakistan.

Delhi fortifies Assam

OUR BUREAU

2-centre, Gwal- 9-1 21/11

Nov. 20: The Centre today rushed 13 Border Security Force companies to violence-racked Assam as sanity seemed to be returning to the state after two nights of murder and mayhem.

The toll of the backlash, a fallout of the mob raids on passengers of trains passing through Bihar, climbed to 27 with the death of three people last night.

Another person, injured in the Ulfa attack in Bongaigaon, died at Guwahati Medical College Hospital.

Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee spoke to Tarun Gogoi and Rabri Devi, the chief ministers of Assam and Bihar, as well as Laloo Prasad Yadav, the man who wields the baton in Bihar. Sources said Vajpayee also asked railway minister Nitish Kumar to return to the capital for consultations and directed C.P. Thakur, the minister in charge of the Northeast's devel-

opment, to go to Assam.

The deployment of the BSF followed a request from Gogoi to Vajpayee and deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani early in the day, which also saw Congress chief Sonia Gandhi call up the chief minister and tell him to crack down on trouble-mongers.

Three companies each have been deployed in worst-hit Tinsukia and neighbouring Dibrugarh, while seven are on their way. The army has been assisting the local administration in curfew-clamped Tinsukia, Bongaigaon, Sonitpur and Nagaon.

The Union home ministry has assured that it would pro-

vide more forces, if required, after polls in four states are over on December 1.

Union minister of state for home Swami Chinmayanand, scheduled to reach Assam on Saturday, is expected to visit some of the affected areas.

State home secretary B.M. Mazumdar said the death count stood at 27, with Tinsukia and Dibrugarh at the top of the list with seven each, Bongaigaon six, Dhubri four and Nalbari three. Curfew has been extended to Barpeta, Nalbari, Moran, Tengakhat, Khowang, Namrup, Tingkhong and Duliajan.

Tinsukia deputy commissioner Bhupendra Nath Das told **The Telegraph** no incident was reported from any part of the district during the day.

But fear was palpable and the Guwahati railway station saw a heavy rush of people bound for Bihar. Debraj, a hotelier in Tinsukia, talked about mistrust everywhere.

■ See Page 6

QUOTE

We knew it was a bomb when an arm came flying through the window

A DOCTOR
outside the HSBC blast site

RAIL RAMPAGE: GENESIS TO BACKLASH

NOVEMBER 17



AASU bandh supporters burn tyres in Guwahati (PTI)

NOVEMBER 19



A woman amid the ruins of her house in Guwahati (Reuters)

NOVEMBER 19



A student from the Northeast protests in Delhi (AFP)

November 9

Around 50 students from Bihar — candidates for Group-D posts of North East Frontier Railway — denied entry to examination halls in Guwahati and Jorhat and assaulted. Examinees from Tripura also thrown out of a test centre in north Guwahati.

November 10

Backlash begins. About 200 students gather at Katihar station and target trains from the Northeast, including the North East Express.

November 11

Protests snowball. Violence spreads to Katihar town. Mob raids Brahmaputra Mail at Bhagalpur. Ten persons hospitalised in next stop, Jamalpur.

November 12

A 25-year-old Mizo woman travelling on the Guwahati-Dadar Express stripped and molested at Munger.

The Mahananda Express and Brahmaputra Mail come under attack at least twice between Munger and Jamalpur. The trains diverted to Malda and sent to New Jalpaiguri under escort. Rabri Devi announces escorts for trains. Nitish Kumar says test will be held again at Katihar for those turned away in Assam.

November 14

As attacks continue, the All Assam Students Union calls 24-hour bandh on November 17. Protesters vandalise railway divisional manager's office in Tinsukia.

Militant groups, including Ulfa, threaten "far-reaching consequences" if train assaults don't stop.

November 15

Rabri Devi removes Munger district magistrate and superintendent of police.

Assam students target Hindi-speaking passengers

and candidates for another railway examination in Dibrugarh. Chief minister Tarun Gogoi urges change in railway recruitment policy, describing it as "widely discriminatory against candidates from the Northeast".

November 17

Violence marks Assam bandh. Houses of Bihari migrants torched, shops set on fire. Bandh supporters attack Samata Party office. Non-Manipuris stage dharna in Imphal, urging Centre to provide protection to trains passing through Bihar.

November 18

Railway postpones Group-D exams in Bihar and Assam. Ulfa kills four in Dhubri.

November 19

Several killed in Assam. Curfew imposed in Tinsukia town, army called out.

Graphic: RAJ

Dhaba strike blame on KLO, Ulfa

MAIN UDDIN CHISTI

Chhagolia (Assam-Bengal border), Nov. 19: Assam and Bengal police today claimed that last evening's attack on a dhaba here, in which four men were killed and seven injured, was a joint operation by KLO and Ulfa militants.

There was, however, no mention of National Democratic Front of Boroland rebels who were included in the list of suspects yesterday.

Circle inspector of Dhubri's Golokganj Nijamuddin Choudhury said the attack on the truck operators was carried out by three militants and not 12 as was believed yesterday.

Around 25 truck drivers and

their helpers were watching the India-Australia match at the dhaba when the militants opened fire.

Three of the dead have been identified as Baban Mondol from Nadia and Prafulla Rai and Ashok Rai from Vaishali in Bihar.

"We are almost certain that last night's attack was carried out by local Ulfa and KLO militants," said Assam's Dhubri district superintendent of police L.R. Bishnoi.

He also confirmed suspicions that yesterday's raid was linked to the ethnic backlash against Hindi-speaking people in Assam, following attacks on passengers from the Northeast in trains passing through Bihar.

"The militants fled towards Baxirhat in Cooch Behar on the Bengal-Assam border and that is why we need the help of Bengal police," Bishnoi said.

Choudhury added: "The escape route taken by the assailants went towards Baxirhat in Cooch Behar. From there they can easily wade through the Sankosh river and enter the forests of the Dooars. The road also leads to Kokrajhar in Assam."

He said that after speaking to eyewitnesses the police had concluded that the trio had come on bicycles from the east.

The district police chief, along with Dhubri collector Prashanta Kumar Barua, Cooch Behar deputy police superintendent David Lepcha and other senior

officers, inspected the site today.

Cooch Behar police superintendent S.S. Panda said that besides Baxirhat and Tufanganj police stations which border Assam, other police stations in the district have also been alerted.

Of the seven injured, two have been referred to North Bengal Medical College and Hospital near Siliguri.

Militants killed

Two Ulfa militants were killed today in an encounter with the army in Gaikhowa village under Golokganj police station. Acting on a tip-off that the militants were hiding in the village, the army swooped down and killed the two rebels in a gunbattle that lasted over an hour.

Backlash bonfires in migrant pockets

OUR BUREAU

Nov. 19: Stoked by militant guns, the backlash that began as a clamour for jobs spiralled out of control in pockets of Assam housing migrants, leaving over 20 people dead since Tuesday night.

The army has been deployed and indefinite curfew clamped in the commercial town of Tinsukia, 480 km from Guwahati, which has a large number of Biharis. Night curfew has been imposed in Duliajan, the oil town in Upper Assam.

As the flames leapt up, the Centre lined up behind the Congress-ruled Assam government, applauding the state's efforts to tackle the crisis and promising help if needed. The governors of Bihar and Assam, too, pitched in, issuing a joint appeal for peace.

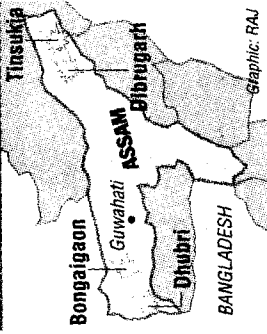
In the worst-ever clashes between people from the two states, Biharis were being targeted in several places in Assam in reprisal attacks after a railway recruitment test blockade in Guwahati last week led to a series of mob raids on trains passing through Bihar.

Whatever happened in Bihar is condemnable and what is happening in Assam is equally condemnable," chief minister Tarun Gogoi said after flagging off a peace rally in Guwahati. Assam has sent a fact-finding team to Bihar.

The bustling Tinsukia bore the brunt of the attacks which reduced it to a ghost town. As many as 12 people — all Biharis, barring one — died in Tinsukia and its twin town Dibrugarh.

Three members, including a child, of a farm hand's family were killed by a mob

THE FLASHPOINTS



that besieged his house last night. The dead have been identified as Bindu Shah (32), his wife Sati Devi (28) and their three-

year-old daughter Pinky. Police said the Shah family had been living in the area for several years, earning its livelihood by working in paddy fields. Neighbours could not help Shah as the assailants warned them not to come out of their houses. "What could we do?" asked an Assamese farmer.

In the neighbouring Dibrugarh district, six members of a family were killed. A group attacked the house of Uma Kant Tiwari, killing his wife Geeta (38), sons Brijesh (16) and Anupam (11), daughter Rumar (13), nephew

Pawan (11) and niece Deepa (9). Uma Kant was able to save himself by hiding in a corner of the house, which was later set on fire.

In Tinsukia, one person died in police firing after a mob refused to disperse and turned its fire on two officers.

Suspected militants poured oil into the fire. In Lower Assam's Bongaigaon, masked motorcycle-borne gunmen today sprayed bullets on a group of people at Gangquarters — named after the quarters of railway gangmen. Four were killed, three have been identified as

Bhanumati Choudhury (50), Amina Khatun (40) and Renu (30).

Last night, four people — two of them from Bihar — were killed by Ulfa in Dhubri, bordering Bengal. Late tonight, unconfirmed reports said suspected Ulfa militants opened fired on Hindi-speaking people in Nalbari, killing three. After the train attacks, Ulfa had asked Biharis to leave.

In Patna, Bihar chief minister Rabri Devi sent a letter to Gogoi seeking steps against those committing atrocities on Biharis. ■ See Page 6

20 NOV 2003

THE TELEGRAPH

REPRISAL ATTACKS ON BIHARIS; TOLL 27

Army deployed as violence continues in Assam

GUWAHATI, NOV. 19. Reprisal attacks on Biharis in Assam today claimed seven lives, taking the toll to 27 so far as reports of ULFA strikes on Hindi-speaking people poured in from many parts of the State. Curfew was clamped on Tinsukia and the Army was called in to control violence.

Militants belonging to the United Liberation Front of Assam (ULFA) swooped on the New Bongaigaon Railway Station of Lower Assam after sundown and mowed down four persons, including a woman, near the railway quarters while three were hacked to death at Kakopathar in Upper Assam, reports said.

The Union Minister for northeast, C.P. Thakur, told newsmen in Patna that the Centre might have to take the direct help of the Army if the situation continued to deteriorate in Assam. The Centre was monitoring the situation and had directed the Assam Government to take all measures to check violence and provide protection to Biharis residing there.

There was a pitched battle this morning between a 500-strong Bihari mob and a 1000-strong Assamese mob in the Upper Assam town of Tinsukia. As the situation threatened to go out of hand, police fired in the air to disperse them. One person was killed in the police shooting.

The Army is already out in Tinsukia and Dibrugarh districts but has not been able to bring the situation under control.

The Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, told newsmen that the ULFA was instigating attacks on innocent Bihari people in the State to exploit the sentiment of the people, who were anguished at the attack on Assamese train passengers in Bihar between November 9 and 12.

The ULFA had instigated the mob attack on a Bihari settlement at Kheroni village at Moran in Dibrugarh district on Tuesday night, resulting in the deaths of six persons, including minors, he said.

The Governors of Assam and Bihar, Gen. Ajai Singh and M. Rama Jois, in a joint statement here, called for calm, appealing to the "common nationality of the people" and the obligation not to damage national unity and brotherhood.

"We are greatly pained and perturbed over the violence un-



A woman amid the debris of her burnt house in Guwahati on Wednesday. — Reuters

leashed in both the States. We are forgetting that we are all children of Bharat Mata and there is only one citizenship.

"We are all Indians first and Indians last. It is time we remind ourselves what the great visionary and builder of modern India said: 'Who dies if India lives, who lives if India dies,'" they said, appealing to the youth for unity. — UNI

Laloo sends SOS

Our Patna Staff Correspond-

ent reports:

The Rashtriya Janata Dal leader and former Bihar Chief Minister, Laloo Prasad Yadav, has sent an SOS to the Central Government seeking steps to check the continuing violence against Biharis in Assam.

The Bihar Chief Minister, Rabri Devi, in a letter to Mr. Gogoi, urged him to put an end to the "mindless killing of Biharis". A copy of the letter has been sent to the Union Home Ministry.

She said her Government had

taken steps to stop attacks in Bihar on trains carrying passengers from the northeast.

It had cracked the whip on those responsible for the violence in Munger, Katihar and Bhagalpur districts and handed over the cases to the Central Bureau of Investigation.

She hoped that the Assam Government too would take firm action and restore normality.

Bengal sounds alert; another photograph: Page 11

20 NOV 2003

Quid pro woe

Bihar & Assam must exercise caution

558
19/4/42
When it comes to reputations, Bihar has a record so vile that harassment of passengers on trains passing through the state is seen as common practice. Perhaps last week's incident in which passengers of the Brahmaputra Mail and Mahananda Express were attacked might have gone the way of "routine" but for the fact that the bullies singled out Assamese to vent their displeasure at Bihari candidates not being allowed to sit for Railway Recruitment Board tests in Guwahati and Jorhat. Reports also speak of a Naga and a Mizo woman being subjected to reprehensible physical humiliation. But there was courage, too when a Bihari army officer's wife intervened to save an Assamese doctor by telling his assailants that he was her son. If the attackers' sole aim was to bash up Assamese travellers, one wonders why they helped themselves to cash and belongings in the bargain. This is clearly a case of goons operating under political patronage. The culprits must be brought to book.

That the incident provoked a backlash in Assam came as little surprise; some people were roughed up, houses burnt and a 24-hour bandh observed. Ufa reportedly ordered Biharis to leave. Assamese have good reason to feel hurt because the state is home to more than a million Bihari workers. This alone should warn unsavoury characters in Bihar to tread cautiously. The transfer of the Munger DM and SP for inept handling of the situation is not enough. Much more needs to be done to prevent recurrence of such senseless violence. However, AASU must realise its demand for 100 per cent job reservation for locals is impracticable.

Advani to talk to Assam, Bihar Governments

Centre

NEW DELHI, NOV.16. The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, today said he would talk to the Assam and Bihar Governments in a bid to reduce tensions over the alleged prevention of Bihari students from appearing in railway recruitment test in Maligaon in Assam on November 9.

"I had gone to Aruanchal Pradesh yesterday. I will now talk to both Assam and Bihar to ensure that the tension created between them are removed," he said here during an interaction with women students from Bihar.

He was responding to a question from a student of Patna Women's College about the steps being taken to ensure security of women students from Bihar who may visit Assam in future.

Students from Bihar, agitated

over being denied appearance in the examination had last week assaulted around 30 passengers after stopping two trains at the Jamalpur railway station.

Talking to presspersons on the Maharashtra multi-crore stamp paper scam, Mr. Advani said that the Centre would decide on any action after talks with the State Government.

After a 30-minute meeting with the Maharashtra Governor, Mohammed Fazal, he said: "If we have to do something, it will be on the basis of talks with the Maharashtra Government."

He said Mr. Fazal did refer to the scam during the meeting but more important was "what the State Government says on the issue." "I have not asked for any report on the scam from the Governor," Mr. Advani said.

The Governor also discussed the possible Central assistance to tackle drought in 10 districts of the State.

Now both the issues would be directly taken up with the Chief Minister or Home Minister of the State, he said.

Mr. Advani said he had not demanded a CBI inquiry into the scam.

"The CBI is already looking into the matter on the request of Andhra Pradesh, Delhi and Gujarat. Its chief is on record stating if other States ask the investigating agency, it will take up their request as well."

