

Over 1,700 killed in Tamil Nadu

By Our Tamil Nadu Bureau

CHENNAI, DEC. 26. Over 1,700 people were killed as Tamil Nadu bore the brunt of the seismic sea waves triggered by an earthquake that had its epicentre more than 2,000 km away near the west coast of Sumatra in Indonesia. Fishermen, morning walkers and inhabitants of the coastline were washed away by waves that rose up to 10 metres and flooded the beaches and seaside huts and buildings.

The mild tremors experienced in some parts of the State at 6.30 a.m. gave little indication of what was to come. Between 7.30 and 9 a.m., huge waves slammed the coastline taking those near the seashore by complete surprise. There was little time for anyone to react as the waves swept away even those who were a couple of kilometres from the sea.

When the waves receded, hundreds of bodies were found strewn on the shore. Debris stood in the place of houses. Overturned cars had no claimants.

The Chief Minister, Jayalithaa, put the death toll at 1,705 with Nagapattinam accounting for 788, Cuddalore 290 and Kanyakumari 392. After making an aerial survey of the affected areas, Ms. Jayalithaa announced Rs. 1-lakh relief each to the families of the dead.

In Chennai, 131 persons were washed away, including early morning walkers and children playing cricket on the beach. The toll in other coastal districts was: Kancheepuram 61; Villupuram 23; Tiruvallur 13; Tirunelveli 4; Tuticorin 2 and Thanjavur 1. About 1,000 people were stranded on the Vivekananda Rock Memorial at Kanyakumari.

It took some time for the magnitude of the tragedy to sink in. While those near the shore who managed to escape the fury of the waves tried to



Villagers of Panayur running to safety on Sunday morning when tsunami hit the Chennai coast. — Photo: N. Sridharan

move as far away as possible from the sea, others who heard the news headed for the beach. The police had to barricade the roads to prevent access to the sea. Those who went to the Marina beach in Chennai after the first huge tsunami had to make a hasty retreat when another came their way.

Seeks expert advice

The Prime Minister, Manmohan Singh, spoke to Ms. Jayalithaa and expressed his shock over the calamity. Ms. Jayalithaa said the State Government required expert seismological advice as to what could be expected further. The Prime Minister promised to do the needful.

The State Government requested the help of the armed forces in the rescue and relief operations. Accordingly, three Armed Forces units and the Coast Guard in the State, put all their resources at their command. Coast Guard ships patrolled the coast off Chennai, Pondicherry, and the Palk Bay

while the Navy's two ships joined in the rescue efforts along the eastern shoreline. Besides, the Coast Guard eastern region headquarters sent a ship each from Visakhapatnam, Haldia and Paradeep to help in relief and rescue.

Army joins rescue effort

The Army made available its personnel for providing medical relief and also to aid in the rescue efforts. The Arakkonam Naval Air Station, INS Rajali, deployed its reconnaissance aircraft, Tupolov 142 M, to assess the damage along the coastline. In some places along the Tamil Nadu coast the water ingress has been up to 1.5 km, according to an analysis of the data obtained from the aircraft.

The havoc and panic began when seawater inundated parts of the Chennai port in a short span, including its privatised container terminal, and the waves caused in the ships in the inner harbour to rock violently.

In the impact the mooring of ABG Kesava, a vessel awaiting

repairs and whose engine had been dismantled, was tossed up and the ship started drifting. The swirling waters pushed it towards the inner harbour, where three other vessels were berthed. There the vessels smashed against one another. One of them hit two hoppers, which are the facility for unloading (imported) sugar, bringing them down like a house of cards. The vessel also hit the wharf cranes and caused damage to them. Two ships belonging to the Coast Guard — Sarang and Vikram — were also damaged.

District Collectors have been asked to send reports to the Commissioner of Revenue Administration for preparing a comprehensive report to be forwarded to the Centre for requisitioning relief. The Union Home Minister, Shivraj Patil, is visiting Tamil Nadu tomorrow. The two Union Ministers deputed by the Prime Minister, Mani Shankar Aiyar and Dayanidhi Maran, are going to Nagapattinam.

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THE HINDU

Srirangam woman appears before police

By V. Venkatasubramanian

KANCHEEPURAM, NOV. 30. Srirangam-based Usha, who the prosecution said was "absconding" in the Sankararaman murder case, today appeared before investigating officers in the Kancheepuram district police headquarters.

Denying that she had run away from the investigation, Ms. Usha said some people had "exaggerated" her relationship with the Kanchi Sankaracharya, Sri Jayendra Saraswathi, prime accused in the case. The relationship was "nothing other than that between a guru and a shishyai," she told reporters here.

Summons served

Half-past noon Ms. Usha (47) came to the police headquarters along with her counsel, Sudha Ramalingam, and her brother, Ranganathan. She was made to wait till 5-30 p.m. at the all-women police station, behind the police headquarters, where the investigation officers Sathyanarayanan, Additional Superintendent of Police, Cuddalore, and Saraswathi, inspector from Chennai, spoke to her. Around 6 p.m., summons was served asking her to appear before the Kancheepuram Superintendent of Police, K. Premkumar, at 10 a.m. tomorrow.

Coming out of the station,



Usha, Srirangam-based woman, addressing reporters at Kancheepuram on Tuesday. — Photo: A. Muralidharan

Ms. Usha, who is suffering from cancer, told reporters that the Kanchi Mutt had supported her financially to meet monthly domestic and medical expenditure

after her husband had parted ways with her.

"How will it be possible for me to lead a life without respect in society, as claimed by some

people?"

Humiliation

Ms. Usha said: "After the police visited my house at Srirangam in October last, the humiliation suffered by me and my aged mother at the hands of neighbours forced me to shift my residence to Chennai." She could not understand how she could be "absconding."

It is 'perjury'

Earlier talking to reporters, Ms. Sudha Ramalingam termed the prosecution's statement in the Madras High Court nothing but perjury. "Probably when the police team went to Srirangam, she might have moved to Chennai. From that one should not come to a conclusion that Ms. Usha is absconding." The police team, which visited her at Srirangam on October 12, left the place stating she did not have any evidence required for the prosecution.

Ms. Sudha Ramalingam said Ms. Usha, as a beneficiary of the Mutt, might have spoken to the Acharya. "She might have derived some mental peace by speaking to the Acharya in view of her health conditions and the fact that her husband, Narayanan, had left her. Ms. Usha, who has been suffering from cancer since 1979, underwent chemotherapy more than 130 times," she added.

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THE HINDU

TN police has 'solid' case against seer: Jaya

Chennai: Police has "shocking" and "solid" information on Kanchi seer Jayendra Saraswathi's links with the murderers of Sankararaman, a temple official at Kancheepuram, Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayalithaa told the state assembly on Wednesday.

In a suo motu statement, the first after the seer's arrest on November 11, Jayalithaa said "police has got vital information" about the Shankaracharya's links with hirelings and associates engaged to murder the temple official after the interrogation of two persons arrested at Chennai on November 9 and articles seized from them.

"The seer had also links in drawing huge money from the mutt's bank account and handing it over to the hirelings," she said, adding that he had also links in making five people, who did not have any connection with the murder, to surrender admitting the crime, only to sidetrack the investigation.

Those who committed the murder had spoken to the seer over telephone, she said. Stoutly denying the charge of BJP leader Murali Manohar Joshi and NDA convenor George Fernandes of violation of laws in effecting the arrest of the seer, Jayalithaa said all legal formalities were observed right from his arrest till he was lodged at the central prison at Vellore.

She said by the arrest her government had proved that "everybody is equal before the law." Explaining the arrest of the seer, Jayalithaa said he was arrested at Mehbubnagar in Andhra Pradesh around 10 pm on November 11, only to avoid any law and order problem. The arrest was effected with the assistance of Andhra Pradesh police, she said.

Narrating the case, she said on September 3, Sankararaman was murdered inside Varadaraja Swami temple and Ganesh, another temple official, lodged a complaint, following which a FIR was filed.

A special police team, under



Bail plea hearing to continue

Chennai: The hearing on the bail plea of Kanchi seer Jayendra Saraswathi in the Madras high court remained inconclusive on Wednesday and will continue on Thursday.

However, Justice R Balasubramanian, who is hearing the plea, made it clear that it would not come in the way of the Kanchipuram judicial magistrate dealing with the petition filed by the prosecution seeking police custody of the seer. PTI

the direct supervision of superintendents of police of Kancheepuram, Tiruvallur and Cuddalore districts, was investigating the case, she said. Several documents, pointing to the link of the seer had been seized from the house of Sankararaman, she said.

On October 27, five persons surrendered before a magistrate here and on interrogation, it was found that they had no role in the murder. A "bogus surrender drama" was enacted as those surrendered had done so only for money, she said. The seer has also alleged links with another case of attack on one Radhakrishnan and his wife here on September 20, 2002. Police has got information that the Kanchi Sankaracharya had "conspired" to finish off Radhakrishnan as the seer suspected that he had written letters making allegations against him (seer), she said. PTI

শঙ্করাচার্যের গ্রেফতার নিয়ে জয়ললিতার পাশে করুণানিধি

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, নয়াদিল্লি, ১২
নভেম্বর: 'হিন্দু বিপন্ন'—এই জিগির
তুলে বিশ্ব হিন্দু পরিষদ কাশ্মীর
শঙ্করাচার্য জয়েন্ড সরস্বতীর
গ্রেফতারের বিরুদ্ধে আগামিকাল
তামিলনাড়ু বনধ ও দু'দিনের দেশব্যাপী
প্রতিবাদ বিক্ষোভের ডাক দিয়েছে।
কিন্তু তামিলনাড়ুতেই তার আদৌ
কোনও প্রভাব পড়বে কি না, তা নিয়ে
যথেষ্ট সংশয় রয়েছে। কারণ, এই
একটি ক্ষেত্রে অন্তত রীতি ভেঙে
জয়ললিতার পাশে দাঁড়িয়েছেন
করুণানিধি। এ আই ডি এম কে
সরকারের 'সৎ কাজের' জন্য তাদের
অভিনন্দনও জানিয়েছেন ডি এম কে-র
সর্বোচ্চ নেতা। সঙ্ঘপরিবারের বিভিন্ন
সংগঠন বিশ্ব হিন্দু পরিষদ, রাষ্ট্রীয়
স্বয়ংসেবক সঙ্ঘ এবং বিজেপি-র
নেতারা অনেকেই প্রতিবাদে সরবা।
শঙ্করাচার্যের মুক্তির জন্য গুজরাতে
মুখ্যমন্ত্রী নরেন্দ্র মোদী প্রধানমন্ত্রীর এবং
কাশ্মীরের শঙ্করাচার্য রাষ্ট্রপতির
হস্তক্ষেপ চেয়েছেন। বি জে পি মুখপাত্র
অরুণ জেটলি শঙ্করাচার্যের গ্রেফতারে
ক্ষোভ প্রকাশ করলেও ঘটনার পুরো
বিবরণ না জেনে দলের তরফে
বিক্ষোভক কিছু করার কথা ভাবা হচ্ছে
না বলে জানিয়েছেন।

কাশ্মীর শঙ্করাচার্যের মতো একজন
ধর্মীয় নেতাকে গ্রেফতার করা হলে
কিছু মানুষের স্বতঃস্ফূর্ত ক্ষোভ
হওয়ারই কথা। কিন্তু এখন প্রশ্ন, সেই
ক্ষোভকে রাজনীতির খেলায় কতটা
ব্যবহার করা হবে? দাবিড় দলগুলি
মোটামুটি এককাত্তা হয়ে যাওয়ায়
হিন্দু দ্বাবাদীরাও অসুবিধায় পড়ে
গিয়েছেন। তবে সতর্ক কেন্দ্রীয় সরকার
রাজ্যপালের কাছ থেকে ঘটনার
বিস্তারিত বিবরণ জানতে চেয়েছে।
প্রকাশ্যে কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ
পাটিল শুধু বলেছেন, "ঘটনা সম্পর্কে
আমি বিশদ জানি না। তাই মন্তব্য
করতে পারব না।"

কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রক অবশ্যই বুঝতে
চেষ্টা করছে, এই গ্রেফতারের কোনও
বড় মাপের প্রতিক্রিয়া হবে কি না।
হিন্দু দ্বাবাদী সংগঠনগুলি আজ সকাল
থেকেই বিষয়টি নিয়ে জলধোলা করার
চেষ্টা করেছে। আর এস এস-এর
মুখপাত্র রামমাধব গ্রেফতারের নিন্দা
করে বলেছেন, "আমরা সাধারণ
মানুষকে এই সঙ্কটের মুহূর্তে কাশ্মীর
মঠের পাশে দাঁড়াতে আবেদন
জানাচ্ছি।" তদন্তের জন্য প্রয়োজন
হলে গ্রেফতার না করেও তাঁর কাছ
থেকে সব রকম সহযোগিতা পাওয়া

যেত, এই মন্তব্য করে রামমাধব বলেন,
তাঁর প্রতি আরও ভাল ব্যবহার করা
উচিত ছিল। আর পরিস্থিতিকে যতদূর
সম্ভব অগ্নিগর্ভ করার চেষ্টা করে বিশ্ব
হিন্দু পরিষদের প্রধান অশোক সিংঘল
বলেছেন, "এটা আমাদের সংস্কৃতি ও
ঐতিহ্যকে ম্লান করার জন্য ইসলাম ও
খ্রিষ্টানদের চক্রান্ত।" প্রবীণ তোগাড়িয়া
আবার এই ঘটনার পিছনে কংগ্রেসের
ইফনের কথা বোঝাতে চেয়েছেন। নাম
না করেই তিনি সনিয়া গান্ধীকে
আক্রমণের চেষ্টা করেছেন।

শঙ্করাচার্যকে গ্রেফতার করে
জয়ললিতা যতটা আলোড়ন তুলেছেন,
তার থেকেও বেশি বিক্ষোভক মন্তব্য
করেছেন করুণানিধি। ডি এম কে প্রধান
বলেছেন, "যদি কোনও গুণী মহিলাও
কোনও অন্যায় করে ফেলেন তা হলে
তিনি প্রায়শ্চিত্ত করতে গঙ্গামান করতে
পারেন। কিন্তু গঙ্গা যদি নিজেই অন্যায়
করে তা হলে প্রায়শ্চিত্ত কোথায়
হবে?" তাঁর দাবি, অসদুদ্দেশ্যে যাঁরা
সম্ম্যাস নিতে চান, তাঁদের আটকানোর
জন্য আইন থাকা উচিত। আর দিল্লিতে
কংগ্রেসের অভিষেক মনু সিংগি
বলেছেন "আইন আইনের পথে চলবে।
আদালতের বিচারে দোষ প্রমাণিত
হলে শাস্তি পাবেন।"

কিছু প্রশ্ন, কিছু ধন্দ

বীরাপ্লনের

দেহ কবর

দেওয়া হল

কোয়ম্বড়ুর, ২০ অক্টোবর: অস্ত্যোষ্টি হল হিন্দু রীতিতে। অথচ শেষ পর্যন্ত কবর দেওয়া হল চন্দনদস্যু বীরাপ্লনের দেহ!

কবর কেন? ঘটনা হল, নিহত দস্যুই বীরাপ্লন কিনা, তা নিয়ে সংশয় উঠেছে এবং ডি এন এ পরীক্ষার দাবি ইতিমধ্যেই জোরালো হতে শুরু করেছে। ফলে কবর দিয়ে একটা পথ খোলা রাখা হল। যাতে দরকারে সেই দেহ তুলে ডি এন এ পরীক্ষায় পাঠানো যায়। 'স্পেশাল টাস্ক ফোর্স (এস টি এফ)' প্রথমে চেয়েছিল দ্রুত বীরাপ্লনের শেষকৃত্য সেরে ফেলতে। বিপদ বাড়তে পারে বুঝে তারাও পরে কবরে সম্মতি দেয়। বীরাপ্লনের তিন সঙ্গীর দেহ অবশ্য দাহ করা হয়েছে।

একদা বীরাপ্লনের ঘনিষ্ঠ সহযোগী ও 'তান্তাই পেরিয়ার দ্রাবিড় কাজাকাম' নামে এক সংগঠনের নেতা কোলাথুর মণি প্রশ্ন তুলেছেন, নিহত দস্যুই যে বীরাপ্লন, তা নিশ্চিত হওয়ার পদ্ধতি এত সহজে সেরে ফেলা হল কেন? এ নিয়ে মানবাধিকার কমিশনে যাওয়ার কথাও ভাবছেন মণি। তাঁর জোরাজুরিতেই আজ বীরাপ্লনকে কবর দেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত হয়। তাঁর স্ত্রী মুখলক্ষ্মীকেও রাজি করান মণিই।

ধর্মপুরী হাসপাতাল থেকে কাল রাতেই তামিলনাড়ুর মেতুরের কাছে মুলাক্কাত্তু গ্রামে পৌঁছে গিয়েছিল বীরাপ্লনের দেহ। কিন্তু কোয়ম্বড়ুর সেন্ট্রাল জেলে থাকা বীরাপ্লনের ভাই মাথিয়ানের জন্য অপেক্ষা করতে গিয়ে রাত গড়িয়ে যায়। শেষ পর্যন্ত আজ ভোর ৬ টায় হিন্দু রীতি মেনে অস্ত্যোষ্টি ক্রিয়ার পর কবর দেওয়া হয় চন্দনদস্যুকে।

এস টি এফের গুলিতে যিনি মারা গেলেন, তিনিই বীরাপ্লন কি না— এই প্রশ্ন এখনও ঘোরতর ভাবে রয়েছে। বাড়ছে সোমবারের রাত ঘিরে কৌতূহলও। এস টি এফেরই পাঠানো যে-অ্যাথুল্যাঙ্গে সদলবল বীরাপ্লন আসছিলেন, তার উপর অন্তত ৪০০ বুলেট দেগেছেন জওয়ানেরা। কিন্তু চালক সর্বানন অক্ষত। এস টি এফের প্রধানের ব্যাখ্যা, গুলির লড়াইয়ের সময় কী ভাবে গাড়ি ছেড়ে নেমে পড়তে হবে, তা অনেক আগে থেকেই শেখানো হয় সর্বাননকে।

চন্দনদস্যুর আঘাতের প্রকৃতি নিয়েও ধন্দ রয়েছে। ধর্মপুরী হাসপাতালের সুএ জানাচ্ছে, কপালে বুলেটের ক্ষত ছাড়াও বুকে, কোমরের কাছে গুলি লেগেছিল বীরাপ্লনের। একটি গুলি 'অটোপসি'-র সময় বারও করা হয়েছে। এস টি এফের বিবরণ অনুযায়ী, বীরাপ্লনের আসার রাস্তার সামনে আখ-বোঝাই ট্রাকে ওত পেতে ছিলেন জওয়ানেরা। তা হলে পিছনে গুলি কী করে লাগল? কপালের ক্ষত দেখে মনে হয় 'পয়েন্ট ব্ল্যাক রেঞ্জ' থেকে গুলি করা হয়েছে। অত কাছেই বীরাপ্লনকে পেয়েও জীবন্ত ধরা হল না কেন?