Mr. Advani refused to comment on the alleged bribery charges against the Minister of State for Environment and Forests, Dilip Singh Judev, saying he would first like to speak to him. — PTI

Advani to mediate in Assam-Bihar row

17/11 9 Centre 9-11-03

NEW DELHI/GUWAHATI/PATNA, Nov. 16. — Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani has decided to intervene personally to end the hostility between Assam and Bihar triggered after locals allegedly did not allow Bihari students to take Railway Recruitment Board tests in the North-east on 9 November.

During an interaction with women students from Bihar, Mr Advani said: "I will now speak to both Assam and Bihar to ensure that the tension between them is defused." He was responding to Patna Women's College students' queries about measures taken to ensure security of women students from Bihar, who may visit Assam in future.

Last week's incident of allegedly denying Bihari students the opportu-

Rail traffic hit

KOLKATA, Nov. 16. — Eastern Railway today cancelled 5959 Up Kamrup Express and postponed the departure of Up Saraighat Express for a day in view of tomorrow's 24-hour Assam bandh. The tri-weekly 2345 Up Saraighat Express will leave Howrah tomorrow at 3.45 p.m. instead. — SNS

nity to take the RRB tests provoked them into assaulting over two dozen passengers from North-east at Jamalpur railway station over the past few days.

The RRB today conducted in Assam the second round of examination for Group-D posts for students who could not appear in the 9

November

under tight security across the state and passed off peacefully.

Security has been beefed up in view of the 24-hour Assam bandh called by the All Assam Students' Union from 5 a.m. tomorrow even as stray incidents of retaliatory violence against Biharis continued in the state for the third day today.

Bihar police today arrested 23 persons in Munger and Katihar districts for their alleged involvement in the anti-Assamese flare-up. State chief secretary Mr KAH Subrahmaniyam said police are conducting more raids in parts of Munger, Katihar and Kishenganj districts. The RRB tests at all the 11 centres in Katihar passed off peacefully today, he said. — SNS

Photograph on page 6

Government of Bihar

Press Communique

H.P. 1974
(Later Date)
9/11/74

The Government of Bihar condemns in unequivocal terms the attacks on the railway passengers from Northeastern states and damages to the railway properties by rowdy elements at places like Katihar, Jamalpur and Bhagalpur following assaults on the examinees who went from Bihar to appear at the recruitment examination conducted by the Railway Recruitment Board, Guwahati. Such ugly incidents are slur on our glorious traditions undermining the unity and solidarity of the nation and promoting provincialism.

The Government of Bihar strongly believes that the citizens of the India are brothers and sisters. All the citizens from Kashmir to Kanyakumari are Indian nationals. Every citizen of the country enjoys the freedom of movement for earning their livelihood as guaranteed by the Constitution of India. The relations of Bihar with the seven sister states of the northeast are very cordial and friendly. Our culture is similar. Our problems too are identical. We are determined that all the citizens of the country enjoy free movement without any infringement of security and safety. This presupposes that Government of all the States takes suitable measures that no such incident takes place in future.

The Government of Bihar in cooperation with the Ministry of Railway has ensured that rail movements are uninterrupted and smooth. All trains running through Bihar towards Northeast are being escorted under tight security. The Government of Bihar has treated the incidents at Jamalpur with due seriousness and removed the District Magistrate and Superintendent of Police, Monghyr and Superintendent of Railway Police, Jamalpur for their dereliction of duties. Government has already started raids and searches by Special Police Team and dozens of criminal elements have already been arrested. The involvement of various groups and elements are being investigated to take strong and deterrent action against them. These initiatives have started showing fruitful results and no untoward incident has taken place after 12th instant.

The Government of Bihar appeals to the people to be aware of rumour mongering indulged in by criminals, anti-social elements and groups. The designs of these elements to undermine the unity and integrity of the nation need to be exposed.

(K.A.H. Subramanian)
Chief Secretary, Government of Bihar

Ulfa serves quit-Assam notice to Hindi speakers

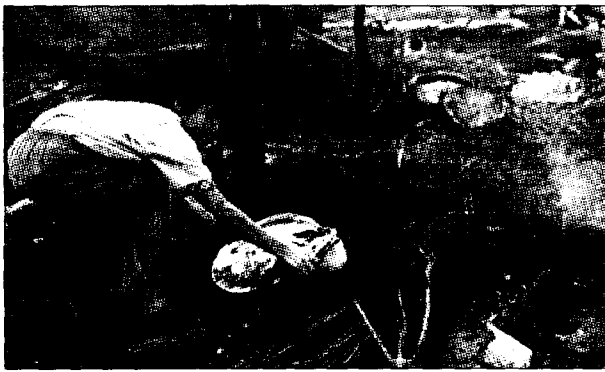
BIHAR TRAIN ATTACKS SET NORTH-EAST ON FIRE

Digambar Patowary
Guwahati, November 15

THE SPORADIC attacks on northeastern trains at various places in Bihar began to snowball into a full-blown linguistic strife on Saturday with Ulfa chief Paresh Barua warning all Hindi speakers to leave Assam immediately and reports pouring in on the backlash against Biharis. The All Assam Students Union (Aasu) called a statewide bandh on Monday.

In a joint statement, the Ulfa and the NDFB warned of "far-reaching repercussions" throughout the region. There are 15 lakh Biharis in Assam.

Several Assamese train passengers have been assaulted and robbed in the past few days in Ratanpur, Bhagalpur, Katihar, Jamalpur and Kishanganj after Bihari candidates were allegedly prevented from appearing in a railway recruitment test in Guwahati on November 9.



UB PHOTOS

A child at a Bihari settlement which was burnt down by a mob at Jalukbari, Guwahati, on Friday night.

Like several Assamese women passengers, a Mizo woman was molested after being mistaken for an Assamese. There were also reports that a Naga girl from Pune, travelling with friends, was raped at Jamalpur.

Issuing the warning, Ulfa said it was planning large-scale retaliation for the serial train attacks. Several other organisations also came out strongly against the attacks. The Aasu and the

Youth Congress burnt effigies of Railway Minister Nitish Kumar, holding him responsible for the entire episode. Mizo Zirlai Pawl, a student's body, warned of violence if the train attacks don't stop.

A group of youths late on Friday burnt the homes of 15 Bihari families on the Gauhati University campus. Some Bihari families fled Morigaon district after being threatened by locals.

Aasu members blocked the Howrah-bound Kamrup Express, the Inter City train and Brahmaputra Mail.

Guwahati SP Hiren Nath said a group of students from Bihar were attacked at the station on Saturday morning. Two were injured in the scuffle, but none of them were students. Some demonstrators damaged railway property at Tinsukia.

Bihar Chief Minister Rabri Devi has ordered the removal of the Munger district magistrate and the police superintendent for "slackness" in containing violence on trains. "Violence won't be tolerated. What happened at Jamalpur station was the result of utter failure of the administration," she said.

Rabri assured Nitish Kumar of full cooperation in tackling the situation. Kumar called upon all political parties to maintain restraint. Assam Chief Minister Tarun Gogoi also appealed for calm after a discussion with Rabri.

Molestation in full view of passengers

OUR BUREAU

Patna/Jabalpur, Nov. 14: A 25-year-old Mizo woman travelling on the Guwahati-Dadar Express was stripped and molested in full view of the passengers on Wednesday, forcing a reluctant Bihar police to agree to open the first investigation into the train attacks that have been taking place on people from the Northeast.

After a November 9 incident in which candidates from Bihar were allegedly prevented from sitting for a railway recruitment examination held in Guwahati, trains originating from the Northeast have been attacked at various places in Bihar in retaliation.

"I cried but none of the fellow passengers came to my rescue. My brothers who tried to resist were beaten black and blue," said the Mizo woman, who was mistaken by the attackers to be an Assamese.

"They stripped me and wanted to push me inside a toilet. When they failed, they began to molest me," the sobbing woman told police in Patna last night.

The sister of a college lecturer in Mizoram, she said when the train stopped at Munger, about 12 men entered the compartment and asked if she and her brothers were from Assam.

"We pleaded that we were residents of Mizoram. But our plea was ignored and our belongings were looted — money, clothes and bags. I was dragged from my seat by some men who grabbed me by my hair. I was taken near the toilet," she said.

According to other witnesses, the women bore the brunt of the attack. Even the old were not spared. After the victim, and the other passengers, reached Patna, they were admitted to Patna Medical College and Hospital and then put up in the circuit house.

While the woman's statement became the basis of cases in Jabalpur — also in Bihar — and Patna, other victims got off the train at Jabalpur in Madhya Pradesh and filed an FIR.

Passengers who reached Jabalpur — 25 hours after the incident — alleged that the railway authorities in Patna and Alla-

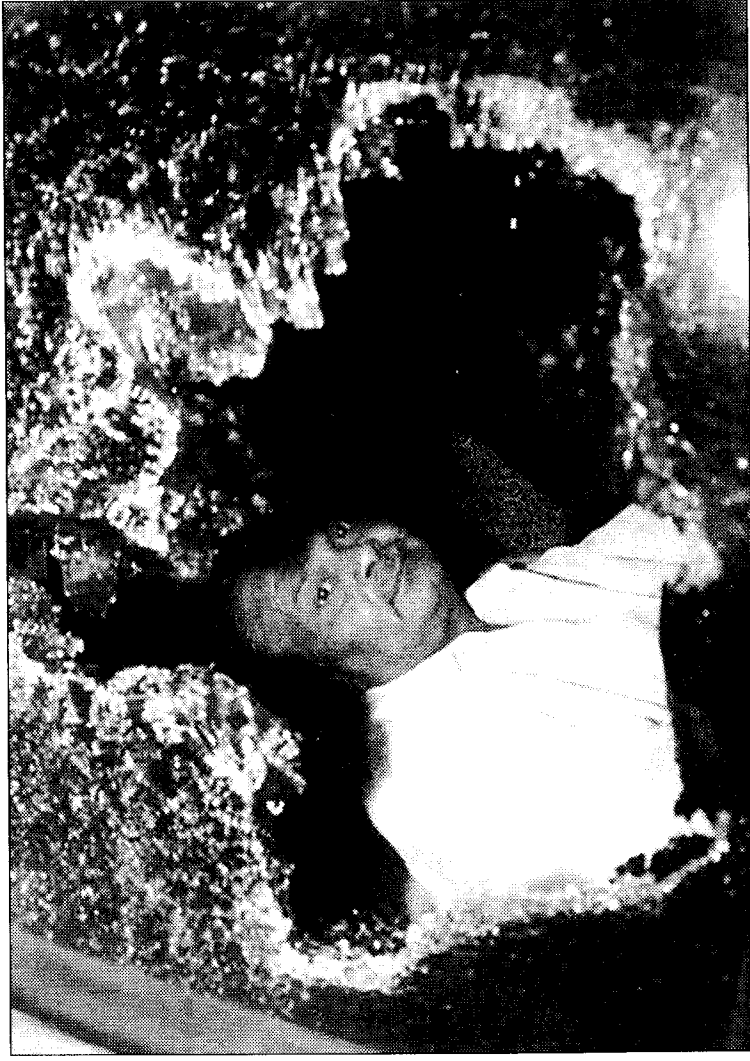
habad had refused to register the case. They said the attack continued for four hours, starting in late afternoon, with passengers travelling in AC 3-tier and 2-tier and sleeper coaches specifically targeted.

The passengers told Jabalpur police that in Bihar the railway authorities had told them to shut the doors and windows and "get out of Bihar as quickly as possible". Since November 10, several trains from Assam passing through Bihar have come under attack at Kaithar, Jamalpur and Bhagalpur.

But this is the first time that Bihar police have recorded the statement of a victim and started a probe.

The director-general of police of Assam contacted his Bihar counterpart, seeking details of the incident.

"I express my regret for the unfortunate incident and I have informed my counterpart in Assam that full security arrangements have been made for trains which will pass through Bihar," the Bihar director-general of police, D.P. Ojha, said.



A man peeps through a damaged window of the Guwahati-Dadar Express after its arrival at Jabalpur on Thursday. (PTI)

Non-Assamese too feel Bihar violence heat

PATNA, Nov. 13. — Several non-Assamese became targets of attack last night by Biharis protesting against the alleged denial of opportunity to some candidates from Bihar to take Sunday's railway recruitment test in Assam. Three persons were today arrested in Jamalpur in connection with the violence.

Katihar, Kishanganj and Munger districts were the worst affected by anti-Assamese violence. Chief minister Mrs Rabri Devi today warned the DMs and SPs that action would be taken against them if such violence recurred.

Several injured passengers narrated their tales as the Brahmaputra Mail from Guwahati reached Patna yesterday. With a still-fresh wound on his head, Bhupendra (23) said: "I'm from Bhagalpur. I was attacked only because I was in a train coming from Guwahati." There were several others like him who were attacked despite not being residents of Assam.

Tension gripped Biharis in Assam as the news of the violence made headlines in local dailies, a report from Guwahati adds. The Aasu issued a veiled threat of retaliation against Biharis and burnt an effigy of the railway minister, Mr Nitish Kumar, in Guwahati.

Special forces have been deployed in five Delhi-Guwahati trains passing through Malda division. — SNS

Bihar students attack trains to Assam

OUR BUREAU

Nov. 12: Students in Bihar today attacked two Guwahati-bound trains in a series of raids since yesterday to retaliate against the alleged assault of candidates from the state who had gone to Assam for a railway recruitment test.

The Mahananda Express and the Brahmaputra Mail were stopped this morning at Jamalpur station, where armed students barged into the compartments, thrashed around 200 passengers and looted their luggage. The passengers complained no one came to their rescue during the hour-long ordeal. Barely 15 km before Jamal-

pur, the Mahananda Express had been held up at Munger station, where irate youths went on a looting spree, said I.P. Singh, a railway officer. But the mob was resisted by a group of army jawans travelling on the train till the Railway Protection Force (RPF) intervened and brought the situation under control.

Eastern Railway said the Brahmaputra Mail and the Seal-dah-Varanasi Express were also stopped between Ratanpur and Jamalpur by students who came to blows with the passengers.

Railway authorities diverted the Guwahati-bound trains through Malda to avoid further trouble. They usually approach New Jalpaiguri via Katihar

in Bihar.

The trains pulled into Malda station one after another around 4.45 pm, where railway doctors tended to about 30 injured persons on the platform. The trains continued their journey later with escorts.

Alarmed by the spate of attacks, the Rabri Devi government today promised armed escorts for trains passing through the state, said Nilmani, IG (administration). The general manager of East-Central Railway, R.S. Varshney, announced that two RPF companies would camp in Katihar, the town from where the protests spread.

Railway minister Nitish Kumar said in Patna the students

who could not participate in examinations for Group-D posts in Northeast Frontier Railway can take the test again, to be held under the Katihar division.

On November 9, around 50 students from Bihar were allegedly denied entry to the examination halls in Guwahati and Jorhat and assaulted.

"We were treated like foreigners. Any argument on our part prompted them to slap us," said Ashoke Singh, a 21-year-old graduate from Katihar. When the students returned with their tales of woe, people in Katihar decided to go on a "retaliatory rampage", said Singh.

Hundreds of students thronged Katihar station yesterday,

raiding trains from the North-east and assaulting passengers. After police arrived, they clashed with the forces and set a railway godown on fire. Soon the violence spread to the town and the police had to fire four rounds to disperse the agitators.

A brutal reprisal was carried out in Bhagalpur, too. Ten persons had to be hospitalised in Jamalpur yesterday after students raided the Brahmaputra Mail.

At Malda, a stunned Heman-ta Roy, a teacher returning to Darjeeling from Dehradun, sat on a bench, a blood-streaked bandage around his head. "The shouting youths suddenly stormed into our AC coach and began lashing us with leather belts, not

even sparing the women and even tore off their clothes. They snatched my gold chain and wallet and misbehaved with my wife," Roy said.