পথে আটকা না-পড়লে কোথায় যেতে পারতেন বীরাপ্লন? পুলিশ এবং এস টি এফ শুধু জানাচ্ছে, চোখের সমস্যায় চন্দনদস্যু জেরবার বলে তাঁরা জানতেন। এটাও জানতেন, সোমবার বা বুধবার তিনি জঙ্গল ছেড়ে বেরিয়ে চোখ দেখাতে যাবেন। পুলিশেরই লোক চালক সেজে বীরাপ্লনের দলের কাছে গিয়ে বলে, অ্যাথুল্যাঙ্গে গেলে কারও কোনও সন্দেহ হবে না। বীরাপ্লনের গাড়ি দেখে এক বার ভাবাও হয় যে, তিনি ফেরার সময় 'অভিযান' চালানো হবে। কিন্তু খানিকটা কপাল ঠুকেই সে যাত্রায় কাজ সেরে ফেলার সিদ্ধান্ত হয় এবং সাফল্যও আসে।

গ্রামবাসীদেরও যাতে সন্দেহ না হয়, তাও খেয়াল রেখেছিল এস টি এফ। গাড়িচালক, নৌকোচালক, ফলবিক্রেতার মতো আটপৌরে মানুষের বেশে আশেপাশের গ্রামে ছড়িয়ে গিয়েছিল তারা। বছরখানেক আগে বীরাপ্লনের দলে 'চর' ঢুকিয়ে প্রচুর তথ্য বার করা হয়। তা সম্ভব হয়েছিল এই কারণেই যে, বীরাপ্লন নতুন সঙ্গী খুঁজছিলেন। বীরাপ্লনের সঙ্গেই গুলিতে হত সেতুকুলি গোবিন্দন দলের ভিতরে তাঁর প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বী হয়ে উঠতে চাইছিলেন বলেও অস্বস্তিতে ছিলেন বীরাপ্লন।

এই সব প্রশ্ন থাকবে। উত্তর খোঁজার চেষ্টাও চলবে। কিন্তু কিছু রহস্যের মীমাংসা সম্ভবত কোনও দিন হবে না। জঙ্গলের যে গোপন ডেরায় বীরাপ্লনের লুট করা ঐশ্বর্য থাকত, তার হদিস জানত তিন জন। তার এক জন দোরেশ্বামী পুলিশের গুলিতে মারা গিয়েছেন আগেই। সোমবার রাতে মারা গেলেন বাকি দু'জন— সেতুকুলি গোবিন্দন আর বীরাপ্লন স্বয়ং! সেই অর্ধের হদিস মিলবে না। কর্নটক সরকার অবশ্য বলেছে, বীরাপ্লনের গোটা কর্মকাণ্ডেরই তদন্ত করবে তারা। জবাব মিলবে না এ প্রশ্নেরও যে, অভিনেতা রাজকুমারের মুক্তিপণের বিরাট অর্থ কোথায় রেখে গেলেন বীরাপ্লন? প্রাক্তন মন্ত্রী নাগাপ্পাকে মেরেছিল কে? বীরাপ্লন শেষ হলেও বীরাপ্লন-অধ্যায়ের অনেক কিছুই কিন্তু শেষ হল না। — পি টি আই

অ্যাথুল্যাস চালক এসটিএফ কর্মী

পুলিশেরই পাতা

ফাঁদে পা বীরান্নের

ধর্মপুরী, ১৯ অক্টোবর: সেই 'বিখ্যাত' পাকানো গোর্ফটা অনেক ছোট করে ছাটা। পরনের পোশাকটাও চিরপরিচিত সবুজ নয়, সাদা। এক নজরে দেখলে বিশ্বাস করা শক্ত যে, ইনি-ই কুসে মুনিস্বামী বীরান্ন। হাসপাতাল, মর্গে যারা চন্দনদস্যুর দেহ দেখলেন, তাঁরাও অবাক। তিন দশকের ত্রাসের রাজত্ব শেষের স্বস্তিকেও ছাপিয়ে গেল এই বিষয়।

কাল রাত এগারোটা নাগাদ বীরান্নের ঘাটি সত্যমঙ্গলম জঙ্গলের কাছে প্রায় আধ ঘণ্টা ধরে যে গুলির লড়াইটা হল, তার জন্য অনেক দিন ধরেই প্রস্তুত হচ্ছিল কর্নাটক-তামিলনাড়ুর বিশেষ টাস্ক ফোর্স (এস টি এফ)। বীরান্ন ধরা পড়লে মাথা কামাবেন, মানত করেছিলেন তামিলনাড়ু এস টি এফের প্রধান কে বিজয়কুমার। রাত পোহাতেই মানত রক্ষা করেছেন তিনি। মুণ্ডিত মস্তকে সাংবাদিকদের সামনে এসে বললেন, গত দু'তিন সপ্তাহ ধরে পরিকল্পনা করে, ফাঁদ পেতে তবে বীরান্নকে তাঁর ঘাটি ছেড়ে বাইরে আনা গিয়েছে। চন্দনদস্যুর দলের ঘনিষ্ঠমহলে আগেই লোক ঢুকিয়ে দিতে পেরেছিল এস টি এফ। তারাই বীরান্নের গতিবিধি সম্পর্কে খবরাখবর জোগাচ্ছিল। কিন্তু গতিবিধি জানতে পারলেও জঙ্গলের মধ্যে বীরান্নের অনুকূল পরিবেশে পুলিশ কিছুতেই সংঘর্ষে যেতে চাইছিল না। অবশেষে বীরান্ন জঙ্গল থেকে বেরিয়ে আসছেন জানতে পেরেই পুলিশ ফাঁদ পাততে পেরেছিল সেখানে। বীরান্নের নিজস্ব নিরাপত্তা ব্যবস্থায় পুলিশের লোক ঢুকিয়ে দিতে পারার ফলেই চন্দনদস্যু যখন

না তাঁর। রীতিমতো ঝাঁপিয়ে উঠলেন আলোকচিত্রীদের। তার পর আলাদা ঘরে ডজনখানেক পুলিশের পাহারায় বন্দি রইলেন বীরান্নের সদ্য বিধবা স্ত্রী। সেতুকুলি গোবিন্দনের বাবা-মা-ও। চন্দ্রগৌড়া আর গোবিন্দনের আত্মীয়রা কেউ হাসপাতালে আসেননি।

ভিতরে যখন এই ছবি, বাইরে তখন ডিড সামলাতে হিমশিম খাচ্ছে পুলিশ। বীরান্নের মৃতদেহটা এক বার চোখের দেখা দেখতে দেওয়া হোক এই দাবিতে জনতা মুখর। তিরিশ বছর ধরে কর্নাটক-তামিলনাড়ু-কেরল লাগোয়া ৬০০০ বর্গকিলোমিটার বনাঞ্চল যার দখলে ছিল, যার নামে অন্তত ১৩০ জন মানুষ খুনের মামলা, দু'হাজারের বেশি হাতি মারার আর কোটি কোটি টাকার চন্দন কাঠ চুরির অভিযোগ, তাঁকে শেষ দেখার সুযোগ ছাড়তে কেউই রাজি নয়। রাতের খবর, বীরান্নের আত্মীয়েরা ঠিক করেছেন বুধবার দুপুরের মধ্যেই তাঁর দেহ দাহ না-করে সমাধি দেওয়া হবে।

বীরান্নান নিকেশ পর্ব থেকে রাজনৈতিক ফায়দা তুলতে উঠে পড়ে লেগেছেন তামিলনাড়ুর মুখ্যমন্ত্রী জয়ললিতা। 'এটা আমার সরকারের সবচেয়ে বড় সাফল্য', দাবি করেছেন তিনি। এস টি এফের ৭৫২ জন জওয়ানের পদোন্নতি আর আর্থিক পুরস্কারের ঘোষণাও সেরে ফেলেছেন জয়া। এই ঘটনা থেকে জয়ার রাজনৈতিক সুবিধা কতটা হবে তা জানার আগ্রহ ছিল বি জে পি শিবিরেও। তামিলনাড়ুর মুখ্যমন্ত্রীকে ফোন করে অভিনন্দন জানিয়েছেন লালকৃষ্ণ আডবাণী।



চন্দনদস্যুর মৃতদেহ, কপালে বুলেটের ক্ষত। ইনসেটে, সেই বিখ্যাত গোর্ফ-সহ আগের বীরান্ন। — পি টি আই

অ্যাথুল্যাসে চেপে জঙ্গলের বাইরে বেরোবার পরিকল্পনা আঁটেন, তখন সাধারণ অ্যাথুল্যাস নয়, অজান্তেই এস টি এফের গাড়িতে উঠে বসেন তিনি। অ্যাথুল্যাস চালাচ্ছিলেন সর্বানন নামে এস টি এফেরই এক জন।

কিন্তু প্রশ্ন হল, অত রাতে জঙ্গল ছেড়ে কোথায় যাচ্ছিলেন বীরান্ন। বিজয়কুমারের মতে, সম্ভবত চোখ দেখাতে। কিছু দিন ধরেই চোখ নিয়ে সমস্যা হচ্ছিল তাঁর। অভিযানের সবিস্তার বিবরণ বিজয়কুমার দেননি। তিনি শুধু বলেন, বীরান্ন আসছে খবর পেয়ে পাল্লারাপাতি গ্রামের কাছে নির্জন রাস্তায় ওঁত পেতে বসেছিলেন এস টি এফের জওয়ানেরা। গাড়ি দাঁড় করিয়ে রাস্তা বন্ধ করে দেওয়া হয়। পাশের একটি ঝুল বাড়ির ছাদেও উঠে পড়েন কয়েক জন। ঘাটি গাড়ার খানিক পরে রাত দশটা পঞ্চাশে এসে পৌঁছান বীরান্ন। সঙ্গে তিন সঙ্গী, সেতুকুলি গোবিন্দন, চন্দ্রগৌড়া ও গোবিন্দন। বিজয়কুমারের দাবি, দু'বার তাঁদের আত্মসমর্পণ করতে বলা হয়। তাতে কান না-দিয়ে আচমকা গুলি চালাতে শুরু করেন তাঁরা। সম্ভবত জীবন্ত ধরা দেওয়া এড়াতেই তাঁরা গুলি চালান। জওয়ানদের লক্ষ করে খেনেডও ছোড়া হয়। গুলির লড়াই চলে এগারোটা দশ পর্যন্ত। মাত্র ২০ মিনিট। শেষ 'অপারেশন কোকুন'। গুলিতে ঝাঁঝরা হয়ে যাওয়া অ্যাথুল্যাস থেকে বার করে বীরান্ন ও তাঁর তিন সঙ্গীর ক্ষতবিক্ষত দেহ রাত দেড়টায় পৌঁছে যায় হাসপাতালে। শেষ হয় এক জন মানুষকে ধরতে দেশের ইতিহাসে দীর্ঘতম, সবচেয়ে ব্যয়সাপেক্ষ অপারেশন। যার মাথার দাম সাড়ে পাঁচ কোটি টাকা।

চেহারা-পোশাকে যতই বদল ঘটে যাক, বীরান্নই মারা গেলেন কি না, সে ব্যাপারে নিশ্চিত হতে ডি এন এ পরীক্ষা করা হচ্ছে না। দেহ শনাক্ত করেছেন বীরান্নের স্ত্রী মুখলক্ষ্মী। আজ দুপুর বারোটা নাগাদ কড়া পাহারায় তাঁকে হাসপাতালে নিয়ে আসা হয়। সঙ্গে জনাকয়েক আত্মীয়স্বজন। সংবাদ মাধ্যমের যাবতীয় ছড়াছড়ি সত্ত্বেও একটাও 'বাইট' মিলল

কংগ্রেস অবশ্য লাভের গুড় একা জয়ললিতার ভাগে পড়তে দিতে রাজি নয়। দলের মুখপাত্র গিরিজা ব্যাস দিল্লিতে বলেছেন, "দুই রাজ্যের বাহিনী মিলিয়েই যে টাস্ক ফোর্স তৈরি হয়েছিল এটা ভুলে গেলে চলবে না। বিভিন্ন সময় বহু তথ্য দিয়ে তামিলনাড়ুকে সাহায্য করেছে কর্নাটক। এ বার তামিলনাড়ুর বাহিনী বীরান্নকে মারলেও তাকে ফাঁদে ফেলার ক্ষেত্রে কর্নাটকের উল্লেখযোগ্য অবদান ছিল।"

রাজ্যের প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী এবং ডি এম কে সভাপতি করুণানিধিকে কাল রাতেই চন্দনদস্যুর মৃত্যুর খবর দেন রাজ্য পুলিশের এক কর্তা। এ দিন কোদাইকানালে বসে করুণানিধি বলেন, "ডি এম কে-র আমলে বীরান্ন কথা দিয়েও আত্মসমর্পণ করেনি। তা হলে আজ তার এই অবস্থা হত না।"

স্বস্তি প্রকাশ করেছে কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র মন্ত্রকও। স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল আজ বলেন, "বীরান্নের বিরুদ্ধে যে অভিযান চালানো হয়েছে, আমরা তার প্রশংসা করছি। বীরান্ন বেআইনি কার্যকলাপের প্রতীক হয়ে উঠেছিল। তার মৃত্যুর সঙ্গে সঙ্গে সেই প্রতীকও ধ্বংস হল।" চন্দনদস্যুর সাক্ষোপাস্তোরা, যারা এখনও জঙ্গলে থেকে গেল, তাদের মারার পরিকল্পনা নেই বলে তিনি জানান। — পি টি আই

● বীরান্নের গল্প শেষ হল রক্তের লেখাতেই... পৃঃ ৫

VEERAPPAN

Died by the gun he lived by

By Shivani Singh

Bhojpuri singer Baleshwar's 1982 hit was — "Collector ke hilawalu/Minister ke hilawalu/Tani Phoolan ke hilawa to Janu". Its rough English translation is: You may have shaken up the collector and the minister, but I'll concede your clout only if you shake up Phoolan Devi. Had Baleshwar lived in Karnataka, the obvious reference in his doggerel would be Veerappan.

For, Koose Muniswamy Veerappan Gounder, a backward Tamil Padayachi born in Gopinatham village in Karnataka, lived to become sandalwood smuggler, ivory poacher, killer and sadist. He later morphed into an Osama-like figure — devilish in his daring, feared for his chilling terror, a Robin Hood to a select few, politically convenient or inconvenient, depending on where the net stood, and almost impossible to catch.

That he has actually been gunned down is yet to sink in. The bandit was shot by a Tamil Nadu special task force (STF) team on Monday night as he emerged, sick with asthma, from the forest in search of a hospital. Earlier, he had many brushes with death and brushed them aside with disdain. But his luck finally ran out. A bullet through the head ended the gory legend.

What was, indeed, the Veerappan phenomenon? How did he take on the might of the state for over two decades, often thumbing his nose at it?

The killer bandit's theatre of operation was the dense tropical forest spread over four districts in an area of 6,000 sq km across Karnataka and Tamil Nadu. The jungles were rich with sandalwood and herds of elephants, both of which became the bandit's stock-in-trade.

Both cutting sandalwood trees and killing for ivory are banned. The ban, apart from generating a flourishing contraband trade in both, has had an unintended victim: the tribal inhabitants of the forests. These tribals are denied legal access to the forests' riches, and become willing accomplices of bandits like Veerappan. They provided almost foolproof intelligence to the brigand and have contributed in no small measure to the



image of invincibility.

But don't get misled — Veerappan was no champion of the poor. He often terrorised them, killed them, brooked no dissent. Sadism was inherent to the man. On October 8, 1988 he boiled alive two officials of the forest department; in November 1991 he beheaded forest conservator Srinivas after offering to surrender; in July 1993 he strangled his new-born daughter because she was the third successive female offspring.

Veerappan rarely stepped out of his haven, conducting business from the forest stretch bordering the states of Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala. And while doing so, he is credited with 120 murders and butchery of over 2,000 elephants. In fact, he began as an elephant poacher. He started young, killing his first tusker at 14, although folklore says he was 10. And his first murder was in 1969 when he was just 17.

But it was only when he started smuggling sandalwood that his crime got noticed. The smuggling business also found him establishing political connections in the 1980s and that is believed to have helped Veerappan to become even more elusive. Catching Veerappan alive was 'impossible' as it would be at the risk of exposing many local political stalwarts.

But unlike Phoolan Devi, Veerappan didn't show any overt interest in a trade-off with the police, of surrendering in return of a political career. The closest he came to politics was when the Tamil Nadu Liberation Army, once dismissed as an insignificant fringe group of Tamil extremists, built relations with Veerappan, providing him with superior-quality weapons. (Prior to this, his best firearm was a Magnum rifle with which he killed both elephant and man.) With TNLA support, he tried to stoke Tamil passions, possibly thinking that CM Jayalalitha might use him as a counterpoint to other groups championing the Tamil cause, but the lady refused to bite. In fact, she was determined to get him, which her police eventually did.

But how did Veerappan's luck run out? Perhaps it was just an unlucky positioning of stars for him, but more likely his last two publicised

crimes — abduction of Rajkumar and his four-month captivity in 2000 and the killing of Karnataka minister H Nagappa in 2002 — were turning points when the balance of sympathy and complicity weighed in against him. Since then, Veerappan has been a marked man and many say it was a question of time before his run ended.

It ended when officer STF ADGP K Vijaykumar's team trapped and killed the brigand. There are some who say he might have been captured alive. But those who live by the gun often die by it, if only to ensure that they don't survive to tell uncomfortable tales.



IT WAS IN THE STARS

"It was in his stars. Thus proclaimed an astrologer in February. After securing a copy of Veerappan's horoscope from an STF source, when this correspondent met the astrologer, he had declared: "Veerappan won't live to see his 53rd birthday." But, when the report of the prediction appeared in *The Times of India* on February 21, the astrologer wanted to remain anonymous. "I'm not looking for money, or fame. I also don't see everybody's horoscope," he had said. Now, he says: "Man may lie, but the planets won't."



TO EACH HIS SHARE

The Veerappan bounty just kept getting bigger. While the Karnataka government reward was Rs 5 crore, the Tamil Nadu government announced a reward of Rs 50 lakh. As the dust settles on the operation, which STF gets how much of the Tamil Nadu CM Jayalalitha announced that TN STF chief ADGP K Vijaykumar would be promoted as DGP; all 752 TN STF personnel would be promoted and those who took part in 'Operation Cocoon' will get Rs 3 lakh each plus a plot. Karnataka has also announced plots for STF personnel.

Who knows?



By HS Balam/TNN

Bangalore: Dead men tell no tales. Veerappan won't either, and death has only deepened the living mystery he was. The big questions:

● Why did well-equipped police teams from Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, as well as the Centre, fail to nab Veerappan?

● Was it bad intelligence, every time, or just a lack of will? Several politicians were believed to have been hand in glove with him, some even for election funds. It was also commonly held that Veerappan would not be taken alive, as he could have revealed his political connections. Who were these people?