He tried to reason with the youths that he and the others were not Assamese, but to no avail.

A students' organisation in Assam today sought Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's intervention to end the "systematic deprivation" of Assamese youths by the railways.

In a letter faxed to Vajpayee, they said that "an overwhelming number of candidates who have been called for recruitment (in Assam) in over 1,600 number of vacancies in the D-Group are from Bihar".

Advani talk offer to Hurriyat

Centre note ✓
NEW DELHI, Oct. 22. — The Centre has decided, for the first time, to extend an invitation to the All Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC) leaders for dialogue at the level of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Centre has thus met the Hurriyat's demand for elevating the dialogue process to a political level. The Hurriyat had earlier rejected meeting the Centre's interlocutor, Mr NN Vohra, saying that since Mr Vohra is of secretary level he should be entertained only by the Hurriyat's secretary and not the leaders.

When Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, opened channels of dialogue with the NSCN-IM, the Centre's pointsman, Mr K Padmanabhaiah, an offi-

Sr 23/10
cial, had pursued the dialogue.

A similar arrangement is being conceived for J&K. Mr LK Advani will hold dialogue with the Hurriyat leaders and Mr NN Vohra will pursue the talks. The Cabinet Committee on Security took the decision to elevate the dialogue to political level today. But the actual exercise is likely to start only after the Hurriyat takes a decision at its executive council meeting in Srinagar.

The BJP hoped that something positive would emerge on the Kashmir front. Mr Advani's talk with Hurriyat leaders could lead to a solution of the Kashmir issue, BJP spokesman Mr Prakash Javdekar said. — SNS

Advani deputed for K-mission

By Manoj Joshi
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The Centre has upped the ante in Kashmir by opening a line to the Hurriyat Conference and putting forward deputy PM L.K. Advani as the point man for talks with the separatist outfit's chairman, Maulana



L.K. Advani

Abbas Ansari. The decision was immediately welcomed by Mr Ansari and J&K CM Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, but panned by the leader of the breakaway Hurriyat faction Syed Ali Shah Geelani.

"The deputy PM will meet Mr Ansari in response to his statement of August 25 that they (the Hurriyat) are interested in talks with the Centre," home secretary N. Gopaldaswami said after a meeting of the cabinet committee on security chaired

by the PM. He said the date for the meeting would be decided later.

The Centre's decision to field Mr Advani as an interlocutor seeks to kill several birds with one stone. First, it gets Mr Advani on board the Kashmir peace bus. So far, he had been seen as a hardliner who has blocked peace efforts. The signal being sent now is that he is willing to be flexible as well. Second, coming on the day the CCS agreed on new peace initiatives with Pakistan, it also ties down BJP hardliners—most of them seen as Mr Advani's proteges—skeptical of the PM's Pakistan policy. Third, it puts the onus of the success or failure of the talks on Mr Advani and his home ministry.

But just how effective the dialogue will be is a moot question. The 25-party grouping split six weeks ago with Mr Geelani, the hardline Jamaat-e-Islami leader, walking away and establishing his

own outfit. Asked to comment on the move, Mr Geelani said in Srinagar that given the statements of Mr Advani and Mr Vajpayee that Kashmir was an integral part of India, he did not have any great expectations from the talks.

Meanwhile, external affairs minister Yashwant Sinha clarified that while Mr Advani would "meet" the Hurriyat leader, Kashmir interlocutor N.N. Vohra remained "the Centre's negotiator". Mr Sinha added that this move was part of India's internal process and had nothing to do with Pakistan. Mr Vohra also held a 20-minute meeting with Mr Advani later and told reporters, "I don't think it is necessary to re-define my role. I am still here."

TNN adds from Srinagar: Hailing Mr Advani's appointment, Mr Ansari said a decision on whether to meet Mr Advani or not would be taken by the Hurriyat executive, which would meet on Thursday.

Our hands are tied: Centre's water experts

By T. Ramakrishnan

CHENNAI, OCT. 12. Water experts in the Central Government express their helplessness in coming to the rescue of States, such as Tamil Nadu, in resolving inter-State river disputes and inter-basin transfer issue.

Water being a State subject, the Centre's role is limited. With the latest amendment to the Inter-State Water Disputes Act, the Centre has to establish a disputes resolution tribunal within a year of receipt of a request from any State. "Beyond this, we cannot do much," says a senior official, dealing with issues concerning an inter-State river.

Many water experts in Tamil Nadu are of the view that the Centre has not been proactive in ensuring effective functioning of the Cauvery River Authority or in answering objections to the Pamba-Achankovil-Vaipar link, mooted by the National Water Development Agency.

Acknowledging the Centre's position on such issues, C.D. Thattai, secretary-general, International Commission on Irrigation and Drainage and member-secretary of the task force on interlinking of rivers, says the law group of the task force is seized of the matter and is looking at various options, including making a new law or a Constitutional amendment to enable Central intervention.

Also, some experts in Tamil Nadu say that under Entry-56 of the Union List (which enables the Centre to regulate and develop inter-State rivers and river valleys to the extent allowed by Parliament), the Centre's role can be enlarged for control of the rivers.

On the issue of making the CRA more functional, the experts in the Central Government say it will be worth drawing lessons from the example of the Upper Yamuna River Board, established as a sequel to an agreement signed by the States

concerned. It has been provided in the constitution of the Board that in case of a dispute over regulation of flows at any structure, such as storage points/barrages, it can take over the operation and control of such a structure until the dispute is resolved. This has to be approved by the Upper Yamuna Review Committee.

Even in the Cauvery case, the original draft scheme, prepared by the Centre for implementation of the interim award of the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal, had more or less a similar provision, empowering the Authority. But this was dropped following opposition from Karnataka and Kerala. The experts in the Central Government, however, say river basin organisations, if set up, will provide solutions to disputes such as the Cauvery row. Under this concept, any river, inter-State or intra-State, is treated as one unit and accordingly, its development and management are planned.

Centre dumps CAS onus on states

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

New Delhi, Sept. 15: The Centre has thrown up its hands on trying to implement the conditional access system by itself and has left it to the state governments. An amendment to the cable act was also in the works to vest the responsibility of implementing the set-top box regime with states.

However, the amendment would only be possible after the first phase of the regime was set rolling in some fashion in the four metros. Union information

and broadcasting secretary Pawan Chopra asked representatives of the governments of Bengal and Maharashtra to suggest new dates from when pay channel signals would be encrypted and routed through set-top boxes in Calcutta and Mumbai.

"There seemed to have been an unstated consensus that CAS can be implemented in the other metros only after it is implemented in Delhi," a source said.

The Bengal government's representative, information secretary Basudev Banerjee, asked for clarifications on the modalities of implementing CAS. He also suggested that the state governments needed to set up committees to oversee the implementation.

This suggestion was taken up immediately and Chopra said it would be accepted with the minister's consent.

The Bengal government representative said that in any case, the regime could not be implemented before the pujas. The festival season would last in Calcutta till October 27.

The state government has said that it would also need to renotify the zones in which CAS

would be implemented. In the Centre's notification, set-top boxes were to have become mandatory from September 1 in a large swathe of south Calcutta. The Bengal representative said there were also worries on the pricing of pay channels.

Other I&B ministry sources said that though the Bengal and Maharashtra governments were not putting it on the record, there was a distinct perception that CAS could not be rolled out in Calcutta and Mumbai before it was implemented in Delhi. CAS has been deferred in Delhi till the Assembly elections.

The Maharashtra principal secretary (home), Jeevan Vibhar, is understood to have told the Centre of the state administration's concern on the set-top box regime being used to disrupt law and order. The police in Mumbai were already overstretched, he said.

I&B ministry sources said that henceforth, "the Centre's role in CAS is going to be a little less 'central'. We see justification in empowering states to become a registering authority for cable operations. It would be easier to systemise and enforce changes in that way."

No-trust state, says funds-giving Centre

Tarun Goswami
in Kolkata

Sept. 2. — It's not only CAS that has the state and the Centre on the war-path. For, the Centre will now be its own book-keeper for funds that it provides to the state. To prevent diversion of funds by the state government, the Centre has begun insisting on the issuance of utilisation certificates for Centrally-funded projects. Moreover, the amounts unspent by the state will now have to be refunded.

The order has created a flutter in state government circles. Senior officials liken this to "total humiliation ... how can the Centre issue this when we issue a proper utilisation certificate".

A note has been issued by the deputy commissioner of the Union water resources department to the pay and accounts officer while releasing a fund (grant-in-aid) of Rs 4.27 crore to the state government for anti-erosion works in the Ganga basin states for 2002-2003.

A senior state irrigation department official said the government had approached the Centre for funds for various projects, including protection of embankments in Malda and Murshidabad for which the money was released.

The note states: "The government of West Bengal shall ensure that the amount is utilised for the purpose for which it is granted so that the objec-

tive of grant-in-aid is achieved. Officers of the Flood Control Commission will inspect the works to ensure in a broad way that the works have actually been executed according to the progress/inspection reports furnished. In case it is found that the government of West Bengal has not been able to utilise the amount for the purpose, the state government shall be liable to refund the entire amount of grant to Government of India forthwith."

A Central official insisted that West Bengal has been "very callous about issuing utilisation certificates." Moreover, funds are often diverted without taking permission from the funding authorities, he said.

THE STATESMAN

3 SEP 2003

Hurriyat must talk to Vohra

TIMES NEWS NETWORK & PTI

Centre State 11-5 1918

Srinagar: Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani said on Thursday Pakistan should realise that terrorist attacks, such as those in Mumbai and Srinagar this week, could derail the peace process between the two countries before it got any headway.



L.K. Advani

Speaking to journalists here on the second and concluding day of the inter-state council meeting, he said both the militants killed in the attack on the telegraph office here were Pakistanis, who belonged to the Lashkar-e-Toiba.

"I am sure that our neighbour would be conscious of the fact that the happenings of the kind that happened here yesterday and in Mumbai two days ago are likely to affect the whole peace process adversely," Mr Advani said. He appealed to the neighbouring country to work towards confidence-building measures.

Mr Advani said the Union government would like the Hurriyat Conference leaders to first talk to Centre's interlocutor N.N.

Vohra before opening a dialogue with New Delhi. The Centre and the states have agreed to retain in the constitution the provision to impose President's rule but decided to introduce safeguards to prevent its misuse, Mr Advani said.

The meeting, presided over by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, "has reached a consensus on Article 356 of the constitution that it should not be repealed but more safeguards should be added to prevent its misuse," Mr Advani said. Giving details of the decisions arrived at the meeting, attended by several chief ministers, Mr Advani said a bill containing amendments to this effect would be drafted and introduced in parliament.

Observing that the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission on Centre-state relations have dominated the proceedings of the council since its inception in 1990, Mr Advani voiced happiness that "important agenda was completed here and most of its recommendations were accepted".

The council accepted the commission's recommendation that Article 356 should be used "sparingly" and as a "measure of last resort", Union law minister Arun Jaitley said.

29 AUG 2003

State meet settles 356

SEEMAGUHA *67*

Srinagar, Aug. 28: The interstate council meeting here wound up by finally laying to rest the long political debate on the Centre's use of Article 356 to dismiss a state government.

The Centre retained the right to wield the constitutional provision, but only as a last resort and with ample restrictions to prevent misuse.

The council's focus since its inception in 1990 has been the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission to strengthen the country's federal system.

The council said at the meeting that a governor's report recommending dismissal of a government should be in the nature of a speaking document, which means all reasons should be clearly explained.

The Centre accepted the commission's recommendation that

29/8
an Assembly should not be dissolved before the proclamation has been laid before Parliament for it to consider the adequacy of the grounds.

The chief ministers gathered at the meeting, however, found unacceptable the commission's suggestion that a government defeated on the floor of the Assembly should not continue in office as caretaker.

Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani emphasised the country's growing healthy, cooperative federal structure. "My experience with states ruled by Opposition parties has been very good. Our discussions have always been healthy and non-partisan," he said.

According to Advani, these were pointers to the growing political maturity of the country's democratic structure. Another pointer was the consensus on all the council's decisions; the Cen-

Centre note
tre formalised what was more or less cleared by the council's standing committee earlier.

From the next session, however, the council will focus on good governance, thus moving away from the earlier sessions' exclusive emphasis on the Sarkaria Commission report.

For the purpose, the Prime Minister will choose a sub-committee of chief ministers to draw a blueprint. Atal Bihari Vajpayee wanted the council secretariat to focus on monitoring the action plan for good governance.

Discussing Article 355 that lays down the Centre's duty to protect states against external aggression and internal disturbance, the council felt prior consultations with a state may not always be possible before deploying the armed forces there when the country is faced with a security threat.

401 INTER-STATE COUNCIL MEET

Consensus on retaining Art. 356 with safeguards

Centre-State

By Vinay Kumar 29/8

SRINAGAR, AUG. 28. The Centre and the States have reached a consensus on retaining Article 356 in the Constitution that empowers the Centre to impose President's Rule in a State, but favoured incorporating certain safeguards to check its misuse.

At a press conference here today after the conclusion of the two-day Inter-State Council meeting, the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, said Article 356 had dominated the Council's deliberations since its inception in 1990. The Centre would incorporate the essential features of the Bommai case judgment into the Constitution. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, who presided over the meeting, has asked the Union Law Ministry to draft amendments to Article 356 and these would be introduced in Parliament.

Mr. Advani said that all the decisions taken by the Council were "unanimous" and that all the Chief Ministers felt that such unanimity had not been seen previously.

"As the Home Minister for the past five years, I have found that the deliberations of the Inter-State Council have always been non-partisan and constructive. As a result of this cooperation from the States, many ruled by the Congress and the Left, we are seeing a good, healthy, cooperative federalism functioning in the country," he said. As the Council had done away with the Sarkaria Commission recommendations, the forum would now be used for sorting out crucial issues of cooperative federalism and socio-economic concerns — a major decision at the Srinagar session.

'Only as last resort'

Briefing reporters on the Council's deliberations in relation to Article 356, the Union Law Minister, Arun Jaitley, said the provision should be used only as the last resort. The Council felt that where the invocation of Article 356 was necessitated, the facts and the detailed reasons should be brought to the notice of the State Gov-

ernment concerned and its response obtained. The Council decided that material facts and grounds on which Article 356 is invoked should be made an integral part of the proclamation issued under the Article. Also, the Governor's report should be in the nature of a "speaking document".

Mr. Jaitley said that it was observed that the remedy provided in Article 365 was less harsh than that in Article 356. The Centre derives power from Article 365 to take action when there is a failure on the part of a State to carry out directions given to it under Articles 256 and 257. However, the Council noted that till date the Centre had never issued directions under the two constitutional provisions and that no proclamation had been issued under Article 356 based on Article 365.

Referring to Article 355 which lays down the duty of the Union to protect every State against "external aggression" and "internal disturbance", the Council said that in an emergency situation threatening the country's security, prior consultation with the State Government concerned before deploying troops there *suo motu* would not be possible. However, in other circumstances of domestic trouble it would be desirable to consult the State concerned as recommended by the Sarkaria Commission.

Action plan

The Council decided to set up a sub-committee of select Chief Ministers to prepare the blueprint for an "Action Plan on Good Governance" which could be discussed at the next meeting.

Taking note of the action taken report on the recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission, which submitted its report on Centre-State relations in 1988, the Council said that of the 247 recommendations, decisions had been taken in respect of 230 of which 170 had been implemented. Seven others were at various stages of implementation while 53 were found unacceptable, and the deliberations in Srinagar were on the remaining 17.

SEE FINDO

29 AUG 2003

Door open for those who shun terror: PM

Srinagar - Gali

Aloke Tikku in Srinagar

Aug. 27. — In an obvious reference to the Hurriyat Conference that called for a bandh to protest against his arrival in the Valley to chair the eighth inter state council meet, Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee today declared that the Centre's doors were open to those who reject militancy and give up their extreme positions.

Mr Vajpayee — speaking at the inaugural session of the inter state council (ISC) that was moved from Vigyan Bhawan in Delhi to an auditorium on the banks of the Dal Lake to send a loud and clear message that the situation in the Valley was turning around, obliquely coun-

tered the Hurriyat criticism that successful Assembly election was not of any significance, reiterating that it was not just the "finest victories" in world history of the victory of the ballot over bullet but "a mandate for peace".

"It was a mandate against cross-border terrorism, which the people of this state have suffered for over a decade and paid a heavy price," he said, promising to help the state government consolidate the "recent gains".

"We will further intensify our sincere efforts to advance the dialogue process," he said on his second visit to the Valley since April this year that set the ball rolling for a fresh peace initiative. "Our doors are

open to all those who reject militancy and extreme positions and wish to play a constructive role in taking Jammu and Kashmir forward on the high road of peace and rapid development," he said.

The Prime Minister will be in the Valley till tomorrow and would leave for Jammu on 29 August. Officials said he was scheduled to meet delegations of state political leaders and others who had sought meetings with him. There has been no request from anyone in the Hurriyat Conference for a meeting with the Prime Minister, an official said, suggesting they appeared to have made their mind to meet the prime minister only if they were given a specific

invitation. As things stand, the official indicated, they were not going to get one. Not till they showed signs of giving up their "extreme positions".

Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani urged states to ensure that a decision on recommendations of the Sarkaria commission were concluded at this meet to enable utilization of the forum for other issues of more recent origin. If discussions at this council are held without political and ideological prejudices with an eye to evolve national consensus. Problems faced by states in their campaign against terrorism could be one of them, he said.

It was a point that the Prime Minister clearly agreed with. "Let us bring

the discussion on Sarkaria Commission's recommendations to a final and consensual conclusion at the Srinagar meeting," he urged the meeting attended by just about a dozen odd chief ministers, the other states represented by nominees of the chief ministers.

"All of you will perhaps agree with me that the dynamics of social, economic and political forces in India has changed significantly since the Sarkaria Commission submitted its report," Mr Vajpayee said, pointing that the end of one party rule at the Centre has inaugurated a new process of harmonization of regional aspirations within an overarching national outlook.



Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and Mr LK Advani greet chief ministers before a national conference in Srinagar on Wednesday. — AFP

Art 356 as last resort, agree Centre & states

Aloke Tikku in Srinagar

Aug. 28. — More than a decade after the Centre and states started a discussion at Inter-state Council meetings on Article 356 of the Constitution that empowers the Centre to impose President's Rule, they came around to accepting that the Centre should retain this controversial power but should invoke it "sparingly" and only as a "last resort".

On its part, the Centre agreed to the demand for safeguards against its misuse and will move Parliament to introduce a constitutional amendment. The amendment would, among other things, make it mandatory to incorporate the justification for imposing President's Rule in the Proclamation issued under this Article.

The Prime Minister today asked law minister Mr Arun Jaitley to draft amendments on the Inter-state Council's recommendations after the Centre bent backwards to accommodate the states' demand to conclude discussions on recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission and focus the next

ISC meeting on "good governance".

The Deputy Prime Minister announced that the two-day meeting of the council, presided over by Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee, had "reached a consensus on Article 356 of the Constitution that it should not be repealed but more safeguards should be added to prevent its misuse".

Mr K. Advani said it was also decided that Article 365 should be retained because it could prevent taking hasty action under Article 356. Mr Jaitley added the chief ministers agreed that the state government should be given full opportunity to explain its position and the Assembly should only be kept in suspended animation and not dissolved as ruled by the Supreme Court in the Bommai case.

But the Centre convinced the states — they were demanding that the Centre be empowered to deploy Central forces only after concurrence of the state — to give up their demand and agreed to consult the states, wherever feasible, before deploying the forces for protection against "external aggression" and "internal disturbance".

ART. 356, 365 TO BE IN FOCUS AGAIN

Vajpayee to chair Inter-State Council meet in Srinagar

By Vinay Kumar

J. L. G. Note
NEW DELHI, AUG. 24. The issue of the Centre's right to *suo motu* deploy armed forces in the States and Article 356 of the Constitution which empowers the Centre to impose President's rule in a State form the core of the agenda for the Inter-State Council meeting to be presided over by the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, in Srinagar on August 27-28.

The two-day meeting, being held outside the capital for the first time, will have an extensive debate on Articles 356 and 365, the two most widely discussed provisions of the Constitution. Article 365 empowers the Centre to apply sanctions against a State Government which fails to comply with its directions under Articles 256 and 257 of the Constitution that are concerned with the construction and maintenance of roads, rail and waterways declared to be of national or military importance.

It will be Mr. Vajpayee's second visit to Jammu and Kashmir in less than four months. He had addressed a public rally in Srinagar on April 18, using the public meeting in the border State to give a call for friendship with Pakistan. The Inter-State Council had last met on November 16, 2001 in the capital. The Council consists of the Prime Minister as Chairman and the Chief Ministers of all the States and the Union Territories with Legislative Assemblies, Lieutenant-Governors of other Union Territories and six Union Cabinet Ministers, including the Deputy Prime Minister, as members. It also has two Union Cabinet Ministers as permanent invitees.

The Prime Minister is also scheduled to visit Jammu on August 28 after the Council's meeting

and official sources indicated that his stay could be extended till the next evening. He is likely to meet several groups of youth and students in Jammu. The suggestion for holding the Inter-State Council meeting in Srinagar was made by Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, during the Standing Committee meeting here on May 13. The Congress-PDP Government has also played host to a number of meetings of Parliamentary Standing Committees over the past few months, sending out positive signals outside the State which have helped it witness a revival of tourism in the State. The Mufti Government can also boast of conducting a peaceful Amarnath Yatra from Jammu to the Valley which drew good participation.

Amid concerns for the security of the VVIPs who will be making a beeline for Srinagar, the Home Ministry and the State Government's security apparatus have been working hard over the past few weeks to oversee security arrangements, for the Council's meeting. The State Government has also successfully hosted a Congress Chief Ministers' conclave and rolled out the red carpet for the President, A.P.J. Abdul Kalam's visit in the last week of June. As the Chairperson of the Inter-State Council, the Prime Minister is expected to deal with some of the ticklish issues pertaining to the Centre-State relations. At the last meeting of the Standing Committee, the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister had recommended that Article 365 be deleted as it was "redundant". But the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, had felt that since the Constitution gave the Centre the power to give directions there must also be a provision to impose sanctions against non-compliance with directions.

Buddha opposes centralisation

SRINJOY CHOWDHURY
STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Aug 2. — Chief minister of West Bengal, Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, has voiced protests against the Centre's failure to route funds for development schemes through the states. Mr Bhattacharjee alleged that the Centre has gone back on its word without even informing the states. Despite talk on "decentralisation," the "hurried reversal, presumably at the urging of Central ministers, smacks of extreme centralisation".

Mr Bhattacharjee's protests follows the Centre's decision not to release funds relating to most Centrally-sponsored schemes and for externally-aided projects under negotiation to the consolidated fund of the states. If the states failed to pass on the money within three and two weeks respectively, the ministries responsible would withhold subsequent instalments.

After a National Development Council meeting that apparently resolved the Centre-states dispute, Mr Bhattacharjee wrote to the deputy chairman of the Planning Commission, Mr KC Pant, pointing out that the finance ministry had issued office memoranda, the last one in May, agreeing to such a decision.

Earlier, the Centre had said that only nine CSS projects amounting to Rs 6,978 crore of 360

schemes amounting to Rs 98,029 crore, would be controlled by the states.

In his letter, Mr Bhattacharjee made three demands:

- First, the CSS and externally aided projects be routed through the consolidated fund of the states. He has called for joint monitoring and promised that the states would release funds to implementing agencies within a week of receipt.

- The Central ministries continue to have major powers as there would be joint discussion and later, review. The transfer of funds would ensure flexibility and discipline, keeping decentralisation in mind.

- The decision on how many of the 360 schemes could be transferred to the states can be taken later.

In 1997, it had been decided that the CSS projects the Centre would keep would be the ones that were related to national security and inter-state issues and some others. The deputy chairman of the Planning Commission and some Union ministers would be responsible for this decentralisation process. Since then, there has been an attempt to merge some schemes and give the states a choice of some schemes in other cases. The states have felt that the Central guidelines would not look at state-related issues as each state has different characteristics.

.. 3 AUG 2003

Centre ready for more power at grassroots

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, July 25. — The Centre plans to give more power to Panchayati Raj institutions in the process of devolution of power to the grassroots. The government will bring a Bill to amend the Constitution further to strengthen the PRIs. This was announced in the Lok Sabha today by rural development minister Mr Kanshiram Rana in his reply to a special discussion on 10 years of the Panchayati Raj. But he failed to provide answers on a number of questions regarding problems plaguing the system.

In the discussion, it was said that in many panchayats, the gram pradhans and the mukhthias corner contracts in the name of fictitious (benami) persons. This results in little work and more loot of money. Some Opposition members alleged that the control of the district magistrate on the PRIs was a big hindrance in executing projects and in getting funds disbursed for works. It is in this regard that the government will amend the Constitution further to bring more power and jurisdiction of work to the panchayats.

A peculiar problem confronts Jharkhand where rules say that all the panchayat heads and other office-bearers will be tribals even in the region where non-tribals constitute a majority of the population. A BJP member from Jharkhand drew the attention of the House to the anomaly and urged that it be ended soon. Jharkhand has not been able to hold panchayat polls for fear of ethnic clashes. Rules have to be amended to give representation to the non-tribals of Jharkhand in the PRIs, members said.

The discussion took place on the proposal of the Congress on the occasion of 10 years of the Panchayati Raj system which was introduced first by Rajiv Gandhi and implemented in 1993 after amendment of the Constitution.

THE HINDU

PM urges Bengal to ditch dogma

Statesman News Service

KOLKATA, July 16. — The Prime Minister today delivered West Bengal's ruling Marxists a well-aimed, though tacit, rebuke by criticising the state government for its political "dogmatism". He implied that the "extreme positions" taken by a faction of the ruling dispensation in the past had been a major contributory factor in bringing the state to the brink of industrial bankruptcy. And in an attempt to soften the blow, he threw words of encouragement at the chief minister, saying he was doing his bit to turn things around.

It's not for nothing that he's known as one of the most seasoned politicians in India: Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee followed up this mild praise with some mild criticism and urged Mr Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee to stop "repeating the decades-old complaint... (that) the Centre discriminates against the state. Our track record over the past five years shows that we don't follow a policy of discrimination on political or ideological grounds."

The Prime Minister was addressing a gathering of indus-



CALM DOWN, CM: After spending the afternoon at the receiving end of gentle barbs, and some praise, from Mr Vajpayee, Mr Bhattacharjee seems all set to pour ice on the former. Not literally, of course! in Kolkata on Wednesday. — Rajib De

try barons and other dignitaries on the occasion. Following the government's late realisation of what needs to be done, Mr Vajpayee said, winds of change have started blowing, but "quite mildly". A lot of "catching up" remains to be done to usher in "a new

work culture and a pro-growth mindset" that would ensure revival of business. He lauded the recent initiatives in IT, biotechnology and pharmaceuticals and described the Haldia Petrochemicals project as a "small beginning" in the sector.

Mr Vajpayee stressed on the "need for introspection by all sections of society" to answer certain questions. "Bengal was the undisputed leader and promoter of industrial culture in India till the late 1960s. Why did it lose its way thereafter?... As recently as 1981, Bengal's per capita income was above the national average. Two decades later, it fell below the national average. Why did this happen? Why did business leave Bengal?"

Mr Bhattacharjee coaxed the Centre to include representatives of the governments of West Bengal and Sikkim in the joint study group of officials and economists agreed upon to examine Indo-China trade and economic issues. He also took the opportunity to urge the Centre to enhance allocations for road, air and water transport facilities and telecommunications services.

Mr Sumit Mazumder, BCCI president, called upon the Centre to provide a modern international airport, more international flights and a convention centre for Kolkata.

Another report on page 8
Traffic chaos, Kolkata Plus I

TIGHT security notwithstanding, there was many a slip. The one that sent ripples of laughter was when the PM got a taste of things done the Bengal way. Mr Vajpayee was invited to unveil the chamber's commemorative plaque with the push of a button. Press as hard as he did, nothing happened. Then a bright spark solved the problem: he yanked the curtain apart with his hands!

INTERESTINGLY, referring to the Indo-China trade agreement, Mr Vajpayee said the trade route through Nathu La was converging at "Tibet". His written script mentioned "China". Playing to the gallery, Mr PM?

HE came, he rested, he ate, and then he left. All in a few hours. Around 12.45 p.m. the PM's entourage arrived at Hyatt. Mr Vajpayee went straight to his suite. Around 1.15 p.m. when the Governor, chief minister, Mr Jyoti Basu and other dignitaries arrived. There were 25 tables laid out at the Regency Ballroom. The lunch, no wonder, was elaborate. The PM's favourites were all there: tandoori salmon tikka, makai palak, chinggrri malaikari, chappati and papad. No prizes for guessing the dessert: sandesh, date pancakes, diced mango and vanilla ice-cream. — SNS

Vohra briefs Advani on talks in J&K

By Our Special Correspondent

Centre Govt *HP-11* *377*

NEW DELHI, JULY 2. The Centre's interlocutor on Jammu and Kashmir, N.N. Vohra, met the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, today and briefed him on the progress of his talks with various groups in the State.

Responding to questions at a media briefing about the progress of the talks, Mr. Vohra said he was listening to different voices. "The process was one of dialogue and not mathematics. Different views had to be heard and synthesised," he said.

Mr. Vohra, who held a round of talks in Kashmir in April, is preparing for similar talks in Ladakh and Kargil. Asked whether talks had been planned with the All-Party Hurriyat Conference — which did not meet him while he was in Srinagar — Mr. Vohra said that everyone would be heard. To the Hurriyat's public posture that it would not talk to the Centre's negotiator, Mr. Vohra said the situation would be considered if "it is their final view".

There has been a great deal of scepticism over what Mr. Vohra's talks will achieve, given the history of the Centre's "talks on autonomy" with Jammu and Kashmir.

Mr. Advani recently told reporters that Mr. Vohra was there "to find out if there is any kind of realignment of relationship between Srinagar and Jammu, Srinagar and Leh, Srinagar and Delhi which would satisfy their aspirations. Is the present level of autonomy enough?"

Home Ministry officials, however, said that Mr. Vohra's talks focus "mostly on issues of sub-regional autonomy", that is, between Srinagar and Jammu and Leh. And Girish Saxena, former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, described Mr. Vohra's talks as a "parallel process" to the diplomatic process underway to find a solution to the Kashmir problem.

Centre's emissary begins dialogue with people of J&K

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Jammu: As the Centre's interlocutor N.N. Vohra began his interaction here with various political and social groups and prominent individuals on Monday, the common view was that any solution to the "so-called Kashmir problem" should not be "Valley-centric," but should also include the aspirations of the people of Jammu and Ladakh.



N.N. Vohra

The talks, scheduled to continue till June 14, began on Sunday as the Panthers Party presented a memorandum to Mr Vohra and its chief Bhim Singh had a long discussion with him.

The interlocutor, accompanied by an eight-member team, on Monday

met leaders of the BSP, JD (U), JD (S), Jammu State Morcha and the Akali Dal (B). Prominent individuals who presented their views included human rights activist Balraj Puri and former DGP M.M. Khajuria.