● Why was he so easy to find for civilians and journalists? While finding Veerappan remained an unfulfilled task of a number of police teams, civilian volunteers in dhotis and chappals never seemed to have had any trouble in ambling across to his jungle hideout. Was there something the cops missed always, or was it an even bigger secret?

● Did Veerappan have links with the LTTE? A few of those known to have met Veerappan, some going as far as to offer seeking his surrender, were known LTTE supporters. When Veerappan kidnapped Kannada superstar Rajkumar, one of the conditions for the actor's release was the creation of a separate Tamil homeland. It is also believed that he had begun to fancy a shy at politics. Those who secured Rajkumar's release were known sympathisers of LTTE. Why did Karnataka and Tamil Nadu seek their help? And why was no effort made to grill them?

● Did the Jayalalitha-Karunanidhi political onepmanship help Veerappan? Jayalalitha has accused Karunanidhi of going soft on Veerappan, even jailing Gopal and self-professed Tamil nationalists Nedumaran and Kollathur Mani, who were close to Karunanidhi, under POTA. In fact, when JD mandated the release of Mani from prison to initiate negotiations.

● Was a hefty ransom paid to get Rajkumar freed? Both M Karunanidhi and SM Krishna, who were CMs then, deny it. The family of the filmstar and the emissaries won't comment. But police officials who were party to the behind-the-scenes activity confirm that money was indeed paid. One of them even disclosed that a part of the ransom was given by stamp scam kingpin Abdul Telgi! It was also said that Krishna spoke to Veerappan before the ransom money was dispatched. And did Veerappan use a part of the ransom to fund the LTTE?

Verma's muse is dead but film on Veerappan alive

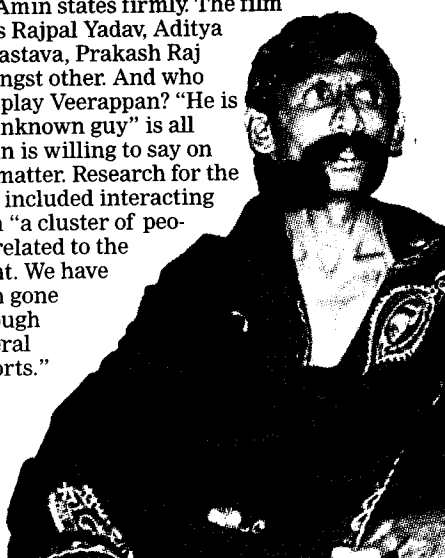
By Nikita Doval
TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Veerappan is history, but Bollywood biggie Ram Gopal Verma is making sure his story is immortalised on celluloid. Verma, whose *Jungle* was built around a jungle bandit suspiciously similar to Veerappan, is busy with a film on the sandalwood smuggler.

But won't Veerappan's death throw a spanner in the Ram Gopal Verma works? "No, for the film is not so much about Veerappan as it is about a plan to catch him that went terribly awry," explains Shimit Amin, who is directing the movie. The film is based on a chapter titled *The Grand Plan* in Sunaad Raghuram's book *Veerappan: The untold story* and deals with three villagers, one of whom supplies food to Veerappan's gang.

"When the other two discover this connection, they hatch a plan to capture the smuggler and collect the reward. Forty-three people were killed in the subsequent events along with a few policemen," explains Amin. The three men and Veerappan survived.

"This is just one incident in the past so the current development will not have any effect on it," Amin states firmly. The film stars Rajpal Yadav, Aditya Srivastava, Prakash Raj amongst others. And who will play Veerappan? "He is an unknown guy" is all Amin is willing to say on the matter. Research for the film included interacting with "a cluster of people related to the event. We have even gone through several reports."



In his jungle, fear was the key

By Chandrika Mago/TNN

New Delhi: It wasn't state forest laws locking out villagers that created the Veerappan sympathy phenomenon but a mix of the poacher's generosity and ruthlessness which kept people quiet as he wreaked environmental damage over four decades, say wildlife and police sleuths who have tracked the infamous outlaw for years.

Amazingly, a hesitant analysis from foresters even suggested that between 1989 and 1995, forest health actually improved in some areas of Veerappan's range, possibly because others were too fearful to step in or because of restrictions enforced by the Special Task Force chasing the smuggler. More 'open forest' in the

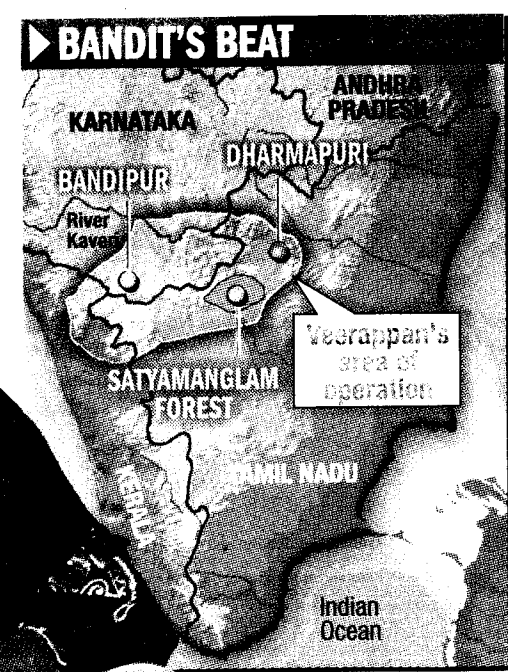
hunted monitor lizards and blackbucks for meat, langur because of a legend that its blood is good for asthma patients and even dynamited fish, eating some and leaving the rest floating.

Officials still believe 20-30 pairs of elephant tusks remain hidden in the forest.

If people didn't complain, it wasn't because they sympathised with him. Chikkerur says the smuggler distributed money freely.

A retired state wildlife official blames Veerappan's ruthlessness, recalling he killed 16 people from a village of suspected informants.

It would be "wrong", they say, to blame forest laws changed just a couple of years ago to give more space to villagers.



From boy poacher to most wanted killer

By Jayanth Kodkani/TNN

Bangalore: It was back in 1963 that a boy called Veerappan killed his first elephant. The blood didn't stop flowing for the next 40 years as Veerappan morphed into a Robin Hood figure.

The story goes that notorious poacher Salvai Gounder was so impressed by Veerappan's skill in stalking elephants that he took the boy under his wing. Gounder shifted to sandalwood smuggling after the export of ivory was banned in the early 1980s. Gounder's beat, the forest from Nilgiris to Dharmapuri, was rich in sandalwood. Gounder's heirs were Veerappan and another gang-member called Thangavelu. At the peak of their plundering, sandalwood worth in

various pockets of the forest.

The hard life and times of the tribals living on the fringes of the forest provided the perfect background to Veerappan's career of crime. Given that poaching was a community occupation and tribals living in acute poverty were angered by government restrictions on their share of nature, there was enough ground support for Veerappan.

As Veerappan's gang expanded, the stories around him grew taller. Veerappan's natural cunning ensured he built up political and administrative connections to keep his sandalwood business going profitably.

Deadly poacher that he was, Veerappan lived by his own jungle law. He knew no caste, and did no looting or maiming for

blind revenge, eliminating mainly those who crossed his path. His tribal humility and propriety were evident by the way he addressed *Nakkeeran* editor RR Gopal as 'Editor saar'.

Veerappan's ruthlessness was legendary. In 1994, he trapped top police officers with talk of surrender and killed them. Veerappan's cold-blooded elimination of rivals was also evident when his former colleague in crime Thangavelu formed a rival gang sometime in the summer of 1986. Veerappan invited the Thangavelu gang over for a meal. That was the end of Thangavelu. Video films that Gopal brought back showed Veerappan keeping track of his world with the help of newspapers and the radio. He was blessed with a razor-sharp

memory and narration skills, including theatrical demonstrations. His ambushes were always carefully planned. Once, his sister Mari guided a task force hot on Veerappan's heels the other way, even as the bandit's wife Muthulakshmi joined him in the forest. This was soon after she delivered a girl in 1991. Mari had been planted as a help in a dispensary run by the Task Force.

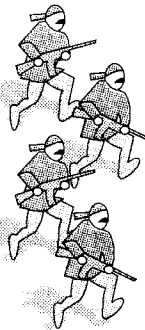
Another strong Veerappan characteristic was his strong emotional attachment to family and close aides. The killing of his brother Arjunan provoked a round of revenge slayings.

The Veerappan story found its way onto the silver screen too in *Veerappan* (Kannada) and *Captain Prabhakar* (Tamil).

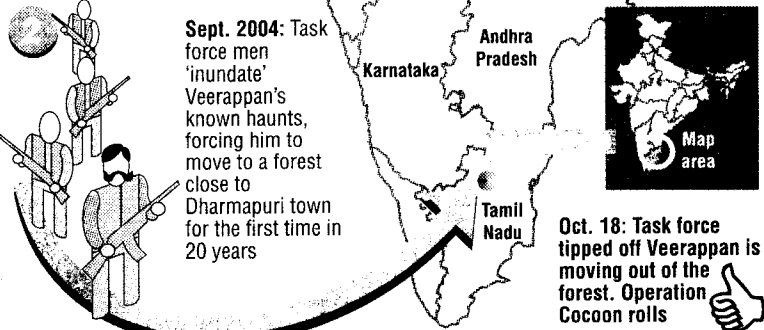
Jungle justice catches up

OPERATION COCOON The sequence of events as recounted by TN special task force chief K. Vijayakumar

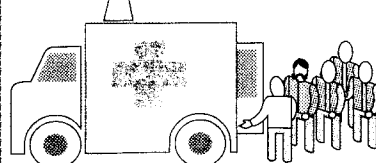
1 Sometime in 2003: Four Special Task Force members infiltrate Veerappan's inner circle and spend two to three weeks with the bandit. They bring back a wealth of information, especially on his failing health, based on which Operation Cocoon is planned



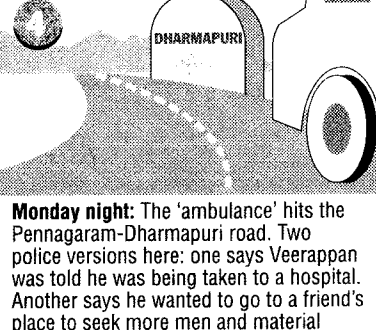
2 Sept. 2004: Task force men 'inundate' Veerappan's known haunts, forcing him to move to a forest close to Dharmapuri town for the first time in 20 years



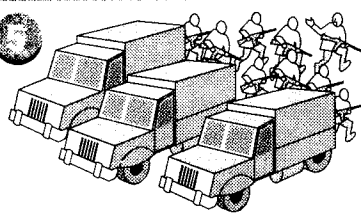
3 Monday evening: Driven by a task force insider, a 'decoy vehicle' that resembles an ambulance reaches Veerappan's hideout. Veerappan, who has an eye ailment, and three aides allow themselves to be driven away



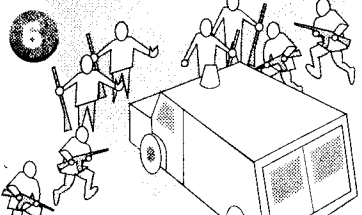
4 Monday night: The 'ambulance' hits the Pennagaram-Dharmapuri road. Two police versions here: one says Veerappan was told he was being taken to a hospital. Another says he wanted to go to a friend's place to seek more men and material



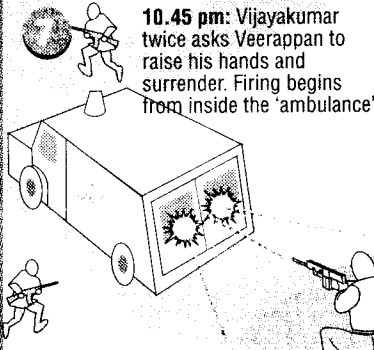
5 10.20 pm: A 60-strong task force team led by Vijayakumar in civilian clothes and three vehicles position themselves at Padi, 8 km from Dharmapuri. All entry and exit points to the forest areas across Tamil Nadu sealed by then



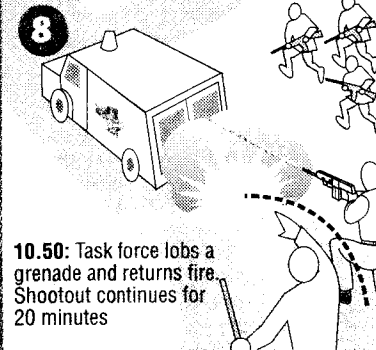
6 10.30 pm: The 'ambulance' reaches Padi and is waylaid. The force has split into three groups. One takes position on top of a nearby school




7 10.45 pm: Vijayakumar twice asks Veerappan to raise his hands and surrender. Firing begins from inside the 'ambulance'




8 10.50: Task force lobbs a grenade and returns fire. Shootout continues for 20 minutes



9 11.12 pm: Veerappan found dead inside the 'ambulance' with a bullet hole in his head. Injured aides alive but die before reaching hospital



THE HUNTER



QUESTIONS

- How did the force manage such a clean shot of Veerappan's head if he was inside the van?
- Why would he trust a stranger who came with an ambulance?
- How come there are two versions about his destination?
- Why is no DNA test being done?
- Will his political links be buried along with him?

Veerappan dies as he lived

M.R. VENKATESH IN DHARMAPURI

Oct. 19: A hole in the head.

That bullet wound — not the imperious thicket of a moustache which had lost its sweep and flourish overnight — was the most striking feature on the face of Kuse Munesamy Veerappan as he lay dead in a decrepit hospital.

Caked in blood, the bullet mark also had the imprint of what many would consider poetic justice, though questions remain on how it was delivered.

Veerappan, who had lured many a policeman to his death, was driven to his in a police decoy ambulance in Tamil Nadu's Dharmapuri. A commando of the special task force set up to hunt him down was at the wheel, in disguise.

At Padi, 8 km from here, a special task force team led by Tamil Nadu chief K. Vijayakumar was lying in wait. Police said Veerappan was asked to surrender and killed after he opened fire. "It was all over in 20 minutes (10.50 pm to 11.10 pm)," said Vijayakumar.

The "ambulance" driver was produced at the news conference. "I would have been very happy to capture him alive. But when he opened fire, we had to retaliate," Vi-

jayakumar said.

The police, who had failed and lost lives in attempts to get the bandit in the forests that he knew like the back of his palm, this time waited till he was squeezed out of his hunting ground.

However, questions were raised about how Veerappan received surgical bullet wounds — on his head, chest and hip — when he was inside the "ambulance". But Vijayakumar angrily brushed aside suggestions of a fake encounter. "I do not want to answer this question," retorted the additional director-general of police, who has been promoted to DGP.

Vijayakumar had been shunted to the STF after falling foul of chief minister Jayalalitha in a high-profile case when he was commissioner. Part of the first batch of Special Protection Group officers detailed to protect Rajiv Gandhi after Indira Gandhi's assassination, Vijayakumar was handpicked by the then Prime Minister to provide security to his family.

It was "no flash in the pan operation", Vijayakumar said, describing the "extraordi-

nary intelligence operation" that trapped the 52-year-old sandalwood and ivory smuggler who had murdered over 100 people and killed 2,000 elephants for their tusks. The operation was codenamed Cocoon.

Four STF men had penetrated the bandit's inner circle last year and come back with a "wealth of information". They had also convinced him that the commando who drove the "ambulance" last night was the man to summon for medical help.

A diabetic, Veerappan had an eye problem and was finding it increasingly difficult to get "men and material support" from fringe Tamil extremist groups, police said. Vijayakumar felt that Veerappan might have set out last night either to consult a doctor or in search of a new friend who could assist him.

Another version is that he was trying to escape to some other place. This would explain the civilian clothing and the "trimmed" moustache.

Jayalalitha announced a reward of Rs 3 lakh, a plot and a promotion to all the 752 special task force personnel. "My government's resoluteness

has paid off," she said in Chennai, as supporters likened her to Durga slaying Mahishasura, pointing out that the killing coincided with Navratri. Jaya is another name for Durga.

Asked if many "political secrets might have died" with the bandit, Jayalalitha said: "Well, that cannot be helped."

The bodies of Veerappan and his associates were handed over to their families after post-mortem. Veerappan's wife, Muthulakshmi, was inconsolable as she was led to the mortuary. After identifying her husband, who looked different in plainclothes and with his moustache trimmed, she took the body.

Veerappan's last rites, slated to be held in a village near Mettur, 50 km from Salem, have been put on hold as his lawyer said a close relative of the bandit wanted the body to be buried. Officials are also waiting for the arrival of Veerappan's second daughter Vidyanani. Both Vidyanani and sister Prabha are school students and in their teens.

A forensic scientist said DNA profiling should be done to confirm the bandit's identity. But police said the identity has been established "by thumb rule".

■ Veerappan hunt, Page 6

QUOTE

He was a cruel animal and vermin of the gutter

RAJKUMAR

Tug-of-war for spoils of death



B.R. SRIKANTH

Bangalore, Oct. 19: Dead men tell no tales.

Veerappan's death means a silent end of his links with political bigwigs. The patronage was obvious but could not be established. He had the tacit support of politicians in both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka, but the dangerous liaisons were obscured by a game of one-upmanship between the ruling parties in the two southern states over the last decade and a half.

This game continued even after Veerappan and his men fell to the special task force on Monday night. Early on Tuesday, Tamil Nadu chief minister Jayalalithaa rushed a statement to the media on the spectacular success of the STF.

At that point, the Karnataka government could not confirm Veerappan's death with police chief S.N. Borkar groping for details of the encounter near Papparpatti in Tamil Nadu's Dharmapuri district. The operation is a "precious jewel of my government", Jayalalithaa said in the statement.

The ADMK chief pointed out that she had created the STF in 1993 during her first tenure as chief minister, but criticised the next DMK government for rendering the STF ineffective.

"When I came back to power in 2001, I immediately took steps to reconstitute the STF. Every political party mocked me for my stand in this whole operation, particularly the DMK, which played a dubious role in the Rajkumar abduction crisis," she added.

Her counterpart in Karnataka reacted several hours later. Dharman Singh vowed that his government would launch a probe into the political patronage and financial support that the brigand got over the last three decades.

"Though Veerappan and his associates have been killed in an encounter, we need to pursue some vital clues about the political and financial support that appears to have helped him survive so long," Singh said.

A nuisance which held the nation to ransom finally has ended. He was a cruel animal and vermin of the gutter

Rajkumar
Kannada actor kidnapped and freed in 2000



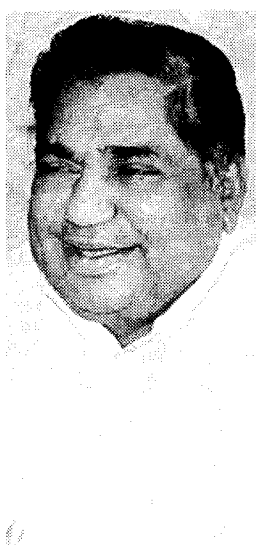
If they (the special task force) had done it before, many lives would have been saved. It would have been good for us also

Parimala Nagappa
Widow of former Karnataka minister H. Nagappa, who was kidnapped and killed by Veerappan



There was a big contribution made by Karnataka police also over the years. This particular operation was carried out in Tamil Nadu by Tamil Nadu STF

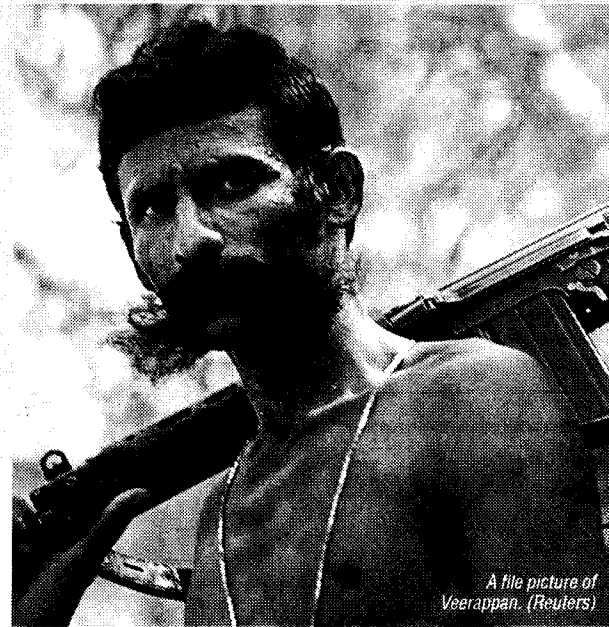
Jayalalithaa
Tamil Nadu chief minister



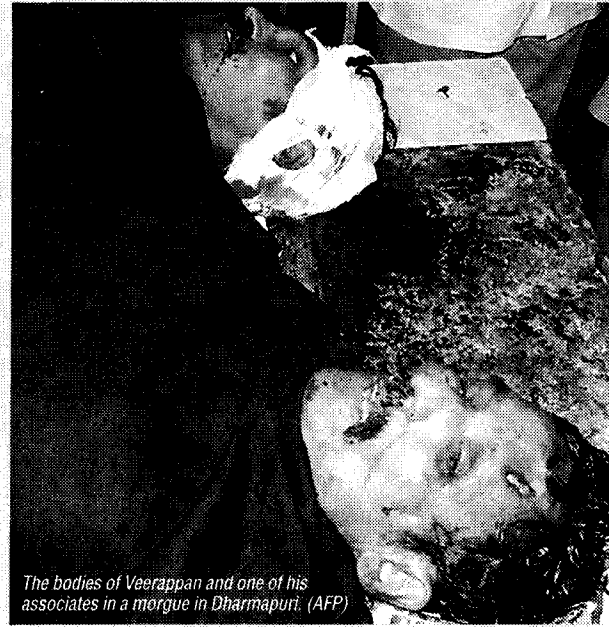
Congratulations. It is your (Jayalalithaa's) keen interest that brought an end to the 20-year reign of terror in the forests

Dharam Singh
Karnataka chief minister

DEADLY DOSSIER



A file picture of Veerappan. (Reuters)



The bodies of Veerappan and one of his associates in a morgue in Dharmapuri. (AFP)

- **January 1952:** Kuse Muniswamy Veerappan Gounder born in Gopinatham village, now in Karnataka, then in Tamil Nadu
- **1969:** Said to have committed first murder
- **1972:** Arrested for the first time
- **1986:** Arrested again by Karnataka police, escapes
- **July 1987:** Kidnaps and kills Tamil Nadu forest officer Chidambaram
- **January 1990:** Guns down a sub-inspector and a head constable in revenge
- **April 1990:** Ambushes and mows down officer Dinesh, who was "hot on his trail", two sub-inspectors and a constable
- **November 1990:** Beheads deputy conservator of forests, R. Srinivas, blaming him for his sister's death. Head is traced three years later
- **February 1992:** Kidnaps son of a granite quarry owner. Frees him for Rs 15 lakh
- **August 14, 1992:** Veerappan blows up STF superintendent Harikrishna and several police personnel to avenge the killing of four gang members in June
- **April 1993:** A bus carrying

Tamil Nadu police personnel targeted near Palar, killing 22 people. Superintendent "Rambo" Gopalakrishnan hurt

• **May 1993:** Attacks Karnataka police superintendent Gopal Hosur and party, killing six policemen

• **July 1993:** BSF joins operations in the forest area, catches 19 gang members. A series of encounters sets back the gang. Veerappan seeks

amnesty

• **December 1994:** Brother Arjunan and two others, Ayudurai and Rangaswamy, surrender in the face of an STF onslaught. Later, Arjunan and Rangaswamy consume poison

• **December 1995:** Veerappan vents anger on Tamil Nadu STF, kills two personnel

• **January 1996:** Attacks and injures Tamil Nadu superintendent

Tamil Nadu. Begins negotiations with Tamil Nadu government

• **July 30, 2000:** Abducts Kannada matinee idol Rajkumar and four others. One hostage flees, actor freed months later amid claims of a huge amount changing hands

• **August 25, 2002:** Former Karnataka minister H. Nagappa abducted. Body found after some days

Cataract, asthma drove in last nail

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Bangalore, Oct. 19: Veerappan dropped guard on Monday because he was suffering from a number of ailments, including falling vision, bouts of asthma and diabetes, according to top police sources here.

The sources said the bandit had been desperate for medical attention for almost a year. Following a tip-off that he was suffering from cataract, the joint special task force had kept a watch on medical centres in Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

That he was suffering from asthma was evident from tablets found in the forests during joint combing operations. Veerappan, however, tried herbal medicines to treat the cataract as well as cure asthma.

In November 2000, the governments of Tamil Nadu and Karnataka allowed Dr Bhanu to accompany Tamil activist P. Nedumaran during negotiations for the release of the thespian Rajkumar. She treated Veerappan's wounds and asthma as well as Rajkumar's illness for a couple of days, and returned to the city along with the actor when Nedumaran succeeded in his mission.

The sources said the brigand had trimmed his hand-to-hand contact in order to sneak out of the border region for treatment.

"In the past, he used to summon a doctor from the border areas or visit one without being noticed. This time, he accepted help from one of our informants for treatment in a hospital and boarded the ambulance. If he was on his feet, he would have given us the slip during the encounter," the sources said.

900 men, Rs 20 cr for chase of decade

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Bangalore, Oct. 19: An army of 900 men backed by resources to the tune of Rs 20 crore was deployed for more than a decade to track down the country's most wanted bandit.

Official sources said 900 men, including a crack force called the Ninth Battalion, constituted the special task force (STF) of Karnataka.

A similar force (in terms of number of men) joined in from Tamil Nadu for combing operations in Male Mahadevsar hills in Karnataka and the adjoining forests in the neighbouring state.

The joint STF was set up in April 1993, soon after a blast triggered by the gang claimed the lives of 22 policemen of Tamil Nadu.

According to S.C. Burman, retired DGP who led the STF between 1993 and 1995, the search operations resulted in the arrest of Veerappan's wife Muthulakshmi in 1993.

"We were supported by BSF men when we blasted one of his hideouts a day before her arrest. We succeeded in reducing the gang to five men within two years. We lost three men but shot down 18 of his gang. His brother Arjunan and two others surrendered in December 1994, but he (Arjunan) committed suicide next year (while in custody)," he said.

The operations were hindered by a lack of support from the Centre a couple of times.

Though it despatched five companies of the BSF in 1993, the state's plea for central forces met with no response from Delhi.

Soon after the death of former minister H. Nagappa in 2002, the state requested additional forces and sophisticated weapons.

The weapons were put on hold with the Centre placing the requests from Jammu and Kashmir and the border states ahead of Karnataka.



Policemen and locals gather to take a look at the bodies of Veerappan and his associates at the shootout site in Dharmapuri on Tuesday. (AFP)

Vermin of the gutter, spits relieved actor

OUR SPECIAL CORRESPONDENT

Bangalore, Oct. 19: Veerappan's death at the hands of the special task force has let loose the emotions of prominent people who have had run-ins with him.

For Kannada thespian Rajkumar, the bandit's death meant good riddance to a "cruel animal and vermin of the gutter".

"I suspect that he would have nurtured elements like him. They should not be allowed to grow. I am happy he is no more," said the veteran actor who spent over 100 days in the forest after Veerappan whisked him away from his farmhouse at Gajanur, Tamil Nadu, in 2000.

His wife, Parvathamma, who was a witness to the abduction, woke him up early today to break the news of Veerappan's death.

"Now I am free to visit my native village without fear after waiting so long," said Rajkumar, who was prevented fr-

om visiting his ancestral home since his release.

Rajkumar said he had offered Veerappan the opportunity to begin a new life while in captivity in the dense forests of Satyamangalam.

"To change him, I offered to assist him with my contacts so he could buy a house and farmland and live a normal life. He told me he would not surrender in this life."

Rajkumar said he knew nothing about the ransom reportedly paid for his release. "I have not seen any money being transacted or paid to him (Veerappan), at least in my presence. However, I respect P. Nedumaran (Tamil Nationalist Movement leader), whose intervention helped set me free."

The bandit's death was the end of a "cruel animal's life" to Parimala Nagappa, widow of former Karnataka minister H. Nagappa, who died in Veerappan's captivity two years ago. "If only Veerappan was held or finished much earlier, my husband would not have

been kidnapped or found dead in the Chengadi forest. I wish he was captured alive; so many truths could have come out," said Parimala, now a Janata Dal (Secular) MLA.

Nagappa was abducted on the night of August 25, 2002, and held captive for 104 days before his body was found on December 8.

His son Preetan demanded a "CBI probe to find out how he came to know about our village and took my father away".

Retired deputy superintendent of police Abdul Karim said Veerappan's death "is a relief not only to me but also to millions of people". His son, sub-inspector Shakkil Ahmed, was killed by the bandit in August 1992.

In 2000, Karim had fought the governments of Karnataka and Tamil Nadu when they wanted to release Tada detainees as demanded by Veerappan for Rajkumar's release. His petition in the Supreme Court stalled the release of 51 detainees.

Shining pate caps crowning glory

M.R. VENKATESH AND ALOKE TIKKU

Oct. 19: Suave and calm amid a rush of cock-a-hoop jawans in brown-and-green fatigues, K. Vijayakumar reported at his base camp as usual today. Only a piece of cloth — wrappied round his head — peeping under his cap gave away the unusual.

The chief of Tamil Nadu's Special Task Force had tussled his head after returning well past midnight at the end of a successful operation against their target, Veerappan. He had sacrificed his hair "in fulfilment of a personal vow" at the famous Bannari Amman temple near his Satyamangalam base camp, about 100 km from Coimbatore.

It is a shrine where Veerappan, too, used to make

offerings. This out-of-character show of emotion stems from his running battle with the forest brigand. Additional director-general Vijayakumar had his first brush with Veerappan as part of the special task force before taking over as the Chennai commissioner after Jayalalithaa came to power in 2001. He got his second crack at Veerappan last December, when Jayalalithaa put him at the head of the STF after his term as Chennai commissioner.

In his moment of glory, Vijayakumar thanked his team and the Karnataka STF. "We worked as one hand, with one mission... we drew our strategy and flooded STF personnel from both states in Veerappan's heartland of Gopinatham," he



Vijayakumar at a news conference in Dharmapuri on Tuesday. (PTI)

said, about the close co-ordination with the Karnataka force.

Like a true warrior, he had words of praise for his

vanquished enemy. He termed Veerappan a "worthy foe, one who was not easy to get".

The officer today put down the success to the STF's "stunning, two-track intelligence gathering". Inundating Gopinatham, Veerappan's birthplace, with informers and helping the tribal populace with medical camps, a move that wiped away bitter memories of earlier police excesses, made a difference.

The former commando worked on a two-fold strategy of winning the confidence of villagers and sharpening the intelligence network of the STF.

A home ministry official said this emphasis on improving the quality of intelligence inputs resulted in yes-

terday's encounter. Earlier, combing operations were undertaken on vague or delayed intelligence — such isolated campaigns could achieve little in forests spread over 6,000 sq. km.

"He is someone who is willing to experiment," said an officer who worked with Vijayakumar. It is this quality, some suggest, that prompted Vijayakumar to look at training women from the tribal belt to join the police.

Vijayakumar also mentioned the support from the chief minister's office.

"We penetrated into jails in both Tamil Nadu and Karnataka to get vital intelligence from some of Veerappan's former associates," he added. The icing was Vijayakumar's "master plot" of putting an STF man in Ve-

erappan's driver's seat and luring him into a trap.

His foe gone, he is looking to help the friends who worked with him through proper distribution of the reward on Veerappan's head.

After the killing of former minister H. Nagappa, Karnataka had jacked up the reward to Rs 5 crore. Tamil Nadu had kept its booty at Rs 50 lakh.

Vijayakumar said Jayalalithaa had suggested increasing the amount, but he had advised against it.

"We wanted the new plan to be kept low profile, but now the prize money from Tamil Nadu will automatically go up to Karnataka's level or even higher as the chief minister has already given a commitment on this issue," he added, with a smile.

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Law and order in U.P. not satisfactory: Sonia

RAE BARELI, SEPT. 14. Ahead of the Lok Sabha and Assembly byelections in Uttar Pradesh, the Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, today said she would take up with the Centre and the Mulayam Singh Yadav Government the deteriorating law and order situation in the State.

The Congress chief told reporters on the first day of her three-day "mass-contact" programme in her parliamentary constituency here that "law and order was not satisfactory in Uttar Pradesh."

Ms. Gandhi attributed her claim to the "feedback" from the people and newspaper reports. She, however, parried a question over her party's outside support to the State Government.

In Lucknow, Mr. Yadav declined to react to Ms. Gandhi's remarks when approached by reporters.

During his recent visit to his

Amethi parliamentary constituency, Ms. Gandhi's son, Rahul, had claimed that criminalisation had become a part of life in the State.

Ms. Gandhi's comments come a month before byelections to two Lok Sabha and 12 Assembly seats in the State.

Key problems

The Congress chief listed power, water and roads as key problems facing her constituency and promised to look into the matter.

Earlier, Ms. Gandhi arrived at the Amausi airport in Lucknow and drove down to Rae Bareilly. "Instead of holding public meetings, she would make unscheduled stoppages to meet people," a senior party leader said.

This is her second visit to the constituency after the Congress came back to power at the Centre.

Sources said Ms. Gandhi planned to visit remote villages and take stock of the development there instead of relying on local leaders for feedback on people's problems and aspirations. — UNI, PTI

"Don't waste money"

RAE BARELI, SEPT. 14. The Congress president, Sonia Gandhi, today asked a group of women, who had gathered to welcome her at the Ramlila Ground here, not to waste money on flowers and instead use it for "productive" purposes.

Ms. Gandhi, who arrived here today on a three-day mass contact programme to her parliamentary constituency, was addressing a public meeting at Sudauli. She said the people of her constituency need not spend money on flowers to welcome her. — UNI

Court allows withdrawal

of case

By Our Special Correspondent

HUBLI, SEPT. 6. Mohammed Ismail, Judicial Magistrate First Class Second Court, has given the court's consent for the withdrawal of the case filed against Ms. Bharti.

Mr. Ismail said that he had allowed the application filed by the prosecution (in July 2002) seeking consent to withdraw the case and said all the accused in the case, including Ms. Bharti, were discharged.

The Magistrate said he had dismissed the applications filed by the six interveners on Saturday (opposing the withdrawal) of the case. He directed that the orders of the court be communicated to the Speaker of the Madhya Pradesh Legislative Assembly.

A loud cheer rent the air when the crowd waiting outside mobbed Jagadish Shettar, BJP State unit secretary, and Prahlad Joshi, party MP, when they came out of the court hall. The two leaders said the order vindicated the BJP's stand in the case.

The order brought down the curtains on an issue that had resulted in Ms. Bharti quitting as Chief Minister and surrendering in court.

Her decision to go to jail rather than seek bail had put the Congress-led Government headed by Dharam Singh in a tight spot.

Chandy Checks In

11-12 19 New Kerala CM could stop Congress's merry-go-round

Oommen Chandy's elevation as chief minister is a watershed in Kerala politics. Since the 1970s, Congress politics in the state has been the domain of K Karunakaran and A K Antony. Chandy, 61, is an eight-time MLA and a leader in his own right. A close associate of Antony, his ascent to the CM's post is a fallout of the drubbing the Congress-led United Democratic Front (UDF) received in the parliamentary elections at the hands of the Left Democratic Front (LDF). The UDF which came to power winning 100 of the 140 assembly seats in 2001 lost 19 of the 20 Lok Sabha seats in 2004. Antony, who led the front on both occasions, has assumed moral responsibility for the defeat. Two factors have been cited as reasons for the UDF's dismal show. One, Antony's failure to run an effective government in the midst of faction fights. Two, the shift of minority groups to the Left Front following a stray remark by the chief minister about them working as pressure groups. Neither the party nor Antony got its act together despite repeated defeats in bypolls. With just 18 months left for the term to get over, Chandy faces a daunting task. He has not begun promisingly, as a few coalition partners have kept out of the cabinet. Still, he appears the Congress's best bet considering that he has a clean image and enjoys the trust of some sections of minorities.

S. G. Kerala
While walking the tightrope, Chandy needs to get the government back on the rails. The Kerala model of development that emphasised a welfare society with state capital has been projected as a model for the Third World. It is in need of correctives. The state continues to top the charts in development indices. But its famed educational and health infrastructure is crumbling. The exchequer is hurtling towards a debt trap. Unemployment is at an all-time high. There is unrest in the plantations. Antony's promise on fiscal prudence hasn't yielded expected results. A much hyped global investor meet failed to alter the development paradigm. Despite significant strides in tourism, the big idea of the 90s, the state continues to be a remittance economy. The last two decades have seen a drastic change in Kerala's social character. A consumerist middle class dominated by nuclear families sets the development priorities. For Kerala's youth, the future lies in joining the 10 million-strong diaspora. Congress or Left, the state's political class is clueless when it comes to understanding the new social dynamics. Chandy needs to make a beginning. His is an unenviable task.

Antony out of power, but not out of favour

K. SUBRAHMANYA

New Delhi, Aug. 31: A.K. Antony's exit as Kerala chief minister is unlikely to be the end of the road for him.

The Congress' "Mr Clean" continues to enjoy the trust and confidence of Congress chief Sonia Gandhi even though she asked him to make way for Oommen Chandy.

AICC leaders are quite sure that Sonia will bring Antony to the party headquarters to shoulder organisational responsibilities at the first opportunity.

"That she has confidence in Antony is borne out by the fact that among a dozen Congress chief ministers, he is the only one who continued to have a place in the party working committee after the organisational reshuffle that Sonia Gandhi carried out a few weeks ago," a party leader said.

Ahmed Patel, Sonia's political secretary and working committee member in charge of Kerala, has dropped enough hints that Antony could make a comeback to national politics after nearly 10 years. The former chief minister was

briefly a party treasurer under P.V. Narasimha Rao while holding charge as a Union minister.

A few months after he quit as Union minister in late 1994, Antony returned to Kerala to take over as chief minister from his arch-rival K. Karunakaran. Ironically, Chandy, who succeeded Antony this morning, orchestrated Karunakaran's replacement with the latter in April 1995.