Mr Bhim Singh and Jammu State Morcha's Shri Kumar favoured the reorganisation of the state. While the former said it would strengthen national integration and restore peace, the latter, specifically advocating trifurcation, said this would end the "subjugation" of the people of Jammu and Ladakh by leaders of Kashmir. They also called for the settlement of the Kashmiri Pandits.

Another common view was that the Kashmir dispute arose because of the occupation of a part of the state and gifting a slice of it to China by Pakistan and any talks with that

country should begin with this point.

It was also frequently stressed that any weightage to groups like the Hurriyat should depend not on media hype but on its actual popularity.

Mr Puri wanted Mr Vohra's brief to be defined in terms of its "internal and external dimensions" and its scope.

He said the overcentralisation of polity was the root cause of the disturbance of peace and the regional tensions. He favoured a five-tier regional autonomy.

Some other points made at Monday's interaction were implementation of the Wazir Commission report on creating more districts, a fresh delimitation commission and granting Jammu a fair representation in the legislature.

PACT TO ARM ARTICLE 356 WITH SAFEGUARDS

Centre, States differ on deployment of Army

NEW DELHI, MAY 13. The issue of the Centre's to unilaterally deploy armed forces in States divided the meeting of the Inter-State Council's standing committee here today. Several State Governments felt that the Army should be sent into a State only with the "concurrence" of the Government concerned.

The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, who chaired the meeting, told presspersons that he was in favour of provisions permitting the Centre to *suo motu* deploy troops. There had not been "a single instance" of the Centre taking unilateral action since Independence, he said. The situation was that the State Governments regularly made requests for the support of the armed forces which the Centre was not able to provide.

However, he said he could "conceive of a situation where the Central Government feels armed forces should be sent and the State Government does not agree. Article 355 of the Constitution charges the Central Government with the duty to protect States and where the use of armed forces — even if a State does not want it — is obligatory. Mr. Advani said that such a situation could arise "not only in Jammu and Kashmir but also in the east and northeastern States".

The meeting, convened to discuss 17 recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission (on Centre-State relations), ended with a decision to accept the Commission's recommendation that it would be desirable to have "prior consultation" with the State Government "before deploying Union armed forces *suo motu* in aid of civil power".

Another issue that divided the meeting today was the Centre's right to apply sanctions against States which failed to comply



The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, with (from left) the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh, the West Bengal Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, the Kerala Chief Minister, A.K. Antony, and the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, at the ninth Inter-State Council Meeting of the Standing Committee, in New Delhi on Tuesday. — Photo: V. Sudershan

with its directions under Articles 256 and 257 of the Constitution, which are concerned with the construction and maintenance of roads, rail and waterways declared to be of national or military importance.

Article 365 empowers the Centre to apply sanctions against a Government which fails to comply with such directions. The Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister recommended that Article 365 be deleted as it was "redundant".

Mr. Advani, however, felt that since the Constitution gave the Centre the power to give directions there must also be a provision to take sanctions against non-compliance with the directions. Other States on the committee, including West Bengal, Kerala, Assam and Jammu and Kashmir, felt that if a State failed to comply it should be referred to the Inter-State Council.

The Inter-State council was set up in 1988 to deal with disputes between States and between the Centre and the States. Mr. Advani was amenable to the suggestion that the matter be referred to the Council.

Among the recommendations accepted by the standing committee, meeting for the ninth time since the Council was formed, was that Article 356 (President's Rule) "should be used as a measure of last resort".

It was agreed, Mr. Advani said, that safeguards suggested in judicial pronouncements, as in the Bommai case (which calls for the ratification of the decision by both Houses of Parliament), should be incorporated in the Constitution.

However, no new legislation was planned for the coming session. Parties in Parliament would be consulted before a decision was taken.

1 5 MAY 2003

THE HINDU

Mufti skirts terror, speaks welfare at Advani meeting

Our Political Bureau
NEW DELHI 12 MAY

NOTWITHSTANDING his public stance favouring "softening" of borders in J&K and a possible ceasefire between the militant groups and the government, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed did not bother to raise the two suggestions at his meeting with deputy prime minister L.K. Advani on Monday.

Though the Mufti was closeted with Mr Advani for a good 30 minutes, the focus of his discussion was on routine development issues like action on the Prime Minister's employment package announced during his J&K visit on April 19. He also sought a special initiative from the Centre to promote tourism in the state to put the economy on its track.

Even as he presented the deputy prime minister with an update on the general law and order situation in the state, the chief minister skipped any mention of his proposals for "soft borders" or a unilateral ceasefire on



MUFTI: DEVELOPMENTSPEAK

the lines of the one called by the Hizbul Mujahideen in 2000.

The fact that the Mufti's is a coalition government and its partner, the Congress, can ill-afford to be seen as countenancing his "soft border" and "ceasefire" positions, may have held back the J&K chief minister from discussing these issues. Neither would he have found support from the Centre even if he had raised the issues with Mr Advani.

It was only on Sunday that he had sought freedom for the people on either side of the line of

control. Pressing for his "confidence building measures," the Mufti said: "When the border between Rajasthan and Sindh can be opened, why cannot the same be done for our state... this will only increase the pace of normalisation... and trading activities."

However, inside Mr Advani's office, Mr Sayeed restricting himself to enquiring about the creation of the two lakh jobs in the state. He was told that a task force had been constituted to look into the matter and was scheduled to submit its suggestions before August 15 this year. The Cabinet secretary will monitor the package, Mr Advani informed the Mufti.

The issue of nursing the tourism industry back to health also came up for discussion. Mr Sayeed, said sources, asked for some special initiatives from the Centre to sell the state as a secure tourist destination. He requested the deputy prime minister to pass a directive to other ministries, asking them and other government institutions to hold conferences in Jammu and Kashmir.

Centre-State ties depoliticised: Advani

NEW DELHI, MAY 10. Asserting that the Vajpayee Government had "de-politicised and de-ideologised" Centre-State relations, the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, today said such a "conscious" approach had led to "smoother and harmonious" relations between the two.

"I can state that the Centre's conduct with all the States has been completely even-handed. Our style of governance is highly consultative. I count it as one of our Government's several successes that we have completely de-politicised and de-ideologised Centre-State relations," he said at the 'India

Today' Chief Ministers' Conclave. Castigating parties for sometimes adopting an approach of political untouchability, Mr. Advani said "ideological untouchability should be tabooed" when the question of national interest arises. "A qualitative change has occurred in the Centre where many regional parties which have got together under the banner of the NDA have played a major role in national politics... the NDA is a political manifestation of the social diversity of India."

This had given an alternative



The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, with the Chief Ministers of Andhra Pradesh and Gujarat, N. Chandrababu Naidu and Narendra Modi, at the Chief Ministers' conclave in New Delhi on Saturday. — PTI

approach to the Indian polity and the rulers of the country as to how regional aspirations could be blended to have a national perspective.

Several Chief Ministers including N. Chandrababu Naidu (Andhra Pradesh), Rabri Devi (Bihar), Narendra Modi (Gujarat) and Manohar Parikar (Goa), besides Union Ministers and leaders of political parties were present at the gathering where

Goa was adjudged the best State in the overall category.

"For the first time, the country has evolved a cohesive political platform capable of providing stable governance at the Centre and, at the same time, harmonising regional aspirations with a national perspective," Mr. Advani said.

At times he had faced criticism for having "a good functional relationship" with the

Chief Ministers of Opposition-ruled States of West Bengal, Tripura and Jammu and Kashmir. "We have consciously adopted this approach because it is our conviction that the interests of the nation must always supersede all other considerations. This had made possible the holding of impartial Assembly elections in Jammu and Kashmir, Tripura and

Meghalaya. — PTI

30 APR 1973

THE STATESMAN

NATION

Centre ready for truce: Vohra

Statesman News Service

JAMMU, April 29. — The Centre's interlocutor for Jammu and Kashmir, Mr Narendar Nath Vohra, today said the Centre would not hesitate to declare cease-fire in the state if the situation so demanded.

The declaration of truce will depend on ground realities for which the situation has to be monitored. "If the need arises and ground situation demands, I don't think anybody will have any hesitation and objection in declaring truce," Mr Vohra said. He was addressing a press conference in Srinagar this afternoon.

Mr Vohra's statement is considered significant because he has the Centre's blessings in his Mission Kashmir. But this does not enthuse the state's key players

Despite the fact that the Hurriyat Conference did not meet him, Mr Vohra still foresees a dialogue with all including those who have not talked to him during this visit.

The Centre's interlocutor for J&K said declarations of cease-fire and non-initiation of combat operations have taken place in the past. The Centre will not hesitate in declaring another cease-fire. Terming Kashmir as a political issue, he said the people of the state were led up with violence and wanted to lead a peaceful life.

Mr Vohra said he had thought it better to give an open invitation for talks through the media to all the people including those who have different perceptions.

On the Prime Minister's announcement that Mr Vohra had come to the state with envelopes carrying invitation, he said this did not imply that those who are sensitive

invitations for the Hurriyat Conference or other separatist groups.

Mr Vohra termed the Pakistani Prime Minister's telephonic conversation with Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee as "significant" and hoped that this time the process would be taken forward.

"The Prime Minister took several measures for peace and prosperity such as the Lahore bus yatra and Agra summit. But it did not help. Now he extended an olive branch during his visit to Kashmir from this soil and it has evoked a positive reaction from Pakistan. Mr Zaffar ullah Khan Jamali's talks with Mr Vajpayee is good and hopefully it will help in our endeavours."

Mr Vohra said he had met around 30 political, non-political and non-governmental organisations and 117 individuals during his sojourn stay in the city. He has



Mr NN Vohra leaves for Delhi after addressing a press conference in Srinagar on Tuesday. — PTI

believes Kashmiris are fed-up with violence and disenchanted with the arm culture.

Hurriyat refuses to meet Vohra

By Shujaat Bukhari)

SRINAGAR, APRIL 24. The All-Party Hurriyat Conference today officially rejected the Centre's peace offer by refusing to hold talks with the latter's interlocutor on Kashmir, N. N. Vohra, and instead sought a "meaningful" dialogue at the highest level.

The senior Hurriyat leaders, Mohammad Yasin Malik and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq, said "the

executive council has unanimously decided not to hold talks with Mr. Vohra". "(The Hurriyat does not see any scope in such talks," Mr. Malik said adding "if we talk to him we will be compromising our stand that New Delhi should talk to only those who dispute its presence in Kashmir". "The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's gesture to hold talks with Pakistan is a welcome step and we have also been stressing on a trian-

gular approach but as far as the talks with the Kashmiris are concerned they seem to be directionless," he said.

Reiterating that the dialogue should be on the pattern of the Naga talks, Mr. Malik said, "though there is no similarity between Nagaland and Kashmir as the latter is an internationally recognised dispute, New Delhi has been using a different yardstick".

The Mirwaiz said, "if India thinks it can resolve this complex issue by talking to pro-India parties, it is free to do so. No one can tie its hands". But, "if New Delhi is serious in resolving the Kashmir issue it should only talk to those who oppose its rule in the State".

Even those who met Mr. Vohra had maintained that the talks should be held with the parties outside the mainstream, Mr. Malik said.

"If New Delhi is not ready for tripartite talks, let it consider what we call a triangular approach," he said.

S.K. Sinha new J&K Governor?

By Luv Puri

JAMMU, APRIL 24. S. K. Sinha, a retired Lieutenant General, is tipped to succeed G. C. Saxena as the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir on May 1. Mr. Saxena's term expires on May 2. Official sources said that the Chief Minister, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed, had given his consent to the name of Mr. Sinha, till recently the Governor of Assam.

In the past, the Mufti had pressed for a person with a civilian background to be appointed Governor but due to the security scenario prevailing in the State the Centre apparently has not agreed to his demand.

Hurriyat won't meet Vohra

State News Service

JAMMU, April 24. — In what could be termed as a serious setback to Mr NN Vohra's Mission Kashmir, the All Party Hurriyat Conference today formally rejected the Centre's new interlocutor for Kashmir talks saying the conglomerate would not enter into negotiations with him as "Mr Vohra's mission is directionless, lacks will to solve the vexed Kashmir issue and is aimed at talking to those who are already in the mainstream."

The Hurriyat not only set out its own set of "three fundamentals which will guide the future negotiations between New Delhi and the APHC," it also insisted on unconditional talks on Kashmir. After a marathon APHC executive council meeting at the party headquarters at Rajbagh in Srinagar today, Md Yasin Malik, and Mirwaiz Umar Farooq told a news conference that they have unanimously decided not to talk to Mr Vohra as there is no clarity in his agenda and ideas. "We have set our three fundamentals for talks which are: dialogue should be without preconditions, it should be at the highest level and the talks should be with those people who represent the disputed nature of the Kashmir problem," the senior Hurriyat leaders added. "We are ready to talk for resolving the vexed Kashmir issue, but the process should be sincere. Even mainstream political parties have said that Mr Vohra should talk to separatists," he added. Criticising Mufti Sayeed, he said Mr Sayeed during his stint in the Congress was supporting the unconditional dialogue with separatists and even left the party when the high command refused to accept his theory. Reiterating triangular talks between Delhi, Islamabad and people of Kashmir, Mirwaiz Umar Farooq said if the Kashmir issue has to be addressed then every party has to bring flexibility in their stand. Welcoming Mr AB

Lt-Gen. Sinha new J&K Governor

JAMMU, April 24. — Lieutenant general (retd) Srinivas Kumar Sinha will soon be sworn in as the new Governor of Jammu and Kashmir. He will replace Mr Girish Chander Saxena whose term expires on May 2. Lt. Gen. Sinha will take oath as the new governor on 1 May in a small function at Jammu Rajbhavan. Mr Saxena whose term expires on 2 May, would be leaving for Delhi on 30 April. — SNS

Vajpayee's offer of friendship to Pakistan, he said it has been welcomed by its Prime Minister, Mr Zaffar-ullah Khan Jamali.

Pak ready for talks

"Pakistan is ready to talk on all issues including Kashmir," President Musharrarf told a group of editors in Islamabad adding, "Mr Vajpayee's offer of talks is a good move and a victory for both the countries," adds PTI. Saying that Mr Vajpayee's offer augured well for peace in the region, he expressed optimism that it would move forward.

Opp seeks no clarification

In a rare departure from rules, the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha today refrained from seeking clarifications to the Prime Minister's statement extending a fresh offer of dialogue and friendship to Pakistan if it stopped cross-border terrorism. The Opposition agreed to go along with the government provided it was taken into confidence on any negotiations with Pakistan.

Pak detainees move SC: Three Pakistani nationals detained "arbitrarily" for the past nine years in different J&K jails, have now moved the Supreme Court seeking release. In response to a plea filed by Bisarat Ali Rajput, Abdul Khaliq and M Salahuddin, the Supreme Court has now asked the state to inform within a week about the jails where these Pakistan nationals were lodged.

Mission Vohra in 'low profile' mode

Statesman News Service

JAMMU, April 23. - In between testing his skills at the sprawling Royal Spring Golf Course here, Mr NN Vohra, the Centre's latest point man on Kashmir, has held meetings with several mainstream political leaders since Tuesday.

Separatist leaders have declined to meet him and have termed the initiative as another eye-wash to hoodwink international opinion on Kashmir by. Instead, they have instead demanded a direct dialogue with the Centre or its interlocutors.

Mr Vohra's today met Mr Ghulam Rasool Wani, vice president of Awami League, led by former chief minister and brother-in-law of Mr Farooq Abdullah, Mr Ghulam Muhammad Shah. Nothing filtered out offi-

cially as to what transpired between Mr Wani and Mr Vohra, who's being assisted by the PMO's Kashmir Affairs chief and former RAW chief Mr AS Dulat.