There is no slot vacant at the AICC at present, but party leaders reckon the Congress chief might entrust Antony organisational responsibilities in his capacity as a working committee member. It is pointed out that "over the last one year, Sonia has opted to give organisational responsibilities to working committee members without formally making them a member of her team of AICC office bearers."

Antony's rehabilitation in Delhi may be on the cards, but he is unlikely to find a place in Parliament. Rajya Sabha elections are not due in Kerala for 18 months and two of the three Upper House MPs — Karunakaran and former AICC gener-

al secretary Vayalar Ravi — are unlikely to make way for him. If Antony is to enter the Rajya Sabha, only state Congress chief Tennala Balakrishna Pillai can make way for him.

Teething troubles

Chandy, 61, who took over as Kerala's 19th chief minister today, is already facing the strains of running a rickety coalition for the 21 months that remain in the United Democratic Front's term, adds our special correspondent from Thiruvanthapuram.

Chandy, the first Jacobite chief minister in the state, was sworn in along with four of the seven non-Congress UDF partners. The ones to miss out were the Kerala Congress-Jacob, Kerala Congress-B and the RSP-B, the latter splitting a few hours before the swearing-in.

Governor R.L. Bhatia administered the oath of office to Chandy, the Indian Union Muslim League's P.K. Kunhalikutty, Kerala Congress-M's K.M. Mani, K.R. Gowry of the Janadhipatya Samrakshana Samiti and the Communist Marxist Party's M.V. Raghavan.

6.8.1995 9.58 Kerala

Cracks in UDF as Chandy takes charge

Two partners kept out of swearing-in

HT Correspondent & IANS
Thiruvananthapuram,
August 31

CRACKS SURFACED in the ruling UDF on Oommen Chandy's first day as the new Kerala chief minister.

For the first time in the history of the UDF, two of the eight parties that constitute it were kept out of the swearing-in ceremony held today. The problem cropped up when last night it was decided that two senior UDF leaders — R. Balakrishna Pillai and T.M. Jacob of the Kerala Congress (Jacob) — would not be sworn in.

Chandy was sworn in along with four others — P.K. Kunjalkutty of the Indian Union Muslim League (IUM), K.M. Mani of the Kerala Congress (Mani), K.R. Gowriamma of the Janadhipathya Samrakshana Samithi (JSS) and M.V. Raghavan of the Communist Marxist Party (CMP). All of them were ministers in the A.K. Antony Cabinet.

The Congress has been gunning for Pillai — the transport minister who publicly announced that he would not work for the victory of the Congress candidate from the Adoor Lok

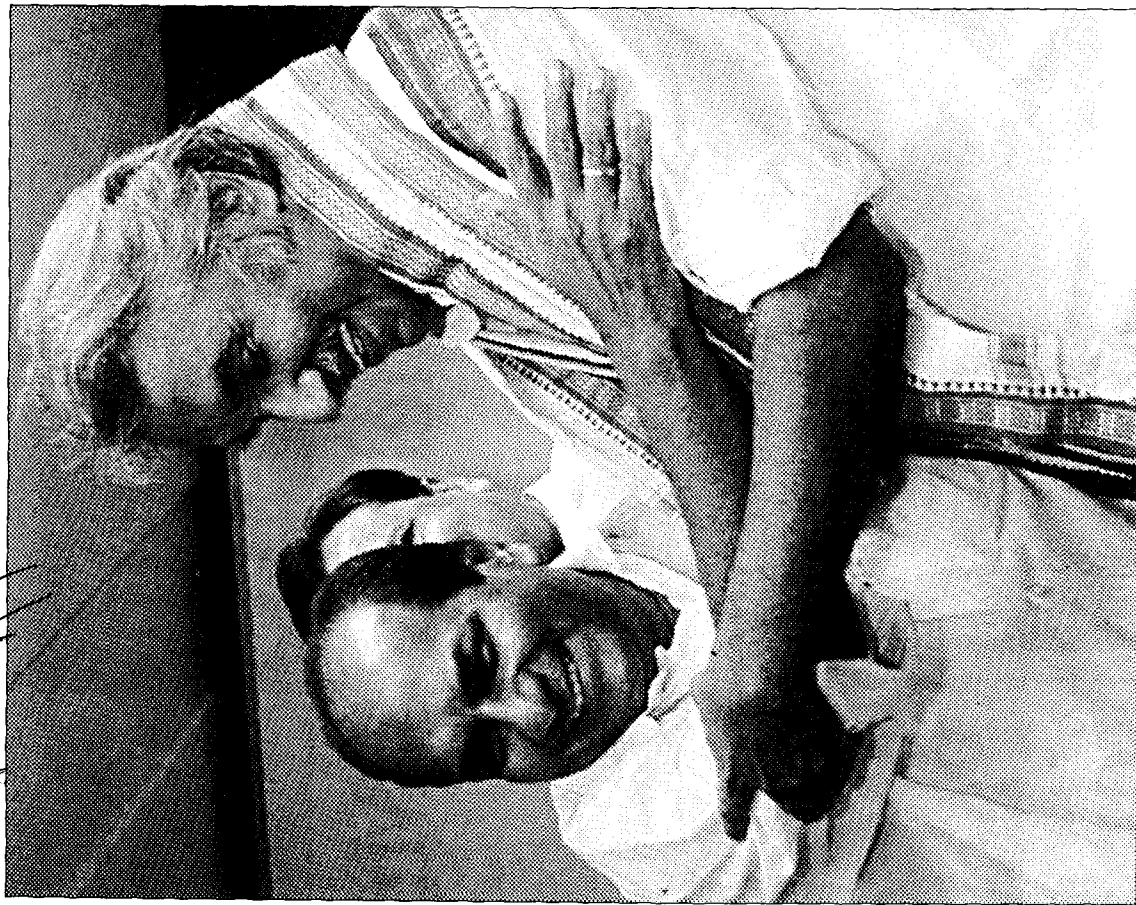
Sabha seat in April — for quite some time.

Jacob, irrigation minister in the Antony Cabinet, was not on talking terms with Revenue Minister K.M. Mani, who heads the Kerala Congress (Mani). The latter believes that Jacob and Pillai were instrumental in the defeat of his son from the Muvattupuzha constituency.

On Monday night, Pillai expressed his dissent by walking out of the first meeting of UDF leaders after Chandy was elected to succeed Antony. "I do not know why I have been excluded from the ministry," a visibly upset Pillai said.

Chandy is bound to face problems when he puts together a Cabinet. "There will be only 20 people in the council of ministers. Today, only five people, including me, will take the oath. The expansion will take place at the earliest," he said.

Under the existing arrangement, the Congress will have eight members in the Cabinet, IUM, four and the Kerala Congress (Mani) and the other five allies one each. But if Pillai and Jacob are kept out, it remains to be seen if both their Cabinet posts would go to the Congress.



Kerala Chief Minister Oommen Chandy with his predecessor A.K. Antony on Tuesday. PTI

Mr Clean wears crown of thorns

Ramesh Babu
Thiruvananthapuram, August 31

THOUGH THE change of guard was smooth, a bumpy road lies ahead of Kerala's new CM.

The party is in tatters, workers are demoralised and crippled, government employees agitated, students on a warpath, farmers' suicides on the rise, minorities alienated and fundamentalist forces rearing their heads again — a slew of problems is awaiting Oommen Chandy. However, the most pertinent question is: Will it be the end of factionalism that has been ravaging the state unit for quite some time? For a change now, all, including the ever-bargaining Karunakaran, are chanting the unity mantra. But how long would this honeymoon last?

Though the party high command is in a hurry to do away with the menacing "group politics", eating into the vitals of the party, it is not easy for the state leaders — who often identify with their groups than the party — to dump their well-nourished factions.

Outgoing Chief Minister A.K. Antony has proved beyond doubt that clean image and high morals are no recipes for good governance. What the party needs is a politician with a will. A prototypic of Antony, but a populist to the core — here much will depend on Chandy's capacity to lead from the front and instill the confidence lost among his people.

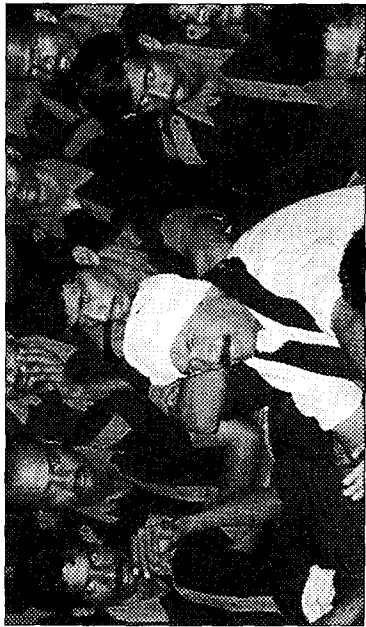
Vaiko's padayatra concludes with arrest

G.C. Shekhar
Chennai, September 15

1679
H-2

MDMK LEADER Vaiko's 42-day 'Renaissance March' covering over 1,025 km ended with a twist. Vaiko was arrested early in the morning, only to be released nine hours later.

After the police told him that he could not march into Chennai city during daytime as planned, Vaiko commenced his last leg from a city suburb in the dead of the night around 1.15 a.m. and reached the memorial



PTI

MDMK leader Vaiko with his supporters at the end of his padayatra in Chennai on Tuesday.

arrest to save my boys," Vaiko told reporters while boarding the police van. Cops took Vaiko and only six others into custody and lodged them in a police station before releasing them just after noon.

The arrest was criticised by all major Opposition parties in the state as yet another "undemocratic act" of the AIADMK government.

Talking to reporters, Vaiko described his arrest as yet another act of political vendetta by the Jayalithaa government.

of DMK founder C.N. Annadurai on the Marina Beach around 3.45 a.m. today.

From there he proceeded to Island Grounds where his march was to culminate.

Even before he entered the ground, he and 3,000 volunteers were stopped at Napier Bridge just a kilometre from where he addressed a public meeting later in the evening.

The police said he was being arrested since he had defied prohibitory orders banning processions within the city limits. "I am courting

Lost kid count alarms

Traffick hub Disbelief,
tag on city a dose of
Left-bash

RAJEEV BHATTACHARYYA
IN NEW DELHI

More than a thousand children go missing from Calcutta every year, never to return.

A report on human trafficking in the country, compiled by the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), dubs Calcutta one of the most unsafe cities in the country for children.

A total of 5,495 children have remained on the missing list in a span of six years, between 1996 and 2001.

"The number of children reported missing in 2001, compared with the number in 1996-1997, shows a very high increase in Calcutta, followed by Hyderabad, Mumbai and Chennai. On an average, 15,407 children are reported missing every year from six metros in the country," said the report, *Action Research on Trafficking in Women and Children in India*.

"Where these children have disappeared is a question to ponder over seriously," the report adds.

It places Calcutta second, some distance from Delhi (see graphic) but well ahead of Mumbai, Bangalore, Hyderabad and Chennai.

The NHRC is of the opin-

ion that among other factors, disappearance could be related to human trafficking that is rampant in Bengal.

"The link between missing persons and trafficking cannot be ruled out. West Bengal experiences a high rate of trafficking in the country," said P.M. Nair, principal investigator in the project.

The report said the state's contiguity to Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan and the states of Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand and Orissa has made it an ideal hub for trafficking, where deals are struck and victims transported to far-off locations across the country.

A map showing the trafficking routes reveals multiple networks flourishing in the state and spreading out to Rajasthan in the north-west and Tamil Nadu in the south.

Bengal also figures among the six states with a high incidence of trafficking in male children. Unlike girl children trafficked mainly to be sold to the flesh trade, the missing boys are meant largely for "exploitative labour".

Among other measures, the report has suggested amendment of existing laws to check trafficking and setting up of a nodal agency under the NHRC to monitor the alarming trend.

OUR BUREAU

Disbelief to surprise to muted criticism of the government — the range of reactions to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) report terming Calcutta a plum spot for human traffickers.

"We haven't seen the report, but it seems an issue that needs to be addressed by the government," state CPM secretary Anil Biswas said on Tuesday.

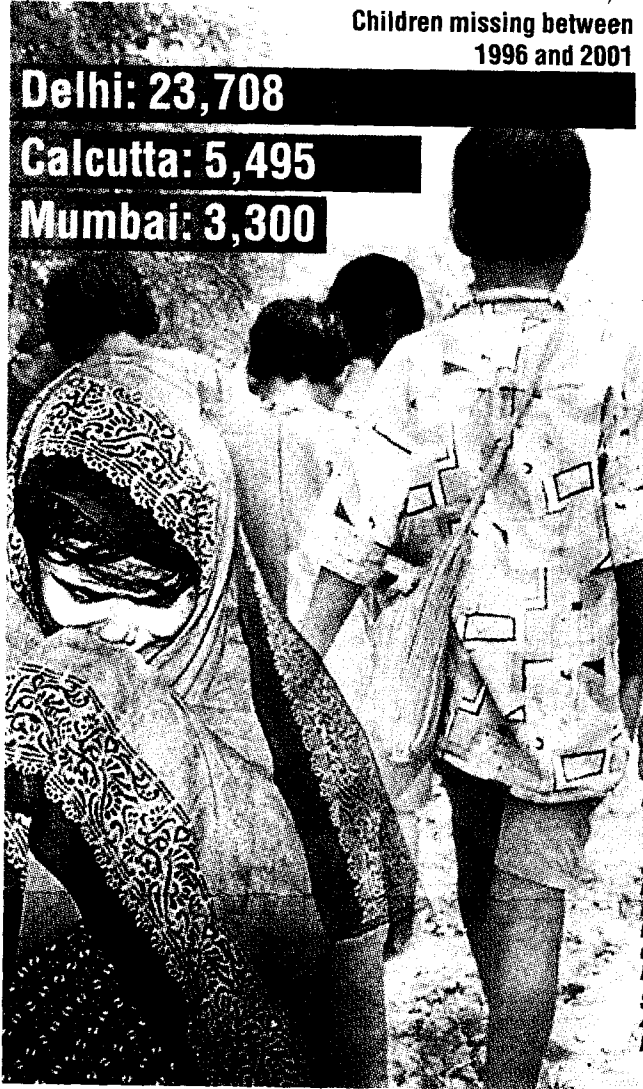
"At this point, remedial measures depend on the administration. We have no comment to offer on whether we should pit the party network against the traffickers, but, theoretically speaking, we will not hesitate to look at the option if the situation warrants it," he added.

The Trinamul Congress seized the statistics as a stick to beat the ruling coalition with. MLA Partha Chatterjee, who has often raised the issue of human trafficking from Bengal through Calcutta in the Assembly, said: "Given the stranglehold of the Left, the traffickers could not have flourished without support from sections of local politicians or police."

According to a report before the state home department, nearly 10,000 minor boys and girls (in the 7-18 age group), gathered from different dis-

Children missing between 1996 and 2001

Delhi: 23,708
Calcutta: 5,495
Mumbai: 3,300



MISSING MINORS

Calcutta is the transit point for trafficking into/out of

- Bangladesh, Nepal and Bhutan
- Neighbouring states like Bihar, Jharkhand, Orissa and even Assam

Reported missing from Delhi, Calcutta, Mumbai, Chennai, Bangalore and Hyderabad:

15,407 children on an average, every year

Study commissioned by NHRC, supported by United Nations Fund for the Development of Women and conducted by the Indian Institute of Social Sciences

Study based on interviews of 4,006 traffickers and victims in 12 states of the country

Graphic: MANOJ

tricts, Bangladesh, Bhutan and Nepal are taken through Calcutta to various parts of India and abroad. Approximately 3,000 are girls, who almost always end up in red-light dis-

tricts, whereas the boys are forced into labour or get sucked into the underworld.

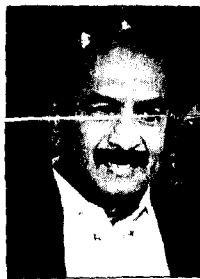
"The incidence of trafficking is alarmingly high in districts like Murshidabad, So-

uth and North 24-Parganas. We are trying to spread awareness among the poor and uneducated," said P.K. Agarwal, principal secretary, social welfare department.

No Pota let-up for Vaiko

Statesman News Service

CHENNAI, Sept. 3. — The designated Pota court here today rejected the Jayalalitha government's plea to withdraw the case against the MDMK chief, Mr Vaiko, and eight party colleagues, holding that the Central Review Committee's decision that there was no prima facie case against them was "arbitrary" and "premature".



Court blow

Dismissing the state government's application, seeking the court's consent to withdraw the Pota case against Mr Vaiko, based on the order of the review committee, the special judge, Mr L Rajendran, said it was "totally unsustainable." The pronouncement came as a disappointment to the large number of MDMK cadres who had gathered in the court premises ready to set off fireworks.

Mr Rajendran said the Review Committee's order was "destitute of any valid material except the speech delivered by Mr Vaiko at the public meeting in Thirumanthalam near Madurai on 29 June 2002, (in support of the banned outfit, LTTE)." Mr Vaiko was arrested under Pota in July 2002, soon after he landed at the Chennai airport from a tour of the USA and was lodged in the Vellore Central prison for nearly 19 months. He came out on bail in February 2004, before the Lok Sabha elections. The MDMK chief, who was not present in the Court when the judge passed the order, is presently on a *padayatra* across the state. The other accused were present in the court. The Judge said the review committee had "prematurely" concluded on the issue "without having any opportunity to analyse the complete materials re-

Soren gets bail

RANCHI, Sept. 3. — JMM chief and former Union coal minister Mr Sibhu Soren today secured a conditional bail from Jharkhand High Court, a month after surrendering before a Jamtara court in connection with the Chirudih massacre case. "Let the accused face trial...He is enlarged on bail," Mr Justice Tapan Sen said after Mr Soren's counsel Mr RK Jain told the Bench that he was prepared to give an undertaking that his client would appear in person before the court. Mr Jain later told reporters that Mr Soren was granted bail on furnishing two surety bonds each amounting to Rs 1.5 lakh. — PTI

lied upon by the Prosecution as available before this Court".

Also, the trial was in progress and "the evidence is not yet concluded". This being the "plight", the court said that the review panel's conclusion "about the absence of (criminal) intention on the part of the accused is untenable".

The review panel had found no prima facie case against Mr Vaiko and the others on the ground that mere expression of sympathy and even support for Tamils in Sri Lanka did not amount to support to the LTTE. In the withdrawal application, the public prosecutor, which relied on review panel's findings, said "the criminal intention of the accused persons to speak in support of LTTE is doubtful." In his order today, the judge, however, admonished the public prosecutor for not assigning any "independent, convincing reason" for seeking consent to withdraw the prosecution case against all the accused.

The court in exercising the "special duty" assigned to it under Section 321 of the CrPC, refused to grant consent to withdraw the case. There would be further proceedings "as per circumstances." Reacting to the order, Mr Vaiko, speaking to the media, said it was "not unexpected". He said he would fight the case.