Mr Vohra also met state legislative council member and editor of Urdu daily *Srinagar Times*, Mr Sofi Ghulam Muhammad, at the Chashmashahi guest house today. Mr Sofi was targeted twice by gunmen for his pro-government leanings.

Yesterday, the National Conference president and MP Mr Omar Abdullah held wide ranging discussions with Mr Vohra. The junior Abdullah had supposedly demanded talks with separatists, specially the Hurriyat. Sources said, he expressed strong resentment about the Mr Vajpayee's remarks on free and fair polls in the state.

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PACT TO ARM ARTICLE 356 WITH SAFEGUARDS

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Centre, States differ on deployment of Army

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By Our Special Correspondent

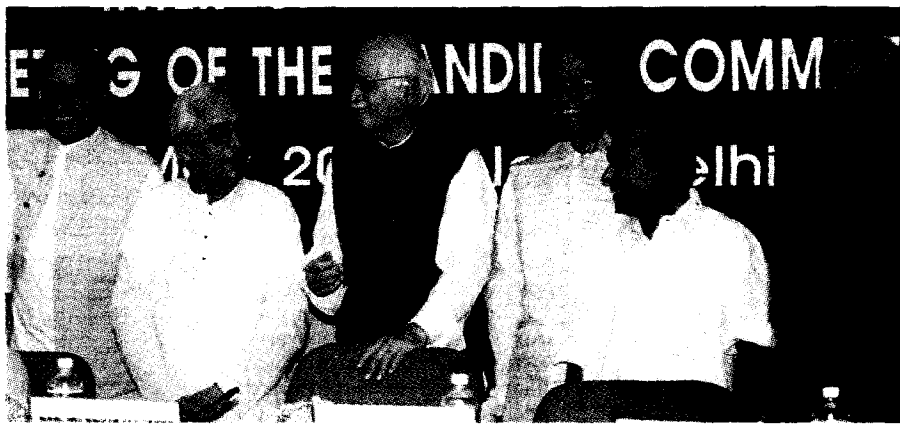
NEW DELHI, MAY 13. The issue of the Centre's right to unilaterally deploy armed forces in the States divided the meeting of the Inter-State Council's standing committee here today. Several State Governments felt that the Army should be sent into a State only with the "concurrence" of the Government concerned.

The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, who chaired the meeting, told presspersons that he was in favour of provisions permitting the Centre to *suo motu* deploy troops. There had not been "a single instance" of the Centre taking unilateral action since Independence, he said. The situation was that the State Governments regularly made requests for the support of the armed forces which the Centre was not able to provide.

However, he said he could "conceive of a situation where the Central Government feels armed forces should be sent and the State Government does not agree. Article 355 of the Constitution charges the Central Government with the duty to protect States and where the use of armed forces — even if the State does not want it — is obligatory". Mr. Advani said that such a situation could arise "not only in Jammu and Kashmir but also in the east and northeastern States".

The meeting, convened to discuss 17 recommendations of the Sarkaria Commission (on Centre-State relations), ended with a decision to accept the Commission's recommendation that it would be desirable to have "prior consultation" with the State Government "before deploying Union armed forces *suo motu* in aid of civil power".

Another issue that divided the meeting today was the Centre's right to apply sanctions against States which failed to comply



The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, with (from left) the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh, the West Bengal Chief Minister, Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee, the Assam Chief Minister, Tarun Gogoi, the Kerala Chief Minister, A.K. Antony, and the Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, at the ninth Inter-State Council Meeting of the Standing Committee, in New Delhi on Tuesday. — Photo: V. Sudershan

with its directions under Articles 256 and 257 of the Constitution, which are concerned with the construction and maintenance of roads, rail and waterways declared to be of national or military importance.

Article 365 empowers the Centre to apply sanctions against a Government which fails to comply with such directions. The Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister recommended that Article 365 be deleted as it was "redundant".

Mr. Advani, however, felt that since the Constitution gave the Centre the power to give directions there must also be a provision to take sanctions against non-compliance with the directions. Other States on the committee, including West Bengal, Kerala, Assam and Jammu and Kashmir, felt that if a State failed to comply it should be referred to the Inter-State Council.

The Inter-State council was set up in 1988 to deal with disputes between States and between the Centre and the States. Mr. Advani was amenable to the suggestion that the matter be referred to the Council.

Among the recommendations accepted by the standing committee, meeting for the ninth time since the Council was formed, was that Article 356 (President's Rule) "should be used as a measure of last resort".

It was agreed, Mr. Advani said, that safeguards suggested in judicial pronouncements, as in the Bommai case (which calls for the ratification of the decision by both Houses of Parliament), should be incorporated in the Constitution.

However, no new legislation was planned for the coming session. Parties in Parliament would be consulted before a decision was taken.

Vohra in Valley, peace hopes soar

MUZAMIL JALEEL
SRINAGAR, APRIL 21

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TWO days after Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee announced a "new beginning" in the Valley, the Centre's latest Kashmir pointman N N Vohra arrived here today for talks.

Although Vohra is not the first interlocutor to try his luck in Kashmir, his mission is taking place in a very conducive atmosphere. The PM's reconciliatory effort to extend hand of friendship to Pakistan and subsequent call for negotiations to all has provoked a positive reaction from

across the border. Even the militant groups, who used to be the worst adversaries of such processes, too have welcomed the latest developments. Then unlike the previous state government, Mufti's coalition is supportive of a dialogue process. This has certainly provided Vohra with an atmosphere where his mission has gained credibility. And if he attempts to get separatists on board, invites Hurriyat Conference and expands the ambit of the dialogue as envisaged by Vajpayee recently, Vohra mission will certainly amount to a "new

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Kashmir's interlocutors

■ **R K Mishra (Track II):** Unofficial parleys with separatists failed.

■ **K C Pant (Official negotiator):** Met separatist leader Shabir Shah; But made no headway.

■ **A S Duttat (Track II):** Got Hurriyat on board, but failed to break ice.

■ **Arun Jaitley (Official pointman):** Mission ended with the defeat of Abdullahs in the assembly polls.

■ **Ram Jethmalani (Track II):** Set up Kashmir Committee, got Hurriyat on board. No breakthrough because of lack of official patronage.

Centre ready for truce: Vohra

Statesman News Service

JAMMU, April 29. — The Centre's interlocutor for Jammu and Kashmir, Mr Narendra Nath Vohra, today said the Centre would not hesitate to declare cease-fire in the state if the situation so demanded.

The declaration of truce will depend on ground realities for which the situation has to be monitored. "If the need arises and ground situation demands, I don't think anybody will have any hesitation and objection in declaring truce," Mr Vohra said. He was addressing a press conference in Srinagar this afternoon.

Mr Vohra's statement is considered significant because he has the Centre's blessings in his 'Mission Kashmir'. But this does not enthuse the state's key players.

Despite the fact that the Hurriyat Conference did not meet him, Mr Vohra still foresees a dialogue with all including those who have not talked to him during this visit.

The Centre's interlocutor for J&K said declarations of cease-fire and non-initiation of combat operations have taken place in the past. The Centre will not hesitate in declaring another cease-fire. Terming Kashmir as a political issue, he said the people of the state were fed up with violence and wanted to lead a peaceful life.

Mr Vohra said he had thought it better to give an open invitation for talks through the media to all the people including those who have different perceptions.

On the Prime Minister's announcement that Mr Vohra had come to the state with envelopes carrying invitation, he said this did not imply that there were specific

invitations for the Hurriyat Conference or other separatist groups. Mr Vohra termed the Pakistani Prime Minister's telephonic conversation with Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee as "significant" and hoped that this time the process would be taken forward.

"The Prime Minister took several measures for peace and prosperity such as the Lahore bus yatra and Agra summit. But it did not help. Now he extended an olive branch during his visit to Kashmir from this soil and it has evoked a positive reaction from Pakistan. Mr Zaffar ullah Khan Jamali's talks with Mr Vajpayee is good and hopefully it will help in our endeavours."

Mr Vohra said he had met around 30 political, non-political and non-governmental organisations and 117 individuals during his seven-stay in the city. He be-



Mr NN Vohra leaves for Delhi after addressing a press conference in Srinagar on Tuesday. — PTI

lieves Kashmiris are fed-up with violence and disenchanted with the gun culture.

SC hears CBI plea on Hinduja brothers

Our Legal Correspondent

NEW DELHI, April 29. — The Supreme Court (coram, Babu, Mathur, JJ) today began hearing a CBI petition challenging the Delhi High Court order of 10 June 2002 quashing the framing of charges against the three Hinduja brothers in the Bofors pay-off case.

Presenting the government's case, the Solicitor-General, Mr Kirit Raval, argued that the powers of superintendence invested in the Central Vigilance Commission (CVC) over the CBI do not include powers of granting sanction for filing of cases. These only confer on the CVC powers of supervising the CBI, monitoring and review of cases against public authorities pending with the competent authorities where sanction is delayed or detained.

Once a prima facie case has been established and the investigating agency files a chargesheet, it's up to the courts to proceed with the trial. The CVC has no role to play in the process after that, he argued.

The High Court had quashed the trial court's order of November 2001 on technical grounds saying that the CBI had not obtained the CVC's consent before filing the chargesheet.

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NDIAN EXPRESS

Vohra in Valley, peace hopes soar

MUZAMIL JALEEL
SRINAGAR, APRIL 21

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A step forward: Karan Singh

By Our Special Correspondent

CHENNAI, APRIL 20. The Congress MP and scion of the erstwhile royal family of Jammu and Kashmir, Karan Singh, today described as a "step forward" the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's offer to hold talks with Pakistan.

Dr. Singh, who was here to attend a couple of public functions, told reporters that the Prime Minister's statements in Srinagar deserved to be appreciated for three reasons — providing a healing touch within the State, creating a climate for 'détente' between India and Pakistan and for announcing an economic package for the people of the State.

Asked whether he considered a "step backward" the Prime Minister's statement putting the onus for negotiations on Pakistan, Dr. Singh shot back: "Why do you view it in a negative sense? He has not gone backward but forward. Actually, it is a step forward from the earlier, rigid position (of ruling out talks with the neighbouring country)." Dr. Singh said he was for resuming the dialogue with Pakistan. Referring to the economic package, he hoped that it would facilitate the creation of employment opportunities and economic growth.

Asked whether the Mufti Mohammed Sayeed Government in Jammu and Kashmir should continue the "healing touch" policy even after Nadimarg killing of Kashmiri Pandits, Dr. Singh recalled the Chief Minister's observations and said such an approach was required as the economy of the State was a shambles due to the 14-year-long militancy.

Complete groundwork first, Farooq tells Centre

JAMMU, APRIL 20. The former Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Farooq Abdullah, said "confusing" statements were emanating from the Centre regarding Pakistan and cautioned New Delhi against taking any step with Islamabad to resolve the Kashmir issue without doing any groundwork.

Any wrong step at this juncture would prove "disastrous" not only for the State but for the entire nation, the National Conference leader told reporters here on Saturday evening. "The Centre should first do the groundwork in Kashmir before taking any step to resolve the Kashmir issue."

Pointing to the External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha's statement that Pakistan was a fit case for military action, Dr. Abdullah said, "one Minister's stand is supported by another. But at the same time, the Prime Minister is extending a

hand of friendship to Pakistan".

Instead of issuing confusing statements, the Centre should evolve a comprehensive policy deal with Pakistan, he said.

Meanwhile, in Raipur the senior Congress leader, Mani Shankar Iyer, accused the Centre of not having a clear policy on Jammu and Kashmir and urged the Prime Minister to put things in a right direction.

Addressing reporters here last night, he said "instead of offering a financial package for Kashmir, Mr. Vajpayee should make the Government's stand clear." "One day the Prime Minister says the Government is ready to talk with Hurriyat and the next day he backtracks."

To a question, the Congress leader said, "cause of the Centre's wrong policies the relations between Pakistan and United States are getting stronger". — PTI

'Change in stand confusing

LUCKNOW, APRIL 20. The former Prime Minister, Chandra Shekhar, today termed the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's offer of talks to Pakistan "confusing" and "ridiculous".

Mr. Vajpayee should have first clarified the reason for the sudden change in the stand when the External Affairs Minister had warned Pakistan of dire consequences only a week ago, Mr. Chandra Shekhar said here. "The people of the country have the right to know why the country had changed its view on Pakistan within a week."

He was still to understand Mr. Vajpayee's statement that both India and Pakistan should learn a lesson from

the Iraq war. "The Prime Minister should have clarified his version so that a common man could understand the real meaning of such statements," Mr. Chandra Shekhar said.

Holding the Opposition equally responsible for the "country's lack of foreign policy", the former Prime Minister, however, admitted that the condemnation of the Iraq war by Parliament would certainly have some bad impact.

"It would have been good if the Opposition parties had left it to the Prime Minister to decide on the issue."

Calling the recent political controversy in Uttar Pradesh "unfortunate", Mr. Chandra

Shekhar claimed that a "civil war" like situation might arise in the State following caste and communal clashes.

"Development works are being neglected due to the ongoing confrontation among political parties and the official machinery is also being misused."

Asserting that the BJP and the BSP would not bench the coalition Government in the State, the former Prime Minister maintained that present coalition era had led to political instability in Uttar Pradesh.

He also criticised the ideology of "cultural nationalism" saying it would only disintegrate the country. — UNI

PM's visit makes a positive impact

By Shujaat Bukhari

SRINAGAR, APRIL 20. The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's latest visit to Kashmir is seen to be different compared to his own or his predecessors' visits. Mr. Vajpayee evoked a positive response from the political groups like the All-Party Hurriyat Conference, though a decision on talks remains elusive.

Perhaps, after taking cognisance of the media coverage which termed his first-day speech as nothing new in Kashmir history, Mr. Vajpayee announced a comprehensive plan for creating one lakh jobs in the next two years in the State. He also reviewed his earlier package and made new promises to strengthen economic development in the

some of his predecessors. Instead, he left no room for confusion in his desire for having a new beginning in relationships with Pakistan. Though Mr. Vajpayee repeated the condition of an end to cross-border terrorism for the talks to materialise, much to the comfort of the separatists as also a section of the populace, he avoided any rhetoric or Pakistan-bashing. "His softness towards Pakistan is significant as his statements were conciliatory in the backdrop of the atmosphere created between the two countries after the Iraq war," said Jahir Mohiuddin, editor of the Urdu weekly, *Quartan*.

Even as Mr. Vajpayee refused to extend a direct invitation to the Hurriyat and other separatist groups, his statement mentioning the two-week visit to Jammu and Kash-

mir as an invitation. The reaction of the separatists over the statement is positive. Hurriyat chairman, Abdul Gani Bhat said "there is no escape from admitting there is a change in the mindset as to the style of the Prime Minister with respect to the resolution of the conflict". He, ever, said the Hurriyat would meet a cuss its formal response.

The People's Conference chairman, J. K. Lone, thinks that "the body language of the Prime Minister was relatively positive. The Democratic Freedom Party chairman, Shah, too welcomed Mr. Vajpayee's statement but said that "he should have been more specific".

The Prime Minister's visit has also been welcomed by the six-month-old Government headed by Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. The Government not only announced

Centre softens on Hurriyat talks

Srinjoy Chowdhury in Goa

March 16. — The Centre is ready to talk to the Hurriyat Conference as part of its efforts to open dialogue with militants ready to lay down arms and separatists not involved in violence.

Speaking to reporters today, Mr L.K. Advani said: "We have no objection in talking with the Hurriyat (about a peaceful solution of the Jammu and Kashmir problem).... But there is no point in talking to those engaged in militancy unless they are ready to lay down arms." Referring to the talks with the Bodos, the Deputy Prime Minister said it was even worthwhile to talk to "people who subscribe to separatism, but are not engaged in violence". But he ruled out any "trilateral talks" involving Pakistan.