Gowda writ runs in coalition ministry

B.R. SRIKANTH

Bangalore, June 5: For the second time in 10 days, H.D. Deve Gowda proved his clout in the new political atmosphere by ensuring that none of his detractors was accommodated during today's expansion of Karnataka's first coalition ministry.

He had earlier got the Congress to replace S.M. Krishna with Dharam Singh as chief minister. Siddaramaiah of Gowda's Janata Dal (Secular) is the deputy chief minister.

Gowda chose to keep away from today's induction ceremony — as he had done during Singh's and Siddaramaiah's on May 28 — but his son H.D. Revanna, among the nine cabinet ministers and one minister of state sworn in today, made up for his absence. Revanna, tipped to get the plum public works portfolio, took the oath in the name of his father.

Several senior Congress legislators did not make it to the ministry this time, apparently on Gowda's insistence. Among them were D.K. Shivakumar, a lieutenant of former chief minister Krishna, and former ministers R.V. Deshpande, Roshan Baig and A. Krishnappa. Former Speaker S. Ramesh Kumar, too, must have figured on Gowda's hate list and watched the proceedings from the VIP enclosure.

been reeling under the impact of drought for three years.

"Our first priority is to tackle the problems of ryots, availability of seeds and water supply to farm lands in the new sowing season. The spell of pre-monsoon rains in all parts of the state augurs well for taking up agricultural activities on a war footing," Siddaramaiah said.

"We pray for a bountiful monsoon this year to mitigate the hardships of the rural people and minimise the drinking water problem faced by several villages, towns and cities due to the severe drought during the last 3-4 years," he said.

Singh and Siddaramaiah told reporters that the first session of the Assembly would be held from June 9 to 18. Deshpande, one of the senior-most legislators, will be sworn in as pro-tem Speaker on Monday. The new MLAs will take oath on Wednesday.

Election to the Speaker's post will be held on June 10 and the governor will address a joint session of the legislature the next day.

The leaders said minor differences between the coalition partners were blown out of proportion by the media. "He is happy that is why he continues as the deputy chief minister," Singh said about Siddaramaiah.



Newly-inducted ministers of the Karnataka government in Bangalore on Saturday. (PTI)

Krishna skipped the ceremony held on the portals of Vidhan Soudha, the seat of secretariat, this afternoon.

"This is ridiculous. We will wait and watch," a senior Congress leader said, confirming Gowda's interference.

According to the agreement between the Congress and the Dal (S), five ministers from each party were sworn in by governor T.N. Chaturvedi. The city police and state government officials took complete control this time and made sure only invitees made it to the ceremony. Party supporters were denied entry on roads leading to Vidhan Soudha.

From the Congress, former home minister Mallikarjun Kharge, Prakash Hukkeri, S.R.

More, Srinivas Gowda and Tanvir Sait took oath. Apart from Revanna, the Dal (S) team included P.G.R. Sindhia, M.P. Prakash, D. Manjunath and Mirajuddin Patel.

The partners have decided chief minister Singh will hold the home portfolio while Siddaramaiah will take finance. Kharge is likely to get irrigation

and Sindhia, revenue.

In the first cabinet meeting, the government decided to draw up a common minimum programme for socio-economic development. Keeping in view the programmes and policies of the Dal (S) manifesto, Siddaramaiah said the government would first address the problems of farmers across the state as they have

ত্রিপুরা মন্ত্রিসভা থেকে পাঁচ মন্ত্রীকে বাদ দেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নিল সিপিএম

স্টাফ রিপোর্টার, আগরতলা, ২৬ জুন: ত্রিপুরার বামফ্রন্ট মন্ত্রিসভা থেকে নিজেদের ৫ মন্ত্রীকে বাদ দেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছে সিপিএম। আজ আগরতলায় দলের রাজ্য কমিটির বৈঠকে এই সিদ্ধান্ত হয়। পরে ফ্রন্টের বৈঠকে সিপিএমের পক্ষ থেকে এই সিদ্ধান্তের কথা জানাবার পরে সিপিআইকে অনুরোধ করা হয় মন্ত্রিসভা থেকে তাদের একমাত্র সদস্যকে সরিয়ে নেওয়ার জন্য। সিপিআইয়ের প্রবল আপত্তির জন্য এই প্রস্তাবের ফয়সালা ফ্রন্টের বৈঠকে হয়নি।

সংবিধানের ৯১তম সংশোধনী এবং উত্তর পূর্বাঞ্চলের জন্য বিশেষ ছাড় অনুযায়ী সর্বোচ্চ ১২ জনের মধ্যে মন্ত্রিসভা সীমিত রাখার শেষ দিন ধার্য হয়েছে ৬ জুলাই। এ রাজ্যে বিধানসভার আসন ৬০টি। এর মধ্যে সিপিএম-এর ৩৯ জন বিধায়ক, সিপিআইয়ের একজন ও আরএসপি-র ২ জন করে বিধায়ক আছেন। অপরপক্ষে কংগ্রেসের ১৩ ও আইএনপিটি-র ৬ জন। রাজ্য মন্ত্রিসভার সদস্য-সংখ্যা ১৮। এর মধ্যে সিপিএম-এর একারই ১৬ জন মন্ত্রী।

ফ্রন্টের শেষ দুই দলকে জোটের নিয়ম মেনে একটি করে দফতরের মন্ত্রিত্ব দেওয়া হয়েছে। আইন অনুযায়ী ৬ জনকে ছাঁটাই করতে হবে। সেই হিসাবে শেষ দুই দলের মন্ত্রিত্ব হারানোর আশঙ্কা নেই। ছাঁটাইয়ের সব কোপ এসে পড়ার কথা ছিল বড় শরিক সিপিএম-এরই ঘাড়ে। তবে মন্ত্রিত্ব থেকে সরে দাঁড়াতে বাকি শরিকদের যে একেবারেই 'অনুরোধ' করা হবে না, তা নয়।

এ মাসের গোড়ায় দলের মুখপাত্র এমন ইঙ্গিতই দিয়েছিলেন। আজ বিকেলে রাজ্য সম্পাদকমন্ডলীর সদস্য গৌতম দাশ জানিয়েছেন, প্রাণিসম্পদ বিভাগের মন্ত্রী নারায়ণ রূপিনী, শিল্প ও বিজ্ঞান-প্রযুক্তি দফতরের পবিত্র কর, পঞ্চায়েতের সুবোধ দাস, কারা ও নগরোন্নয়নের সুধীর দাস এবং মৎস্য ও পরিবহন দফতরের

সুকুমার বর্মনকে মন্ত্রিসভা থেকে সরিয়ে নেওয়ার সর্বসম্মত ও চূড়ান্ত সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়েছে। এঁরা সকলেই সিপিএমের। মন্ত্রিসভা থেকে সিপিআইয়ের একমাত্র সদস্য আদিম জনজাতি দফতরের মনীন্দ্র রিয়াংকে সরিয়ে নেওয়ার জন্য ওই দলকে অনুরোধ করা হয়েছে বলে গৌতমবাবু জানিয়েছেন।

রাজ্য কমিটির বৈঠকের পরে বসে ফ্রন্টের বৈঠক। সেখানে সিপিএমের বাতিলের তালিকা 'সর্বসম্মতভাবে গৃহীত' হয়। কিন্তু সিপিআইয়ের প্রসঙ্গ আসতেই দল বেঁকে বসে। দলের রাজ্য সভাপতি প্রশান্ত কপালী স্পষ্ট জানিয়ে দেন, তাঁদের একমাত্র সদস্যকে সরিয়ে দিলে দলের অস্তিত্বই বিপন্ন হয়ে পড়ার সামিল হবে।

এই নিয়ে বিকেল পর্যন্ত তর্কবিতর্ক চলে। কিন্তু সমাধানে পৌঁছানো যায়নি। দলের পক্ষ থেকে এও দাবি করা হয় যে, একান্তই যদি মনীন্দ্রবাবুকে বাদ দেওয়ার সিদ্ধান্ত নিতে হয় তবে সিপিআইয়ের আপত্তির কথাও ফ্রন্টের এই বিষয়ের প্রস্তাবে স্পষ্ট করে লিখে রাখতে হবে। সিপিএম এই প্রস্তাব মানতে রাজি হয়নি। স্থির হয়েছে ৬ জুলাইয়ের আগে আরও একবার এই বিষয়ে ফ্রন্টের বৈঠক হবে।

এ দিনের বৈঠকে পঞ্চায়েতের সুবোধ দাস ছাড়া সব মন্ত্রীই উপস্থিত ছিলেন বলে গৌতমবাবু জানান। কয়েকদিন আগেই সুবোধবাবু নিজের ফাইলপত্র, এমনকী মন্ত্রীর সরকারি বাসভবনের চাবি পর্যন্ত অফিসারদের হাতে দিয়ে আগরতলা ছেড়ে চলে যান। এ দিন অবশ্য সিপিএম-এর মুখপাত্র বলেন, "ওঁর শরীর অসুস্থ। তা ছাড়া বন্যার ফলে ওঁর এলাকার অবস্থাও ভাল নয়। তাই তিনি উপস্থিত থাকতে পারেননি।"

পদচ্যুত মন্ত্রীদের কোন কোন প্রশাসনিক দায়িত্ব দেওয়া যায় তা নিয়ে কিছুদিন পরে দলে আলোচনা হবে বলে জানিয়েছেন গৌতমবাবু।

মুলায়ম সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে আন্দোলনের রাস্তায় কংগ্রেস

অগ্নি রায় • নয়াদিল্লি

১৩ জুন: উত্তরপ্রদেশে নিজেদের হারানো জমি ফিরে পেতে মরিয়া কংগ্রেস নেত্রী সনিয়া গান্ধী সমাজবাদী পার্টির সঙ্গে মুখোমুখি সংঘর্ষের সিদ্ধান্ত নিয়েছেন।

কংগ্রেস শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব স্থির করেছেন, আর দেরি না করে মুলায়ম সিংহ যাদবের বিরুদ্ধে রাজনৈতিক চাপ ক্রমশ চূড়ান্ত স্তরে নিয়ে যাওয়া হবে। সমর্থন প্রত্যাহারের মাধ্যমে মুলায়ম সরকারকে ফেলে দেওয়া না গেলেও বিভিন্ন স্তরে মুলায়মকে বিপাকে ফেলার রণকৌশল নেওয়া হয়েছে। এই পরিকল্পনা অনুযায়ী রাহুল গান্ধীর বিরুদ্ধে মুলায়ম সিংহের ন্যাকারজনক মন্তব্যকে কেন্দ্র করে রাস্তায় নামছে কংগ্রেস। সূত্রের খবর, আগামী ১৫ জুন উত্তরপ্রদেশ জুড়ে মুলায়ম সরকারের বিরুদ্ধে ধর্না ও ধিক্কারমিছিল করা হবে। এই আন্দোলনে যোগ দেওয়ার জন্য এ আই সি সি-র বেশ কিছু শীর্ষ নেতাকে নির্দেশ দেওয়া হয়েছে।

দলীয় সূত্রের খবর, মুলায়মের সরকারের উপর থেকে সমর্থন প্রত্যাহারই শুধু নয়, এই নতুন কংগ্রেস জমানায় উত্তরপ্রদেশে নিজেদের হাত সাম্রাজ্য ফিরে পেতে বিভিন্ন স্তরে ক্ষেত্র প্রস্তুত করার চেষ্টা করছেন সনিয়া। এ ব্যাপারে বামপন্থীদের আপত্তি অগ্রাহ্য করেই মুলায়মকে রাজনৈতিকভাবে কোণঠাসা করার জন্য বাঁপাতে চলেছেন তিনি।

কংগ্রেস শীর্ষ নেতৃত্ব উত্তরপ্রদেশ নিয়ে যে যে পরিকল্পনা নিয়েছেন, তার মধ্যে রয়েছে:

- অবিলম্বে রাজ্যের রাজ্যপাল বদল। বিষ্ণুকান্ত শাস্ত্রীর অপসারণ আর কিছু সময়ের অপেক্ষা মাত্র। খুব শীঘ্রই মোতিলাল ভোরা অথবা আর কে ধবনকে নতুন রাজ্যপাল হিসাবে নিযুক্ত করা হবে। কংগ্রেসি রাজ্যপাল নিয়োগের মাধ্যমে বিভিন্ন বিষয়ে মুলায়ম সরকারের উপর চাপ তৈরি করা যাবে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে।

- আপাতত উত্তরপ্রদেশের দায়িত্বে রয়েছেন ওয়ার্কিং কমিটির সদস্য চৌধুরি বীরেন্দ্র সিংহ। পরিকল্পনা রয়েছে রাহুল গান্ধীকে এ আই সি সি-র সাধারণ সম্পাদকের পদে অভিযুক্ত করে উত্তরপ্রদেশের দায়িত্ব দেওয়া। রাহুলকে আনার ফলে শুধু যুব সম্প্রদায়ই নয়, রাজ্যের বিভিন্ন মহলে সংগঠন মজবুত করার কাজটা সহজ হবে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। আনুষ্ঠানিকভাবে দায়িত্ব পাওয়ার আগেই রাহুল তাঁর লক্ষ্য স্পষ্ট করে দিয়েছেন। মুলায়ম সরকারকে ফেলে নতুন করে রাজ্যের পরিকাঠামো, আইন-শৃঙ্খলা পরিস্থিতি খতিয়ে দেখার কথা বলেছেন তিনি। পাশাপাশি প্রদেশ কংগ্রেসের বিভিন্ন স্তরে 'প্রয়োজন অনুসারে' রদবদল করা হবে বলে কংগ্রেস শিবির থেকে জানানো হয়েছে।

- রাজ্যস্তরের কংগ্রেস কর্মীরা ভীষণ ভাবে চাইছেন মুলায়মের বিরুদ্ধে সরাসরি সংঘর্ষের রাস্তায় যেতে। বিভিন্ন স্তরে প্রতিনিধি মাধ্যমে তাঁরা সেই আর্জি সনিয়ার কানে তুলেছেন। তা ছাড়া

রাহুলের অমেটি এবং সনিয়ার রায়বরেলী সফরের সময়ও এই বিষয়ে কথা হয়েছে। তাঁদের আবেগ বিবেচনা করেছেন নেত্রী। ১৫ তারিখ উত্তরপ্রদেশে গিয়ে মুলায়ম বিরোধী আন্দোলনের পুরোভাগে থাকতে বলা হয়েছে সলমন খুরশিদ, চৌধুরি বীরেন্দ্র সিংহ-সহ বিভিন্ন নেতাকে।

সম্প্রতি মুলায়ম রাহুল প্রসঙ্গে বলেছিলেন, তিনি (রাহুল) এমন কিছু কেউকেটা নন যে, তাঁর নাম করে কিছু বলতে হবে। এর পরে সমাজবাদী নেতা অমর সিংহও কংগ্রেস সম্পর্কে আক্রমণাত্মক মন্তব্য করেছেন।

- কংগ্রেস বিভিন্ন মঞ্চে ক্রমাগত উত্তরপ্রদেশের আইন-শৃঙ্খলার অবনতির কথা তুলে চলেছে। এমনকী স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিলও বিবৃতি দিয়ে বলেছেন, সেখানকার আইন-শৃঙ্খলার অবস্থা অত্যন্ত সঙ্গীন। কিছু ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া দরকার। কংগ্রেস সূত্রের খবর, এই ভাবে উত্তরপ্রদেশে ৩৫৬ ধারা জারি করার একটি প্রেক্ষাপট তৈরি করতে চাইছেন সনিয়া। রাজ্যপাল কংগ্রেসেরই হওয়ায় (বদলের পর) তাঁর প্রস্তাব পেতে সমস্যা হবে না। কিন্তু শেষ পর্যন্ত ৩৫৬ ধারার পিছনে কেন্দ্রের শরিকদের সমর্থন পাওয়ার সম্ভাবনা খুবই কম। কারণ, ডি এম কে এবং বামপন্থীরা এই প্রক্ষেপে পুরোপুরি ভিন্নমত পোষণ করেন। বাস্তবে অতদূর এগোনো সম্ভব না হলেও (কারণ, রাজ্যসভায় কংগ্রেসের সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠতা পাওয়ার সম্ভাবনা খুব কম। আর ৩৫৬ ধারা জারি করতে গেলে দু'কক্ষেরই সংখ্যাগরিষ্ঠ অনুমোদন প্রয়োজন) এই ভাবে মুলায়মের উপর রাজনৈতিক চাপ তৈরি করা সম্ভব হবে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে।

- অদূর ভবিষ্যতে মুলায়ম সরকারের উপর থেকে সমর্থন তুলে নেওয়া। পাশাপাশি রাষ্ট্রীয় লোকদলের নেতা অজিত সিংহকে সঙ্গে নেওয়ার জন্যও প্রবল চেষ্টা করছে কংগ্রেস। তাঁকেও অনুরোধ করা হচ্ছে সমর্থন তুলে নেওয়ার জন্য। এর ফলে মুলায়মের সরকার পড়ে যাবে না ঠিকই, তবে অবশ্যই চাপের মধ্যে থাকবে। তা ছাড়া মুলায়মের বিরুদ্ধে সংঘর্ষের পথে হটলে কংগ্রেস স্বাভাবিক ভাবেই বসপা-র সমর্থন পাবে।

কংগ্রেস সূত্রের খবর, সনিয়া মনে করছেন, এই ভাবে মুলায়মের সঙ্গে সরাসরি লড়াইয়ে রাস্তায় গেলে রাজ্য দলের আঁখরে লাভ হওয়ার সম্ভাবনা। কংগ্রেস এবং সমাজবাদী পার্টির ভোটব্যাঙ্কের একটি বিরাট সাধারণ অংশ রয়েছে।

কেন্দ্রে কংগ্রেস সরকার আসার প্রশাসনিক সুবিধাকে কাজে লাগিয়ে, প্রিয়ঙ্কা এবং রাহুলকে সামনে রেখে উত্তরপ্রদেশে লড়লে সংখ্যালঘু, পিছড়ে বর্গ ভোটব্যাঙ্কে একাধিপত্য স্থাপন করা সম্ভব হবে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে। মায়াবতীর সঙ্গে সমঝোতায় দলিত বর্গেও কংগ্রেসের প্রভাব বাড়ার সম্ভাবনা।

এই ভাবে রাজ্যে প্রধান বিরোধী দলের ডুমিকা সার্থক ভাবে পালন করতে পারলে বিজেপি-র অস্তিত্বকেও বিপন্ন করে দেওয়া যাবে বলে মনে করা হচ্ছে।

MONDAY, JUNE 14, 2004

UTTAR PRADESH ON THE BOIL

CONGRESS LEADERS MAY make out that their recently intensified disquiet over law and order in Uttar Pradesh is motivated by genuine concern for the well being of the people of the State. But what stands out is the *realpolitik* in the party's hostile stance towards Chief Minister Mulayam Singh Yadav. At one level, the war of words against the Samajwadi Party-led Government waged by Congress leaders including party president Sonia Gandhi, Union Home Minister Shivraj Patil, and new party icon Rahul Gandhi is an extension of a political battle witnessed in the State during the 14th general election. The announced objective on both sides was to gain dominance over the secular political space in U.P. The Samajwadi Party won that round handsomely, picking up 36 out of the State's 80 Lok Sabha seats against the Congress' nine. But following the Bharatiya Janata Party's debacle in the State and the not unrelated arrival of a new dispensation at the Centre, the Congress sees a new opportunity to capture ground from the Samajwadi Party and, with some luck, to marginalise it.

The manoeuvres triggered by this changed strategic perception underline the Congress' refusal to come to terms with the Samajwadi Party's secular credentials — and its special appeal to minorities and to substantial sections of the socially disadvantaged. In the process, the contributions made by this party towards keeping the communal peace in India's most populous State tend to be dismissed. It is an open secret that the Congress leadership is trying to persuade or pressure the Rashtriya Lok Dal to defect from Chief Minister Mulayam's camp. There are also indications of a growing closeness, or tactical convergence of interests, between the Congress and Mayawati's

'Dalit-assertive' Bahujan Samaj Party. The calculation is that an alliance with the BSP will help the Congress not only in Uttar Pradesh but also in Maharashtra, where Legislative Assembly elections are due by the end of the year. Although the BSP did not win any seat from Maharashtra in the 14th general election, its spirited performance, especially in Vidharbha, brought about the defeat of Congress-Nationalist Congress Party alliance candidates in about a dozen Lok Sabha seats.

The logical conclusion of these moves could be the ouster of the Mulayam Singh Government and mid-term polls for the U.P. Assembly. Bullish projections based on lead positions in the State's 403 Assembly segments goad the Congress on in this game of *realpolitik*. An analysis of the data on how the various parties fared in U.P. in the recently concluded Lok Sabha election reveals that the BSP led in 100 Assembly segments, the Congress in 47, and the RLD in 22. Significantly, the Congress came second in more than 50 segments. The calculation is that if it can make common cause with the BSP and the RLD, the new combine can win 42 per cent of the State's Assembly seats (assuming that the socio-political situation remains unchanged). But the Congress also looks forward to a substantial shift of the mass Muslim vote from the Samajwadi Party to the new formation. The game plan seems to dictate that if all this is to happen, the first step is to have the Mulayam Singh Government undone. The arithmetic in the current Assembly is such that the Government is likely to survive even if the Congress and the RLD formally oppose it. It is in this context that the statements about rising crime and the "deteriorating law and order situation" in Uttar Pradesh acquire an ominous meaning.

সনিয়াকে চ্যালেঞ্জ অমরের,

স্বাক্ষরিত, নয়া দিল্লি, ১২ জুন: সমাজবাদী পার্টির কংগ্রেসের চাপান-উত্তোর এ বার চরম আকার ধারণ করল। সরাসরি কংগ্রেসকে চ্যালেঞ্জ জানিয়ে দিল্লিতে সমাজবাদী নেতা অমর সিংহ বলেছেন, কংগ্রেসের প্রতিটি ইন্টার জবাব তারা পাটকেল দিয়ে দেবেন। আর রায়বরেলীতে সনিয়া গান্ধী সমাজবাদী পার্টির বিরুদ্ধে দীর্ঘমেয়াদি লড়াইয়ের প্রস্তুতি নিতে দলের সমর্থকদের কাছে আহ্বান জানিয়েছেন।

রায়বরেলী সফরের দ্বিতীয় ও শেষ দিনে লালগঞ্জের এক সভায় দলীয় সমর্থকদের উদ্দেশ্যে সনিয়া আজ বলেছেন, মানুষের সমস্যা সমাধানে রাজ্য সরকার যদি তৎপর না হয়, তা হলে বড় যুদ্ধে নামতে হবে। ছেলে রাহুলকে পাশে নিয়ে কংগ্রেস সভানেত্রী সমর্থকদের পরামর্শ দিয়েছেন, সেই লড়াইকে পরিণতি দিতে তৃণমূল স্তরে দলের সংগঠনকে শক্তিশালী করতে হবে। উত্তরপ্রদেশে সমাজবাদী পার্টি সরকারকে ফের কটাক্ষ করে সনিয়ার মন্তব্য, "পরপর অকংগ্রেসি সরকার জাতপাত আর সাম্প্রদায়িকতার রাজনীতি চালিয়ে যাওয়ায় রাজ্যের এখন এই অবস্থা।"

রামগোপাল যাদব আজ একত্রে দিল্লিতে সাংবাদিক বৈঠক করেন। কংগ্রেস যে-ভাবে বারবার রাজ্য সরকারের উপর থেকে সমর্থন তোলার হুমকি দিয়ে চলেছে, তার পরিত্রাঙ্কিতে তাঁরা বলেন, "আমাদের সরকার ফেলার মতো ওদের হিযাভও নেই, সংখ্যাও নেই।" তাঁরা হঠাৎ এত ক্ষুব্ধ হয়ে উঠলেন কেন, এই প্রশ্নের জবাবে রামগোপাল বলেন, কংগ্রেস যে-ভাবে সংবিধান লঙ্ঘন করে কাজ করে চলেছে, তাতে তাঁদের সরব হতে হয়েছে। সংবিধান লঙ্ঘনের উদাহরণ হিসাবে রামগোপাল বলেন, মুখ্যমন্ত্রীকে না-জানিয়ে রাজ্যের মুখ্যসচিবকে ফোন করে কেন্দ্রীয় স্বরাষ্ট্র প্রতিমন্ত্রী শ্রীপ্রকাশ জয়সওয়াল আইনশৃঙ্খলা পরিস্থিতি নিয়ে আলোচনা করেছেন। তা ছাড়া, স্বরাষ্ট্রমন্ত্রী শিবরাজ পাটিল রাজ্যের আইনশৃঙ্খলা নিয়ে তাঁর কাছে অভিযোগ এসেছে বলে যে-মন্তব্য করেছেন, তাঁকেও রামগোপাল দৃষ্টান্ত হিসাবে তুলে ধরেন।

দুই দলের মধ্যে এই ঠোকটুকি দেখে দুই তরফেরই বন্ধু কমিউনিষ্টেরা যথেষ্ট উদ্ভিগ্ন হয়ে পড়েছেন। সি পি আইয়ের সাধারণ সম্পাদক এ বি বর্দন আজ বলেছেন, "আমরা চাই এর পর তিনের পাতায়

সংঘাত চরমে

প্রথম পাতার পর ১৭/৬/৬৫

অবিলম্বে দু'পক্ষই সংঘাত হোক এবং একে অপরে প্রকাশ্যে আক্রমণ করা থেকে বিরত হোক।"

তবে তাৎপর্যপূর্ণ ঘটনা হল, কোনও দলই কিন্তু অন্যের সরকারের উপর থেকে এখনও সমর্থন প্রত্যাহার করেননি। মুলায়ম সিংহের সরকারের প্রতি কংগ্রেসের সমর্থন বজায় আছে। ভাবে অমর সিংহ আজ জানিয়ে দিয়েছেন, কেন্দ্রীয় সরকারের উপর থেকে সমর্থন তোলার কথা তাঁরা এখনই ভাবছেন না। অর্থাৎ, তরজা চললেও বৃহত্তর ধর্মনিরপেক্ষ এক্য আগে ভাঙার দায় কোনও পক্ষই নিতে চাইছে না।

আজ সমাজবাদী নেতাদের আক্রমণ অবশ্য অনেক ক্ষেত্রেই প্রায় শালীনতার স্তর অতিক্রম করতে বসেছিল। তাঁরা মনমোহন সিংহের সরকারকে 'ক্রীড়ানক' সরকার বলে অভিহিত করেন। তাঁরা বলেন, কংগ্রেস নেতাদের মানসিক ভারসাম্য হারিয়ে গিয়েছে। কারণ তারা রাজ্য সরকার যে সব কল্যাণমূলক কাজকর্ম করে চলেছে, তা দেখে ভীত-সন্ত্রস্ত। অমর সিংহ বলেন, লোকসভার ৫৪৩টির মধ্যে মাত্র ১৪৫টি আসন পেয়ে কংগ্রেস এমন উদ্ধত আচরণ করতে শুরু করেছে, যেন তারা স্বর্গে বিচরণ করছে।

সনিয়াকে চ্যালেঞ্জ অমরের

প্রথম পাতার পর ১৭/৬/৬৫

অবিলম্বে দু'পক্ষই সংঘাত হোক এবং একে অপরে প্রকাশ্যে আক্রমণ করা থেকে বিরত হোক।"

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আজ সমাজবাদী নেতাদের আক্রমণ অবশ্য অনেক ক্ষেত্রেই প্রায় শালীনতার স্তর অতিক্রম করতে বসেছিল। তাঁরা মনমোহন সিংহের সরকারকে 'ক্রীড়ানক' সরকার বলে অভিহিত করেন। তাঁরা বলেন, কংগ্রেস নেতাদের মানসিক ভারসাম্য হারিয়ে গিয়েছে। কারণ তারা রাজ্য সরকার যে সব কল্যাণমূলক কাজকর্ম করে চলেছে, তা দেখে ভীত-সন্ত্রস্ত। অমর সিংহ বলেন, লোকসভার ৫৪৩টির মধ্যে মাত্র ১৪৫টি আসন পেয়ে কংগ্রেস এমন উদ্ধত আচরণ করতে শুরু করেছে, যেন তারা স্বর্গে বিচরণ করছে।

ANADAZAR PUNJIA

12 JUN 2015

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IN SHOCK

Ms J. Jayalalithaa is losing her touch. She is quite well-known for changing her tune when it suits her — her quick turnabout from withdrawing support to the Bharatiya Janata Party to full-throated support for it being just one example — and for going unblinkingly back on her word, but she always did it with imperturbable brazenness. That brazenness seems a little dented. The All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam's non-performance in the Lok Sabha elections has obviously shaken her, and she has gone for an indiscriminate withdrawal of all her policies in Tamil Nadu barely a week after the results. While her retreat on some fronts may augur well, the hurried decision to arrange for free electricity to farmers, for example, suggests an unashamed bid to ensure votes in the coming assembly elections that says little for thought or planning behind any of her moves, past or present. The ban on conversions was a policy that cost her dear this time. She had originally implemented it to show how close she was growing to the BJP. The anti-conversion law was not only contrary to a constitutional right, for practical purposes it alienated her from both the Christians and the Dalits, especially since the latter felt that their only weapon to fight the oppressive casteism in the state was being taken away from them. The withdrawal of this, as well as of the cases of defamation and privilege against organs of the media, are positive moves in every way. Freedom of speech is as fundamental a right as the right to practise the religion of choice. The chief minister has also lifted the income ceiling on beneficiaries under the public distribution scheme, extended the free bus pass to students, and withdrawn the cases against government employees who had gone on strike.

In appearing to be consistent in her rollbacks, Ms Jayalalithaa has exposed an alarming degree of inconsistency. Free power for farmers and hut-dwellers means a heavy subsidy, and this cannot be done thoughtlessly, if it can be done at all. Nothing has been said about water shortage. The free pardon to government employees erases important issues of responsibility and rights and the specifics of the episode that led to the charges against them, while it pushes out of sight the debate over the legitimacy of the Tamil Nadu Essential Services Maintenance Act. Similarly, discussions about the use and abuse of the Prevention of Terrorism Act have been glossed over, in spite of the urgency of the Vaiko question. For Ms Jayalalithaa, thinking is unimportant, all that is necessary is to hold on to power.

THE TELEGRAPH 21 MAY 2004

আম্মার পশ্চাদপসরণ

পরাজিত হইয়া কি তামিলনাড়ুর মুখ্যমন্ত্রী জয়রাম জয়ললিতার সম্বন্ধে ফিরিল? চতুর্দশ লোকসভা নির্বাচনের ফল প্রকাশের আগের দিন পর্যন্ত যে জয়ললিতা রাজ্যের বিরোধী পক্ষের তোয়াক্কা করেন নাই, উপরন্তু পদে-পদে বিরোধী নেতা ও রাজনীতিকদের হেনস্থা, এমনকী নিগূহীতও করিয়াছেন, তিনি সহসা উল্টা সুর গাহিতেছেন। ঔদ্ধত্যের জন্য যিনি রীতিমত কুখ্যাত ছিলেন, ভোটে হারিয়া সেই আম্মাই আজ সহসা বিনয়ের অবতার। রাজ্যের সব কয়টি লোকসভা আসনে পরাস্ত হইলে শাসক দলের পক্ষে আত্মবিশ্বাস ধরিয়া রাখা কঠিন হওয়ারই কথা। জয়ললিতার আত্মবিশ্বাসও বেশ টলিয়া গিয়াছে বলিয়াই মনে হয়। জয়ললিতা দৃশ্যতই বিপর্যস্ত, স্রিয়মাণ, অন্তরে অনুতপ্ত হোন-বা-না-হোন, বাহিরে প্রায়শ্চিত্তপ্রবণ।

গণতন্ত্রে রাজনৈতিক প্রতিপক্ষকে সম্মান করার যে রীতি ইদানীং ক্রমেই বিরল হইতেছে, তাঁহার মতো স্বেচ্ছাচারীর জন্যই তাহা ঘটতেছিল। প্রতিপক্ষের উপর প্রতিশোধ নেওয়া (সম্ভ্রাসদমন আইন 'পোটা'কে এই উদ্দেশ্যে ব্যবহার করা), বিরুদ্ধবাদীদের উপর প্রতিহিংসা চরিতার্থ করার একটা রেওয়াজই ইদানীং তামিল রাজনীতিতে চালু হইয়া গিয়াছিল। ঔদ্ধত্য, সমালোচনার প্রতি অসহিষ্ণুতা, স্তাবকপরিবৃত হইয়া ঘোরা, প্রকাশ্যে ব্যয়োজ্যেষ্ঠদের সাষ্টাঙ্গ প্রণাম গ্রহণ করা এবং প্রশাসনকে দলীয় সংকীর্ণ স্বার্থে ব্যবহার করিয়া বিরোধীদের শায়েস্তা করায় জয়ললিতা ক্রমেই দেশে অনন্য হইয়া উঠিতেছিলেন। গণতন্ত্রের প্রহরীস্বরূপ সংবাদপত্র ও গণমাধ্যমের কঠোরোধ করিতেও তাঁহার জুড়ি মেলা ভার হইতেছিল। আর ধর্মাস্তুর নিষিদ্ধ করিয়া তিনি তো ধর্মাচরণের স্বাধীনতাতেই সরাসরি হস্তক্ষেপ করেন। এই দুর্বিনয়ের একটা শিক্ষার দরকার ছিল। নির্বাচকমণ্ডলীর প্রত্যাখ্যান সেই শিক্ষাই দিয়া গিয়াছে এবং জয়ললিতা অন্তত বাহিরে সেই শিক্ষা আত্মস্থ করার বিজ্ঞাপন দিতেছেন। কিন্তু একই সঙ্গে তিনি এমন কতগুলি সিদ্ধান্ত লইয়াছেন যাহা আর্থিক সংস্কার কর্মসূচি হইতে সরিয়া আসিয়া শাস্তা জনতোষণের নীতিতে প্রত্যাবর্তনের ইঙ্গিত দিতেছে। ইহাই বিপজ্জনক। যেমন জয়ললিতা আবার

করিতে রাজ্য বিদ্যুৎ পরিষদকে ভর্তুকিতে ভরাইয়া দিবার সিদ্ধান্ত লইয়াছেন। পণ্যের গণবন্টন ব্যবস্থায় তিনি যে সব সংস্কার আনিয়াছিলেন, তাহা রদ হইতেছে। সর্বোপরি ধর্মঘটী সরকারি কর্মচারীদের বিরুদ্ধে তাঁহার সরকার যে কড়া ব্যবস্থা লইয়াছিল, তাহাও প্রত্যাহত হইতেছে। এই সর্বশেষ ছাড়টিকে অবশ্য তিনি নিজের মহানুভবতা বলিয়া চালাইবার চেষ্টা করিয়াছেন। কিন্তু ইহার ফলে তৃণমূল স্তর পর্যন্ত প্রশাসনের কাছে যে সংকেতটি প্রেরিত হইল, তাহা মারাত্মক। বার্তাটি হইল, আর্থিক ও প্রশাসনিক সংস্কার কোনও জনমুখী কর্মসূচি নয়, এই সব কর্মসূচি রূপায়ণ করিতে গেলে ভোটদাতারা রূপায়ণকারীদের খারিজ করিবে এবং জনতোষণের পরীক্ষিত পথেই সরকারের হাঁটা উচিত। অথচ বাস্তব কি সে কথা বলে?