Mr Advani's statements are significant as Hurriyat leader Mirwaiz Umer Farooq and

J&K Liberation Front leader Mr Yasin Malik met Mrs Sonia Gandhi yesterday. In the past, the Centre had taken a tougher stand against the Hurriyat. The shift in stand comes with Mr Advani's statement that people in J&K "have legitimate grievances".

The Deputy Prime Minister, who is here to attend naval exercises, said the decision to appoint Mr NN Vohra, a retired home secretary, to work towards a solution of the J&K problem was taken after discussions with Mufti Mohammed Sayeed. Mr Arun Jaitley, currently law minister, had been given the task but Mr Jaitley was "one of us" and his views reflected the view of the government. "A new government had come up and a new beginning had been made." Mufti Mohammed Sayeed suggested it would be better to have someone who was not directly linked to the government or the BJP and

9 cops killed in J&K militant strike

JAMMU, March 16. — Militants blew up a security post killing nine policemen and two civilians and abducted four policemen at a village in Udhampur district last night. Lashkar-e-Tayaba, Hizbul Mujahideen, Harkat-ul-Jehadi Islami and Al-Badar militants attacked a police post in Gool village around 11 p.m. and started firing indiscriminately. The policemen retaliated and in the two-and-a-half hour encounter nine policemen were killed and eight injured.

Militants took four policemen captive and while fleeing took 26 weapons, including self-loading rifles with them. They set on fire six houses and a hospital in the village and shot dead two persons. — PTI

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THE STATESMAN

Vohra can talk to Hurriyat, says Adyani

By Rajat Pandit
Times News Network

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

single allegation against the Centre for missing Pota, in-cluding the state governments were in the dock for it.

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

Be that as it may, Mr. Advani said, "We would not like an extraordinary law enacted by the Centre through a joint ses-sion of parliament to be mis-used by anyone. The terms of reference of the review com-mittee are being drafted and will be announced in the next 10 days or so." The committee will take a comprehensive view of the use of Pota in dif-ferent states and give sugges-tions to remove shortcom-ings in its implementation.

Mr. Advani said he had held consultations with the

have ministry on this aspect. "Effort in all democracies, in-cluding the US, UK, France and others, there are stricter anti-terrorism laws than Pota," he said.

NO FORMAL INVITATION TO HURRIYAT

Vohra to listen to 'all points of view'

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By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, APRIL 3. The Centre's "dialogue" with Jammu and Kashmir is set to begin this month with the recently appointed negotiator, N.N. Vohra's visit to the State on April 20 and 21.

Today, Mr. Vohra met the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, to discuss his planned visit to the State and finalise a schedule for the talks he is to have with the different political parties there.

Sources close to Mr. Advani said that he had told Mr. Vohra to take all points of view into consideration and "give a hearing to all sections of people".

Mr. Advani has maintained most recently in Parliament after he announced Mr. Vohra's appointment that any dialogue with Kashmir would be restricted to those who operate within the framework of the Constitution.

Despite the unqualified advice to talk to "all sections", ambiguities remain whether the Centre's interlocutor will talk to

separatist groupings such as the All-Party Hurriyat Conference (APHC).

After the meeting, Mr. Vohra told the media that he was to "start the talks with all the political parties starting with the National Conference".

In response to a question on the APHC, he said no formal invitation would be issued to them. The decision to talk had to be theirs.

"The information will come out in newspapers. Let us see who comes out."

Mr. Vohra's proposed visit will be his second to the State since the announcement of his appointment in February, but the first in which substantive talks, marking the commencement of the Centre's dialogue with the State, will be held.

To questions on whether the dialogue was part of the efforts to bring peace to the State, Mr Vohra said it was.

Today's meeting with Mr. Advani, which lasted 30 minutes, was also attended by the Home Secretary, N. Gopalaswami, and other Home Ministry officials.

THE HINDU

4 APR 2003

Krishna meets Vajpayee, key CRA meet on Feb 10

PRESS TRUST OF INDIA
NEW DELHI, FEBRUARY 3

A CRUCIAL meeting of the Cauvery River Authority (CRA) to decide on the distress sharing formula of river waters between Karnataka and Tamil Nadu has been convened on February 10. The decision was taken during a meeting between Karnataka Chief Minister S.M. Krishna and Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee here today.

Talking to reporters, Water Resources Minister Arjun Charan Sethi said that the

meeting, "most probably", will be held on February 10.

Urban Development Minister Ananth Kumar, who was also present, said that Krishna requested Vajpayee to convene the CRA meeting at an early date. Kumar added that the meeting should decide on the distress sharing formula as Karnataka was in the grip of a severe drought.

The decision to convene a meeting comes in the wake of Supreme Court asking Attorney General Soli Sorabjee on January 31 to inquire from the Centre the possibility of an

early meeting of the CRA, headed by Prime Minister, to resolve the issue.

The apex court had asked Sorabjee to ascertain from the Government the likely dates for a meeting and intimate the same to the Court latest by Tuesday.

The last two CRA meetings convened on Nov 29 and Jan 13 were cancelled abruptly due to lack of quorum.

A decision to release 1,200 cusecs of water per day to Tamil Nadu for January and February was taken at an official-level meeting last month.

No consensus on law agency

STATESMAN NEWS SERVICE

NEW DELHI, Feb. 8. — Several state governments including that of West Bengal blocked the Centre's proposal to create a central law enforcement agency. The states apprehend that a central agency would dilute their control over the law and order machinery.

Deputy Prime Minister Mr LK Advani said the government had not junked the proposal yet. The question of setting up a central agency to investigate espionage and terrorism needed further discussion, he said.

Some state governments were under the mistaken belief that a

Centre has
central agency would reduce their powers, he said, asserting that he was convinced that it would strengthen them rather than reduce their control.

One reason some states were in favour of the status quo, he said, was that no specific problem had arisen so far under the existing system. State governments have, nevertheless, acknowledged that terrorism and similar activities sponsored by certain external agencies and organised crimes did require a special mechanism to deal with them.

As for pending recommendations of the National Police Commission, Mr Advani said another meeting of

5-10-91
the state governments to discuss police reforms would be convened as unilateral decision was not possible on the matter.

There have been suggestions in course of the conference for a minimum tenure for police officers to allow them to perform better. A similar point was also made by some MPs at the last consultative committee.

At the conference today, state governments, however, agreed to put in place effective public grievance redressal systems and post committed and upright officers with stable tenure in the districts, particularly those afflicted by violence and extremism.

THE STATESMAN

9 FEB 2003

'NO OBJECTION TO TALKS WITH HURRIYAT'

Govt. for devolution of powers: Advani

By Sandeep Dikshit

140-1
17/7

PANAJI, MARCH 16. The Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, today said here that the Centre was open to talks with all separatist organisations in Jammu and Kashmir provided they were not involved in militancy and did not advocate the involvement of Pakistan in negotiations for greater autonomy to the State.

"We have no objections to holding talks with the Hurriyat. But there is no point in talking to those involved in militancy unless they lay down arms," he told newsmen. As evidence of the Government's sincerity, Mr. Advani cited the agreement signed with the Bodo Liberation Tigers (BLT) on the stepping up of Bodo Territorial Council and the ongoing talks with the Issac-Muivah faction of the NSCN. "There is no harm in holding talks with those who subscribe to separatism but are not engaged in violence."

Mr. Advani indicated that the brief of the Government's interlocutor, N.N. Vohra, centered on the issue of devolution. The yardstick in giving more powers

to J&K was similar to that for the northeastern States. The prescription for greater autonomy to J&K is against the BJP Government's political philosophy, but Mr. Advani interjected a significant caveat which enjoined the Mufti Mohammad Sayeed Government to simultaneously grant more powers to Jammu and Ladakh regions.

"The Centre realises that the grievances of the people of J&K are related to the measure of autonomy that should be provided to the State. There is a clear case for devolution of powers to all States especially ones like J&K and Nagaland. People of Jammu and Kashmir have a grievance, but the power in the State is concentrated in Srinagar only. Along with rearranging of New Delhi-Srinagar relationship, there will have to be rearrangement of Srinagar-Jammu and Srinagar-Leh relationships. Mr. Vohra's task is to address all these concerns," he said.

The interlocutor was not expected to encounter political resistance as some important players in the State were sounded out before the appointment

was formalised. "A new government has come up, a new beginning has to be made. Hence we went about it in a more focussed manner."

Mr. Advani parried questions on the next Governor for the State and refused to say whether the Government would again appoint a former Army man or make a new beginning by naming a politician for the post.

Expounding on the statement made in Parliament on the setting up of a review committee to examine instances of misuse of POTA, Mr. Advani said the terms of reference had been drafted and the other two members, besides the chairman, would be named before the month-end. But he was not forthcoming on the follow-up on the panel's suggestions.

'SIMI, JeM involved in Mumbai blasts'

PTI reports:

The involvement of SIMI and Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad has been found in recent bomb blasts in Mumbai, Mr. Advani said. "We have found that these groups have been talking to each other.

17 MAR 2003

THE HINDU

Vohra to liaise with Mufti

SEEMA GUHA

New Delhi, Feb. 19: Retired home secretary N.N. Vohra has been named the government's pointman for Kashmir.

Deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, who made the announcement in Parliament this morning, said chief minister Mufti Mohammad Sayeed had approved the appointment of the former bureaucrat.

Vohra, who pipped Planning Commission deputy chairman K.C. Pant and Kashmir committee chairman Ram Jethmalani to the post, has also held the post of defence secretary. In the mid-1990s, he had headed the Vohra Committee to look into alleged links between politicians and criminals.

Advani said Vohra would carry on the "discussions between the Centre and the state government", but did not specify when the dialogue with elected representatives of the state as well as separatists would begin. "The process will start soon depending on Vohra," he added.

Mufti reacted to the news of the appointment with enthusiasm. "It's very good news.

It will provide a good opportunity for a meaningful dialogue with the elected representatives and other sections of the people of the state," he said. The people of Kashmir and all groups in the state should avail this opportunity of dialogue to restore "lasting peace" with dignity, the chief minister added.

The Mufti government had earlier insisted that a political person should be entrusted with the job. Keeping this in mind, Advani said a decision has to be taken at the "political level" once the process of consultation is over.

Home ministry officials explained that Vohra would begin the preliminary process of talking to all groups, including the Hurriyat as well as separatists willing to give up arms and come to the negotiating table.

North Block believes that Vohra is particularly suited to the job: "He is familiar with the problem. In fact, he knows it in and out. As home secretary, he took a great deal of personal interest in Kashmir and is acceptable to people in the state. We know he will do a good job," a senior official said.

A Mufti aide, when contacted in Jammu,

echoed the home ministry. "Vohra is known for his belief in a peaceful settlement of the problem. He is not a hawk and is sympathetic to the problems faced by the people of Kashmir. He is a liberal person seriously interested in dialogue," the aide said. "His role will be to initiate discussions. He will present his findings to the government. It will then be up to the government to consider these demands."

Mufti has been pleading with the Centre for talks ever since he took over. Political analysts say that even if he is not happy about Vohra's appointment, he will not say anything in public.

"The state government was getting desperate for the Centre to take full advantage of the change in people's mood in Kashmir. Though the Centre wanted to initiate the move much later in the year, Mufti was able to persuade New Delhi to make a start. After all, how long the current mood will last was a constant worry for Mufti's coalition in Srinagar. At least, now he can say something on the anvil," a senior government official in Jammu said.

Ministerial-level talks on Bhavani

By Our Tamil Nadu Bureau

CHENNAI, FEB. 12. After due consultations with legal experts, Tamil Nadu has decided to hold ministerial-level discussions with Kerala on Thursday on the construction of a weir on the Bhavani river.

Based on a request from the Kerala Chief Minister, A. K. Antony, the Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalithaa, today directed the Public Works Minister, O. Paneerselvam, to lead a team including the Finance Minister, C. Ponnaiyan, and the Law Minister, D. Jayakumar, the Chief Secretary, Lakshmi Pranes, and other senior officials to Thiruvananthapuram to hold talks with Ministers and officials in Kerala.

According to an official release, the legal experts have said that talks may be held with Kerala "without prejudice to the stand of the Government of Tamil Nadu in the proceedings before the Cauvery Water Disputes Tribunal."

Tamil Nadu had filed a civil miscellaneous petition before

the tribunal on January 1, 2003, on this issue.

The State had also urged the Centre to direct Kerala to stop construction of the weir immediately.

On February 7, the tribunal had directed Kerala not to proceed with further works stating that nothing should be done to make the petition becoming infructuous till the date of the next hearing slated for March 6.

Earlier, on receipt of information about construction of a weir across the river near Mukkali village in Kerala, Ms. Jayalithaa had written to Mr. Antony, stating that diversion of water outside the Cauvery basin would prejudicially affect the interests of Tamil Nadu.

In that letter, she had pointed out that the issue of sharing of waters in the basin, including the Bhavani, was under adjudication before the tribunal, and urged Mr. Antony to desist from taking further action on construction of the weir till the matter was settled by the tribunal.

In his reply, Mr. Antony had

suggested holding of a ministerial-level meeting of both States for resolving the long-pending inter-State water issues and arriving at acceptable solutions.

After a gap of eight months, both the States are holding the minister-level talks. The previous meeting took place in Chennai on June 10 when several long-pending issues on sharing of inter-state rivers were discussed. "We will pick up the thread from where it was left at the last meeting", an official said.

Among the issues deliberated upon were the Parambikulam-Aliyar Project (PAP), Pamban-Achankovil-Vaippar link, Pandiya-Punnampuzha scheme, Shenbavalli anicut and Neyyar irrigation scheme.

All these are expected to come up at tomorrow's meeting also, according to sources in the Government. The Mullaperiyar dam dispute, being in the Supreme Court, may not figure in the talks.

An important outcome of the last meeting was the decision to

establish a six-member technical committee, comprising three each from Tamil Nadu and Kerala.

From each State, two irrigation experts and an energy specialist would form part of the panel.

Though it was stated then that the panel would submit its report in three months, the first meeting of the committee was held only in December as Kerala took its own time to nominate experts to the panel, according to sources in the State Government here.

Some independent water experts wonder whether any purpose will be served by holding talks unless there was a genuine desire on the part of Kerala to sort out the issues.

However, the official says "at least, the frequency of negotiations between us has increased, compared to the past, which is a healthy sign". The State's delegation was keen on pushing for an early resolution of the pending issues, at least with Kerala now.

Pak. not interested in good ties: PM

9/11 H19-1 Centre-8/2

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 8. External threat to internal security was the Centre's dominant theme at the Conference of Chief Ministers on Internal Security here today. Addressing the day-long conference, the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, said that of the threats to internal security, terrorism most notably affected the "national security, national unity and integrity."

For India "the most disconcerting aspect of terrorism is that it is sponsored, supported and funded by Pakistan as a matter of its state policy,"

Pakistan's assurances on cross-border terrorism, he said, "remain unfulfilled." It had taken "no significant action against training camps and infrastructural support to terrorism."

The Pakistani establishment "does not appear to be interested in establishing tension-free and good-neighbourly relations with India by ending its proxy war against our country," Mr. Vajpayee said. Highlighting the need to maintain peace and communal harmony, he said it would frustrate "those who wish to harm our national unity and integrity." In a clear refer-



The Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, with the Deputy Prime Minister, L.K. Advani, the Defence Minister, George Fernandes, and the Deputy Chairman, Planning Commission, K.C. Pant, at the Chief Ministers' Conference on Internal Security at Vigyan Bhavan in New Delhi on Saturday.

— Photo: Rajeev Bhatt

ence to the Ayodhya dispute, Mr. Vajpayee said that while dialogue and negotiations were the optimal way to resolve disputes, when they could not be so resolved "the verdict of the judiciary has to be accepted by all concerned." There was no issue, which could justify confrontation or communal violence.

Mr. Vajpayee also suggested that the problem of Left-wing extremism, which affects nine States, be dealt through well-

coordinated operations and, "if necessary," under a unified command. He also asked the States to reconsider the proposal for a Central law enforcement agency to deal with certain "federal crimes."

A majority of States maintained their opposition to the proposal. The Chief Ministers' conference follows a meeting of the State Chief Secretaries and Director-Generals of Police where the agenda for today's meeting was set.

At a press conference at the end of the day's proceedings, the Deputy Prime Minister, L. K. Advani, re-emphasised the concern over external threat to internal security.

Asked whether in his perception the threat to internal security had gone up since the last Chief Ministers' conference, and if there was data to suggest this, he said, "no, it has not."

On issues of communalism and their impact on the internal security environment, Mr. Advani said, "this does not arise when we are discussing national security," and added "but the subject was discussed."

The issue of Bangladeshi illegal immigrants had been discussed at the conference and the Chief Ministers wholeheartedly endorsed the Centre's policy. Many Bangladeshi illegal immigrants had been sent back in 2002.

Asked whether there was a time-frame for the Government's "seek out and evict" policy, he said there was none.

And on whether the Government was considering a formal immigration policy, Mr. Advani said the recent decisions were a "step in that direction."

States' opposition: Page 8

Centre State
ND-8

States against Central law-enforcement agency

9/2

By Our Special Correspondent

NEW DELHI, FEB. 8. The States have again rejected the Government's proposal to set up a Central law-enforcement agency, as it would amount to a subversion of the federal character of the Indian state.

At the Conference of Chief Ministers on Internal Security here today, all the State Governments, with the exception of the BJP-ruled States, declared themselves unwilling to accept a Central agency that would infringe upon the separation of powers between the Centre and the State. The general view was that the Central Bureau of Investigation served the purpose well. On the issue of illegal immigrants and "over-stayers," most of the States were supportive of the Centre's decision to actively seek and evict illegal immigrants. Some Chief Ministers raised the issue of "over-stayers," who were of Indian origin and were seeking the extension of visas or Indian citizenship.

The Haryana Chief Minister, Om Prakash Chautala, said that such requests needed to be dealt with expeditiously. The Kerala Chief Minister, A. K. Antony, said that there was a "human dimension" to the problem and that his Government was "evolving a political consensus on their plight and would be approaching the Centre soon."

Many Chief Ministers spoke of the role of good governance in maintaining internal security. Mr. Antony said "I know that this is a larger issue, but it must not be forgotten while we discuss internal security and law and order. A populace which believes in democracy and trusts the Government to pro-

tect its welfare and security is the greatest bulwark against terrorism and the threats to internal security."

The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, said this rather more clearly. Calling on the Centre to open the promised dialogue with elected representatives and other sections of Kashmir, he said "it is the people who sustain militancy. Holding of dialogue coupled with good governance — addressing the causes of alienation and accelerated economic development — is the road map for the restoration of peace."

In a speech read out by his State Home Minister, the Madhya Pradesh Chief Minister, Digvijay Singh, spoke of the importance of maintaining communal harmony. He said "the spirit of secularism and magnanimity to the minorities are the lessons of our history.

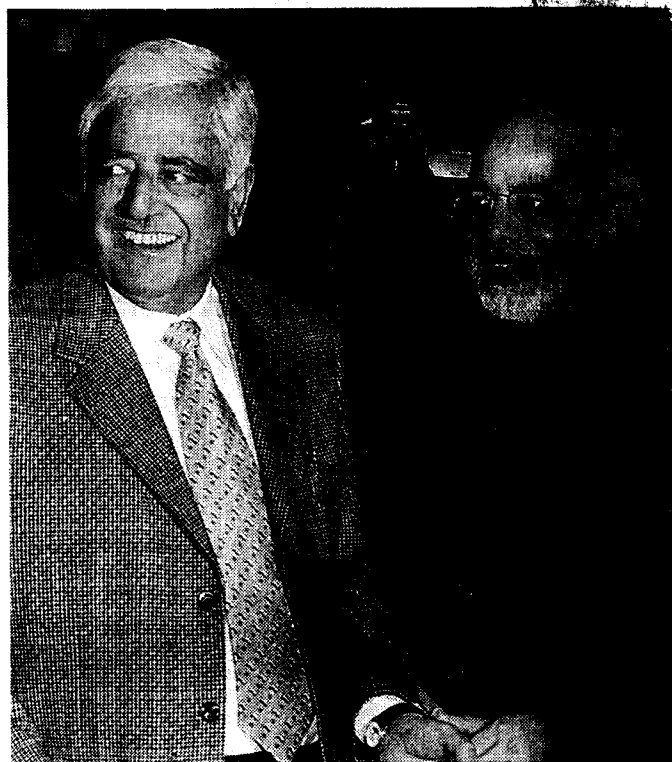
Any attempt to weaken these... will have inescapable adverse repercussion not only for our social cohesiveness... but also for internal security."

The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, also touched on this subject.

She said that maintaining communal harmony was the rationale behind her Government's Anti-Conversion Law.

Mr. Singh's speech was also unequivocal in its call to all communal organisations, such as SIMI and Bajrang Dal, to be dealt with under the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act.

It said "the delay in decisive action by the Government against the Bajrang Dal shall certainly convey signals consonant with the avowed secular credentials of the Indian state."



The Chief Ministers of Jammu and Kashmir and Gujarat, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed and Narendra Modi, at the Chief Ministers' Conference on Internal Security in New Delhi on Saturday. — Photo: Rajeev Bhatt

The Union Home Ministry's proposal for monitoring development schemes in areas where anti-insurgency and anti-terrorist operations were underway was rejected by a majority of the States.

They, however, endorsed the Centre's pilot project to introduce multi-purpose identity cards in select districts.

An issue that remained unresolved was the call to ban the sale of lotteries.

There were differences in ap-

proach among the State Governments, with the Punjab Chief Minister, Amrinder Singh, among those who opposed the ban because of the loss in revenue that the State would face.

Among the exceptional proposals was the one made by the Gujarat Chief Minister, Narendra Modi. Despite the existence of the Intelligence Bureau, he called for the creation of an "All-India intelligence service to effectively collect and analyse intelligence within the country."

9 FEB 2003

Mufti gets assurances from Centre

By Alok Mukherjee

NEW DELHI, JAN. 25. The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, today received some firm assurances and financial commitment from the Centre for various developmental activities in the State.

In the capital today, Mr. Sayeed had a meeting with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, the Human Resources Minister, Murli Manohar Joshi, and the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission, K.C. Pant.

From Mr. Vajpayee, the Mufti received a commitment that the much-discussed rail-link to Srinagar would be completed by 2007 and the former would inaugurate a railway station in the Valley during his visit in April this year. Mr. Vajpayee will also lay the foundation stones for upgradation of the Srinagar airport to international standards. The project will cost Rs. 45 crores and the prestigious national highway development project, which envisages connecting the four corners of the country.

Construction of a rail-link between the Valley and the rest of the country has been on the agenda of the Centre for the last three decades and three former Prime Ministers, Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi and H.D. Deve Gowda, have laid foundation stones at three different places.

The Railway Minister, Nitish



The Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister, Mufti Mohammed Sayeed, with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, at his residence in New Delhi on Saturday. — Photo: V. Sudershan

Kumar, is also expected to visit the Valley on February 3 to distribute payment to people from whom land had been acquired to lay railway lines.

Another assurance that the Mufti received from the Prime Minister was the restoration of power supply to the State, which was cut by the northern grid this month, due to cold weather.

The State had been facing unprecedented load-shedding, since January 1, due to the power cut.

Mr. Sayeed also discussed with the Prime Minister the is-

sue of exploitation of Jammu and Kashmir's huge hydel power resources, estimated at 15,000 MW. He also brought up the issue of financial closure of the ambitious 950 MW Baghilar hydel power project with the help of Central lending institutions, so as to complete the project by December 2004, according to schedule. The release of Rs. 65 crores for an information technology project in the State was also raised by Mr. Sayeed.

Mr. Joshi told the Mufti that the Centre had decided to release a one-time grant of Rs. 20

crores to the Kashmir University and establish two residential schools in the Valley and one in Jammu.

Stating that such residential schools could help combat "tendencies of separatism" by ushering children into the mainstream through proper education, Mr. Joshi said the schools would be of the standard of the Kendriya Vidyalayas.

With Mr. Pant, Mr. Sayeed discussed various developmental projects and programmes under execution in the State and sought the Centre's cooperation for their early completion.

Cauvery meet put off, Krishna agrees to give 6 tmcft of water

By Gargi Parsai

NEW DELHI, JAN. 13. Karnataka today agreed to release 1,200 cusecs of Cauvery water on a daily basis to the Mettur reservoir in Tamil Nadu till February-end — it works out to about six tmcft (thousand million cubic feet) even as the Centre asked both the States to work out the possibility of enhancing the quantum of releases in the next two weeks as part of distress-sharing.

The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, appealed to the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, at a meeting here today, to direct Karnataka to "immediately" release some water to Tamil Nadu to save the "samba" paddy crop. She sought the release of at least 18.8 tmcft, which was deficit, in "good quantum" for the standing crop.

During the 40-minute meeting with Mr. Vajpayee after the Cauvery River Authority (CRA) meeting was postponed due to lack of quorum, Ms. Jayalalithaa said the State might suffer a loss of Rs. 2,360 crores with the failure of two rice crops this season. She sought the allocation of two lakh tonnes of rice and a compensation of Rs. 400 crores to farmers, besides ensuring



The Tamil Nadu Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, with the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee, in New Delhi on Monday. — Photo: V. Sudershan

waiver of the principal of the medium-term and short-term loans taken by farmers.

At a separate meeting with the Prime Minister, the Karnataka Chief Minister, S. M. Krishna, agreed to release "some water" as a goodwill gesture to Tamil Nadu. This was conveyed by the Water Resources Minister, Arjun Charan Sethi, to mediapersons later. PMO sources later said he had agreed to release 6 to 7 tmcft.

However, emerging from the meeting, Mr. Krishna said he explained to Mr. Vajpayee the dif-

ficulties and hardships faced by his State owing to drought. Asked specifically what was the quantum of releases acceptable to him, he said, "I cannot say what is acceptable. The State has obligations under the Supreme Court order."

Mr. Krishna said 800 to 1,000 cusecs was being ensured at Mettur. Asked if he had been directed by the Prime Minister to release water to Tamil Nadu, he said, "no direction has been given to Karnataka."

The formal meeting of the CRA was postponed due to lack

of quorum on November 27, when Ms. Jayalalithaa dropped out at the eleventh hour and the Kerala Chief Minister, A. K. Antony stayed away.

Today, however, while Ms. Jayalalithaa and Mr. Krishna arrived at the Prime Minister's House at 11.30 a.m., the Pondicherry Chief Minister, N. Rangasamy, and Mr. Antony were not there. Mr. Rangasamy expressed his inability to attend the meeting due to "ill health" through a fax sent to the PMO at 9.45 a.m. Mr. Antony had nominated the State Irrigation Minister, T.M. Jacob, to represent him.

It is believed that Mr. Rangasamy's absence today is part of a Congress strategy to prevent Karnataka from getting a "directive" from the CRA meeting to release water to Tamil Nadu. Mr. Krishna and his Government face a contempt petition in the Supreme Court for "non-compliance" of the order of the CRA and the court on water releases to Tamil Nadu during the distress months of September and October.

However, in working out the 6 tmcft flows to Mettur today the technical team did not take into account the deficit as there is no agreement on that account between the two States.

Be pro-active, PM tells governors

New Delhi: Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee on Sunday urged the governors to play a "pro-active" role in state administrations with a "total sense of partnership".

"The Prime Minister underscored the need for governors to play a pro-active role in the state administration with a total sense of partnership. According to him, it was, in the existing set-up itself, possible for the governors to be a full-fledged participant in the development process," a Rashtrapati Bhawan release quoted Mr Vajpayee as telling the concluding session of the two-day conference of governors.

The PM stressed the need for evolving employment-oriented economic programmes and assured resources would not be a constraint.

In his opening remarks on Saturday, President A.P.J. Abdul Kalam had said that "governors have a positive role to play to bring about unity of minds".

Stating that for the first time a road map had been laid down to achieve the goal of a "developed India", Mr Vajpayee said it was being discussed at all fora including the

chief ministers conference, the national development council and now in the conference of governors.

He said since independence various programmes had been launched for alleviation of poverty and take the nation on the path of progress and prosperity.

Mr Vajpayee said his government was committed to making India a developed country by 2020 and concurred with the opinion of the President that all people should actively participate in reaching this goal.

He said the deliberations at the conference were meaningful as it enabled the government to know about the developmental works being carried out in states and also provided a forum for exchange of views on various issues.

Summing up the conference, Mr Kalam said everything possible would be done by all concerned and at all levels to accelerate the process of making the country and its people happy, prosperous and secure.

Mr Kalam said the suggestions made at the conference would be followed up by the government and regular monitoring of various develop-

mental projects and other schemes for the uplift of the people would be undertaken.

He outlined his talk with a computerised show explaining various aspects which needed to be focussed upon for the country to become a developed nation.

Participating in the discussion on the vision for a developed India, the governors felt that to achieve this by 2020, it was necessary that good governance should be provided at every level. The implementation of various policies and programmes depended on this, the governors said.

They suggested that there should be transparency in governance, meaningful schemes for developing the full potential of youth, a forward looking national youth policy and implementation of comprehensive economic development programmes.

Among those who participated in the conference were vice president Bhairon Singh Shekhawat, deputy Prime Minister L.K. Advani, deputy chairman planning commission K.C. Pant and several union ministers. PTI

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THE TIMES OF INDIA

Naga leaders pray for peace, praise Vajpayee

Statesman News Service

NEW DELHI, Jan. 9. — NSCN-IM leaders Mr Isak Chisi Swu and Mr Thuingaleng Muivah paid homage to the messiah of peace at Rajghat today and hailed the political maturity of Mr Atal Behari Vajpayee and his "sincerity" in trying to solve the Naga issue "realistically".

Mr Swu said at Mahatma Gandhi's *samadhi*: "We respect you (Mahatma Gandhi) and honour you. You respected freedom and would've understood our problem. We hope the Almighty gives you eternal rest."

Later in the day as they emerged from a half-hour meeting with the Prime Minister at his residence, the NSCN-IM leaders looked pleased but answered media queries in a guarded manner. Mr Swu, NSCN-IM chairman, said the talks are moving "smoothly" but "it is too premature to say anything now. Talks will continue."

General secretary Mr Muivah said it was a "courteous" meeting, and a "better understanding" had emerged with Mr Vajpayee. "If the government understands the reality of the Nagas, the Nagas will understand the reality of India 10 times more."

Mr Swu said both sides have their histories that can't be changed. "The government is trying to understand the Nagas' history and the Nagas are understanding that of India... The fact that the government has acknowledged Nagaland's history is a good start."

Comparing the present dialogue with the talks of 1967, Mr Swu said the earlier talks had made no headway because of a "lack of maturity" and a "not-so-realistic" approach. But "this time, the leaders are sincere, mature and are trying to solve it realistically. The PM and all leaders are sincere".

On the boundary issue, Mr Swu was diplomatic. "Nagaland is Nagaland. There is no big Nagaland or small Nagaland," he said.



MEN OF WAR, MEN OF PEACE: Mr Th. Muivah and Mr Isak Chisi Swu pay homage to Mahatma Gandhi's *samadhi* on Thursday. — AFP