আপাতদৃষ্টিতে তেমন মনে হইতে পারে। চতুর্দশ লোকসভা নির্বাচন কেবল সংস্কারপন্থী বাজপেয়ী সরকারকেই বিদায় করে নাই, একই সঙ্গে অন্ধপ্রদেশে চন্দ্রবাবু নায়ডু এবং কন্নড়কে এস এম কৃষ্ণর সংস্কারমুখী সরকারগুলিও সমান্তরাল বিধানসভার নির্বাচনে ভোটদারদের দ্বারা খারিজ হইয়াছে। কিন্তু এই প্রত্যাখ্যান কি সত্যই সংস্কারের প্রত্যাখ্যান, নাকি সংস্কার কর্মসূচিকে জনচক্ষে মানবিক অবয়বে মণ্ডিত করিতে না পারার পরিণাম? জয়ললিতার পরাজয় কি গ্রামীণ বিদ্যুতে ভর্তুকি রদ করার জন্য, নাকি তাঁহার ঔদ্ধত্য, প্রতিপক্ষ রাজনীতিকদের প্রতি অবজ্ঞা, গণতন্ত্রের কঠোরোধকে রুদ্ধ করার প্রচেষ্টা, ধর্মীয় স্বাধীনতায় হস্তক্ষেপ ইত্যাদির কারণে? সরকারি কর্মচারীদের ধর্মঘট তিনি যে ভাবে মোকাবিলা করেন, তাহাতে জনসাধারণের তো খুশি হইবারই কথা। তবে দণ্ডাজ্ঞাপ্রাপ্ত বেআইনি ধর্মঘটীদের শাস্তি মকুব করিয়া তিনি কাহাকে খুশি করিতে ব্যাকুল? ভোটদাতারা মোটেই তাঁহার আর্থিক সংস্কার বা ভর্তুকি-রাজ রদের সিদ্ধান্তে খুশি হইয়া ভোট দেন নাই। তাঁহার সরকারের আচরণ তাঁহাদের রুষ্ট করিয়াছে। যাহা নীরবে, মোলায়েম ভাবে করা যায়, তাহা হইচই করিয়া আক্ষালন সহযোগে করিতে গেলে প্রায়শ বিপরীত ফল হয়। তা ছাড়া, জয়ললিতার রাজনীতি, ভূমিকা, প্রতিদ্বন্দ্বীদের প্রতি অবজ্ঞাও

জয়ার একগুচ্ছ

জনপ্রিয় সিদ্ধান্ত

জুলাই ১৮ মে: লোকসভা ভোটে নিশ্চিহ্ন হয়ে যাওয়া এবং অনতিকালের মধ্যেই রাজ্য বিধানসভার ভোটের চিন্তা, এই দুই অঙ্কের সমীকরণে একগুচ্ছ জনমোহিনী সিদ্ধান্তের কথা ঘোষণা করে দিলেন তামিলনাড়ুর মুখ্যমন্ত্রী জয়ললিতা। জনতার মন পেতে তিনি আজ যে সব সিদ্ধান্ত ঘোষণা করেছেন, তার মধ্যে আছে:

১) বিতর্কিত ধর্মাস্তর রোধ আইন প্রত্যাহার করে নেওয়া হবে।

২) কৃষকদের ফের নিখরচায় বিদ্যুৎ দেওয়া হবে।

৩) ধর্মঘটি সরকারি কর্মীদের শাস্তি মকুব করা হবে।

৪) ডি এম কে নেতা তথা তামিলনাড়ুর প্রাক্তন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী করুণানিধি-সহ সব রাজনৈতিক প্রতিদ্বন্দীদের বিরুদ্ধে মামলা তুলে নেওয়া হবে।

৫) অধিকার ভঙ্গের অভিযোগ এনে 'দ্য হিন্দু'-সহ কয়েকটি সংবাদপত্রের বিরুদ্ধে যে-মামলা হয়েছিল, তা প্রত্যাহার করে নেওয়া হবে।

তামিলনাড়ুর মুখ্যমন্ত্রী আজ বিবৃতি জারি করে বলেছেন, ডি এম কে নেতা করুণানিধি, তামিলনাড়ু কংগ্রেসের প্রাক্তন সভাপতি ইলঙ্গোভান, সি পি আইয়ের রাজ্য সম্পাদক আর নাল্লাকামু এবং সি পি এম নেতা এন বরদারাজনের বিরুদ্ধে অভিযোগ ফিরিয়ে নেওয়া হবে। গত বছরের জুলাই মাসে সরকারি কর্মচারীদের ধর্মঘটে যেতে প্ররোচনা দেওয়ায় ওই নেতাদের বিরুদ্ধে তামিলনাড়ু অত্যাৱশ্যকীয় পণ্য সরবরাহ আইনে (টসমা) মামলা দায়ের করা হয়েছিল। ধর্মঘটে অংশ নেওয়ায় সরকারি কর্মচারীদের বিরুদ্ধে যে শাস্তিমূলক ব্যবস্থা নেওয়া হয়েছিল, সেগুলিও বাতিল হবে।

জয়া বলেছেন, ধর্মাস্তর রোধ আইন খারিজ করতে শীঘ্রই অর্ডিন্যান্স জারি করা হবে। 'দ্য হিন্দু'-সহ কয়েকটি সংবাদপত্রের বিরুদ্ধে অধিকার ভঙ্গ সংক্রান্ত অভিযোগ প্রত্যাহার করতে বিধানসভায় প্রস্তাব আনা হবে বলে জানিয়েছেন মুখ্যমন্ত্রী। জয়ার এই সিদ্ধান্তকে স্বাগত জানিয়েছেন 'দ্য হিন্দু'র মুখ্য সম্পাদক এন রাম। তবে বেশ কয়েক জন প্রতিপক্ষ নেতার বিরুদ্ধে অভিযোগ তুলে নেওয়ার কথা বললেও সন্ত্রাসদমন আইন পোটিয় যাঁদের আটক করা হয়েছে, তাঁদের সম্পর্কে কোনও মন্তব্য করেননি জয়া।

মানুষের প্রয়োজন ও আকাঙ্ক্ষার কথা মাথায় রেখেই এই সব সিদ্ধান্ত নেওয়া হয়েছে বলে ব্যাখ্যা করে জয়ললিতার মন্তব্য, তাঁর সরকার সব সময়েই 'জনতার সরকার'। তবে রাজনৈতিক মহলের বিশ্লেষণে, ভোটে পরাজয় এবং পাশের রাজ্য অন্ধ্রপ্রদেশে চন্দ্রবাবু নায়ডুর করুণ পরিণতি দেখে জয়ললিতা এই রাস্তায় হাঁটছেন।

T.M.M.

POWER OF DEMOCRACY

9-87 P. mad. 10-10 (1987)

THE TAMIL NADU Chief Minister, Jayalalithaa, appears to have drawn the right lessons from the rout of her party, the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, in the just-concluded Lok Sabha election. Within a week of the declaration of the election results, Ms. Jayalalithaa has announced the withdrawal of most of the controversial policies and actions that had been the focus of the campaign of Opposition parties. To her credit, the Chief Minister responded positively to the powerful message conveyed by the voters against the unpopular measures adopted by the AIADMK Government in the last three years. In one stroke, she removed the income ceiling for those entitled to get essential commodities under the Public Distribution System, restored free power supply to farmers and hut dwellers, revoked punishment imposed on Government employees who had gone on strike, and extended the free bus pass scheme to all students. Ms. Jayalalithaa also announced that the Government would immediately withdraw the large number of defamation cases filed against newspapers and take steps to drop the privilege proceedings in the Tamil Nadu Legislative Assembly against *The Hindu* and *Murasoli*. She also promised repeal of the Act against forcible religious conversions, which had provoked widespread protests from minorities and other sections of society who saw in the enactment a threat to the fundamental right to practise and propagate religion.

The hope is that the withdrawal of the defamation cases and the steps to drop privilege proceedings will be followed up by efforts to restore normal, healthy professional relations between the Government and the media. Defamation cases, and also privilege proceedings, have often become tools

to intimidate the media in the hands of the intolerant; they have a chilling effect on free expression and criticism. The decision to repeal the Act on conversions is of even greater political significance with Ms. Jayalalithaa using the opportunity to present her Government as a "true friend and champion of minorities." The withdrawal of cases filed against Government employees and political leaders under the Tamil Nadu Essential Services Maintenance Act will be widely welcomed but the Act itself is seen as undemocratic and violative of existing labour laws. Government employees and trade unions will see justice done only if the Act is repealed. Ms. Jayalalithaa has chosen to remain silent on cases filed under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The cases against Vaiko and eight other MDMK members must be smoothly withdrawn. Will it be too much to hope that in keeping with the spirit of the rollbacks, Chief Minister Jayalalithaa will abjure the application of POTA in the State? If she does this, Tamil Nadu will set a trend for the rest of India to follow. In any case, the new Government at the Centre is expected to take early steps to have the discredited anti-terrorism law repealed by Parliament.

After initially seeking to deny that the election results were a reflection on the performance of her Government, Ms. Jayalalithaa has done the right thing by addressing the concerns of various sections of the people that found their clearest expression through the Electronic Voting Machines in the May 10 election. Although she has not attributed the wideranging rollbacks to the poll outcome, the turnaround should be celebrated as yet another demonstration of the power of the ballot box, the power of democracy.

THE HINDU

29 MAY 2001

Lucknow stampede toll

9.8.01 11-5
14/9
mounts to 22

Tandon Washes His Hands Off Incident

TIMES NEWS NETWORK/PTI

Lucknow: The police have registered a case against the organisers of the saree distribution function here during which a stampede occurred killing 22 people.

Police sources said the toll in the incident mounted to 22 after a child, injured in the stampede died on Monday night. The function was organised in Mahanagar area, on the occasion of BJP leader Lalji Tandon's birthday. The programme was organised by a private organisation.

A case has been registered against the organisers and raids were being conducted to nab them, the sources said.

The state government has ordered an inquiry into the tragedy by divisional commissioner D C Lakha, who has been asked to submit his report within a week.

Tandon not only washed his hands off the incident, but also gave those associated with the function a clean chit.

"The organisers were not at fault nor was their intention suspect," Tandon said emphatically. "Giving saris and foodgrains to the poor is a noble cause and they have been doing this for

some years now," Tandon said, coming out strongly in defence of Brajendra Murari Yadav, a former BJP corporator whose history-sheet is still open.

Tandon also did not see the sari distribution as a violation of

upkeep of cremation grounds and anti-polythene drive. "Inspired by such work, the organisers started distributing saris to poor women." When told Yadav was a history-sheeter, Tandon said, "Yeh to punya ka kaam hai, garibon ka bhala hi hota hai is se."



Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee talks to the relatives of the women and children who died in the stampede in Lucknow

the model code of conduct. "The party was in no way involved and the venue also was a public park. The occasion was also not used to campaign for the party," Tandon said.

When told that the venue had party flags all over, he countered, "Does putting up party flags make it an official party function?"

Tandon said that he personally did not believe in having a bash on his birthday but preferred to take up Gomati cleaning drive, better

It was a sad thing to have happened and the victims' kin also realise it was an accident, Tandon said, adding, it won't harm BJP's poll prospects.

Deputy Prime Minister L K Advani claimed that the ex-gratia payment to the families of the dead and injured was not a violation of the Election Commission's model code of conduct.

"It is not a violation of Election Commission's model code of conduct. An accident has taken place and people have died in it. It is the responsibility of both the state government and the Centre to extend all help to the needy," he told reporters here.

Asked whether distribution of saris on the occasion had not violated the model code of conduct, he said the nomination process had not yet started and even the Election Commission has made a comment on it.

THE TIMES OF INDIA 14 APR 2001

Mulayam stands by BJP, Ram raises eyebrows

RADHIKARAMESHAN

Lucknow, April 12: The BJP and the Samajwadi Party came to a tacit agreement to not politicise the 26 deaths that occurred in the stampede here today, but Ram Jethmalani, the Congress-supported Independent candidate against Atal Bihari Vajpayee, questioned the propriety of distributing saris amid campaigning.

Mayavati of the Babujan

happened and we are all sad. His (Tandon's) intention was good, he wanted to do something noble on his birthday but unfortunately this happened."

The Samajwadi leader was remarkably sympathetic towards the BJP, which was his main enemy in Uttar Pradesh till the other day.

Shell-shocked by the stampede because it occurred in Vajpayee's constituency — where Tandon is the Prime Minister's min-

der — the BJP was waiting for a signal from the top before speaking.

"We will see what the Prime Minister says," Om Prakash Singh, a senior functionary, said.

As he hurried back to Lucknow from campaigning in eastern Uttar Pradesh on hearing news of the tragedy, Mulayam looked worried with BJP supporters alleging that the incident was the result of an Opposition-inspired conspiracy to defame Vajpayee.

Tandon, who looked equally distraught, said: "There is no need to link it with politics. I asked the government for help and the chief minister promptly agreed." He argued that since the function was not party-related, "there is no question of anyone trying to sabotage it and as such there is no need for an inquiry".

Tandon said that for the past four years, Bajendra Murari Yadav, whom he described as a fan, has been organising a sari-distrib-

ution programme. "Poor women gather in a big park and I give four or five saris as a symbolic gesture of the 15,000 that are distributed. This year the same ritual was followed in the presence of the chief guest, Sanatan Shree, a *sanyasi*. I felt happy when I left the place," he said.

He, however, admitted that the venue was changed this year to Chandrashekhar Azad Park in Mahanagar, a middle-class residential colony. "There were

several thousand women and the space may have been larger or smaller, I can't say."

While chief election commissioner T.S. Krishnamurthy, who was in Lucknow today to confer with state officials, said he had sought a report from the chief secretary, Tandon suggested he was not clear whether today's programme would violate the model code of conduct.

The district administration's permission was not sought to ho-

ld the programme. "Permission is necessary for holding public meetings. But it cannot be enforced for private functions. Just because elections are on does it mean we stop celebrating birthdays and weddings?" Tandon asked.

The party was, however, more circumspect. Although the Uttar Pradesh unit announced a payment of Rs 50,000 to the families of the deceased, it said it would check with election officials before disbursing the money.

PM poll agent's b'day gift: free saris, 22 dead women

Now they cannot vote



'The dead were bundled into waiting wagons like animals, there was no drinking water for injured,' said a witness

■ Both BJP & Mulayam: Don't politicise ■ CEC says wait for report

AMIT SHARMA
LUCKNOW, APRIL 12

TWENTY-two women and three children were killed and nearly three dozen injured in a stampede at a local park where saris were being given out free to mark the 70th birthday of the Prime Minister's election agent and leader of opposition in the Assembly, Lalji Tandon.

Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, busy in election meetings in Bihar, cut short his visit and reached his parliamentary constituency late in the evening to visit the injured.

To ensure a large turn-out, the organisers of the sari-distribution show, Nagrik Sewa Samiti, had transported the women on vehicles from places as distant as slums from Chinhat. These vehicles were adorned with banners saying "*Tandonji ke janmadin per garib mahilaon ko vastra vitran* (Distribution of clothes to poor women on Tan-



donji's birthday).

Tandon himself distributed nearly a dozen saris and was then escorted out for lunch to a nearby restaurant. It was then, according to eyewitnesses,

that the stampede occurred.

Two stalls had been set up for distribution of the saris—each had four people in charge—for the estimated 15,000 women who jostled in the 41-degree heat, many carrying their babies, too.

Those behind the distribution counters started throwing the sari bundles on the crowd which provoked a 45-minute stampede. A woman with a six-month-old in her arms was among those killed.

"The dead and also the injured were bundled into the waiting wagons like animals. The organisers had not even arranged for drinking water for them prompting us to arrange for the same," said Kishan Gupta, a shop owner in the Vinakay Palace opposite the Chandra Shekhar Azad Park venue. "Most of those who were brought here were dead and some even died on the way. We surely were not equipped to take care of those

CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Fears allayed with flu-fight regimen

OUR BUREAU

Precaution, not panic, was the byword as the Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee government on Wednesday put in place measures to prevent an outbreak of bird flu in Bengal.

"We have received a Central guideline and formed a five-member panel to safeguard against bird flu and combat it, if the need arises. But let me state that there is no need to panic, as neither the chicken nor the feed in our state is imported from other states or countries. We have checked with the Bangladesh high commission and the disease has not affected that country either," said animal resources development minister Anisur Rahaman, after a series of meetings with senior officials.

Union health secretary Xavier Prasad Rao will be arriving in Calcutta on February 9 to meet chief minister Bhattacharjee and chief secretary Ashoke Gupta to take stock of the situation in the state, Rahaman added.

The director of the animal resources development will head the committee on poultry vigil. Other members will be from the directorate, the Indian Veterinary Research Institute and the University of Animal and Fisheries Sciences (UAFS). S. S. Ghosh, UAFS vice-chancellor, will lead another team of specialists to study the causes behind the deaths, if any, of chicken in government and private poultry farms in the coming days. Rahaman said the agencies concerned were also keeping

PREVENTION PRESCRIPTION

- * Supply will be stopped from hatcheries where any kind of disease has been detected over the past three months
- * Movement of vehicles and individuals into hatcheries and near the poultry will have to be restricted
- * Bar on buying chicken feed from abroad or from unregistered and unrecognised outlets
- * Stop sale, production and slaughter at any poultry where outbreak of any disease is reported
- * Farms told to develop their own vigilance system to adhere to the government directives

a special watch at the airport.

In Calcutta, where approximately 150,000 kg of chicken is consumed every day, most of the bird population is sourced from the 22 government-run poultry farms and large private hatcheries, like Arambagh's and Venky's, mostly in the districts. "We will be sending copies of the guidelines (see box) to them on Thursday, with instructions that they be strictly followed. We are particularly worried about the high-yielding varieties of chicken, as they are more susceptible to diseases," said Rahaman.

The management at Arambagh Hatcheries — which accounts for "30 per cent of the city's chicken consumption" — said it had already taken necessary precautions and was maintaining a strict vigil. "We have kept a team of experts ready to combat any eventuality. At our farm in Ilambazar (in Birbhum), we are even restricting the entry of vehicles. There is no real tension, as there has been no outbreak of bird flu in Bengal," stressed P.K. Roy, managing director of Arambagh Hatcheries.

The health department has convened a meeting on Thursday, where expertise will also be sought from virologists of the National Institute of Cholera and Enteric Diseases and the All-India Institute of Hygiene and Public Health. "We will open a special ward at the Infectious Diseases Hospital in Beleghata, just like we had done during the SARS scare," said director of medical education C.R. Maity.

9 JAN 2004

House tax revamp after 20 years

DEEPANKAR GANGULY

Property tax in Calcutta, that double-edged civic sword, will undergo an overhaul in 2004 — for the first time in 20 years.

Mayor Subrata Mukherjee confirmed on Thursday that the exercise — the outcome of which will draw diverse reactions — would begin next week in Jadavpur, singled out as one of the "tax havens", along with Behala and Garden Reach.

The overhaul will grant owners of tenanted houses relief in terms of the amount of tax they

have to pay on the rent received. The rates in "Calcutta proper" and the "added areas" will be recast. The forecast is a slash in wards 1-100 and a hike in the rest.

"The tax overhaul will be part of our effort to modernise Calcutta in tune with the global trends," said Mukherjee.

Chief minister Buddhadeb Bhattacharjee is believed to be backing the Calcutta Municipal Corporation (CMC) tax reforms, as he is convinced that civic taxes must be revised in order to develop the city.

In CMC parlance, the three

"tax havens" are also known as "added areas" because they had been added to the civic body as late as 1985 by the ruling Left to widen their base.

Ever since, house-owners in the "added areas" have been pampered with abnormally low taxes — as prevalent before their incorporation into the CMC — for reasons more political than civic.

The revision exercise may turn out to be a boon for house-owners in the city proper, as they could enjoy a slash in the property tax by about 10 per cent. It could hit house-owners in the

added areas where it hurts. Indications are that they would have to shell out "reasonably high rates" to make up for the loss.

"We are hopeful of introducing the revised tax structure from this April. Our assessment inspectors are already doing the rounds of Jadavpur for this purpose," said municipal commissioner Debashis Som.

Welcoming the move, Amar Mitra, of All Calcutta House Owners' Association, said: "Better late than never. We have been demanding a 30 per cent reduction in the tax to bring all build-

ings in the city's 141 wards under a more reasonable tax structure."

Under the present system, the CMC charges 40 per cent of 90 per cent of the annual valuation as annual property tax for residential buildings. An additional 20 per cent is levied on the property tax as surcharge for commercial buildings. In the budget proposal for the year 2004-2005, the mayor has decided to bring down the chargeable rate of 40 per cent to 30 per cent.

"The total number of buildings in the added areas almost equals the number of buildings

in the city proper. So, if we can get down to tax collection more seriously in these areas, we can make up for the loss incurred in the city proper," said Ashok Roy-chaudhuri, director-general (building), CMC.

The great divide in property tax collections from various parts of the city shows up squarely in the statistics. Though the number of buildings is almost the same, the CMC earns Rs 210 crore as property tax from the city proper and just Rs 18 crore from the added areas. That, the mayor assures, will change in 2004.

- ✓ Up to 10 per cent reduction on the chargeable percentage on annual valuation
- ✓ Instead of a minimum 10 per cent hike in the property tax at an interval of six years, there will be an annual automatic enhancement of property tax by two per cent
- ✓ Property tax in the added areas of Behala, Garden Reach and Jadavpur will be revised upward after 18 years
- ✓ Property tax on the monthly rent of a tenanted residential building will be rationalised

9 JAN 2004